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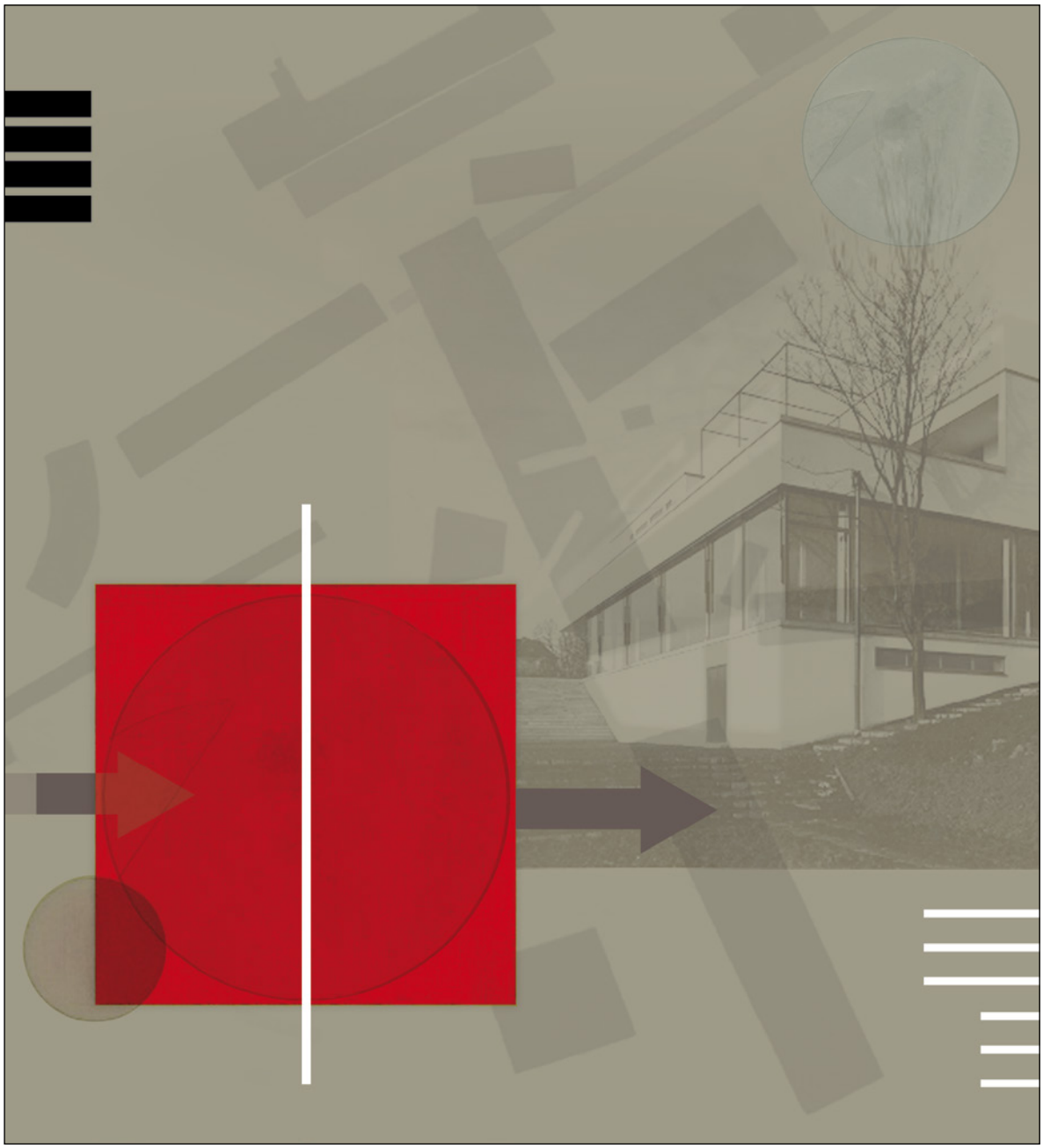

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# content

# Editorial:
## A New Journal and the Meanings of 'East Central' Europe

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**Keywords**

Austria-Hungary; cultural memory; modernity; Oskar Halecki; Friedrich Naumann; Larry Wolff

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# **Editorial:** A New Journal and the Meanings of 'East Central' Europe

We are proud to launch *Art East Central* as a journal that will act as a forum for scholarly articles and discussion on the art, architecture and design of East Central Europe since 1800. It will be the only such journal in English, and its aim is to disseminate knowledge and stimulate debate about the art and culture of a large geographical region that, for many, remains *terra incognita*.

What do we mean by East Central Europe? Geographical terms are often ideologically weighted, and none more so than 'east' and 'central' Europe. As Larry Wolff argued over 20 years ago, the notion of 'eastern Europe' is a product of the Enlightenment and was enmeshed in the wider geopolitical division of Europe (itself a problematic term).[1] Equally, the idea of Central Europe was long associated with Prussian military and diplomatic ambitions, having been coined by the liberal politician Friedrich Naumann to designate the territory that should be subject to German cultural and political hegemony.[2] No term is neutral, but we have chosen 'East Central Europe,' first used by the Polish historian Oskar Halecki in 1943. It is not without its own problems, but Halecki employed it to buttress a claim about setting up a more inclusive understanding of European identity, and it is now a widely accepted designation.[3]

For Halecki East Central Europe denoted the countries between Germany and the then Soviet Union, consisting of Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Behind this lay a particular vision, for it consisted of those lands whose historical experience had been shaped either by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or by Austria-Hungary. Our understanding is more inclusive, for it encompasses, too, the states of the Balkan Peninsula as well as those in the Baltic littoral. Hence, in this, the very first issue, we discuss a book of essays on art history writing in Greece, for example.

Histories and cultures were intertwined and entangled; the visual arts of south-eastern Europe were profoundly shaped over the past 200 years by their intimate connections with Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, as were those of Ukraine. Indeed, in recent years the historic ties of western Ukraine to the former Habsburg Empire, when it formed the crownland of Bukovina and the eastern half of Habsburg Galicia, have led to the creation of a local heritage industry based on the role of Czernowitz (now: Chernivtsi) and Lemberg (now: L'viv) as Habsburg *lieux de mémoire*. Halecki's definition focused on the political future of those countries that were the subject of Nazi German and Soviet aggression and military occupation. As such, it excluded Austria, but *Art East Central* takes it as axiomatic that since Austria was at the heart of the Habsburg Empire, it, too, comes into our sphere of interest, not least since it encompassed the capital of Austria-Hungary, Vienna.

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1) Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

2) Friedrich Naumann, *Mitteleuropa*, Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1915.

3) Oskar Halecki, 'East Central Europe in Postwar Organization,' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 232:1, 1943, 9–18.

Political and state boundaries are artificial constructs, and we are therefore open to contributions on topics that fall outside the geographical boundaries of East Central Europe, if they impinge upon or help shape the critical understanding of our area of focus. The idea of East Central Europe goes beyond mere geographical definitions to comprise a broad cultural zone, its coherence based on shared memories. Uppermost among these is the experience of modernity in perhaps its most violent and disruptive forms; on the political level alone one can describe the historical experience of East Central Europe as one founded in interruptions. In no area of Europe – perhaps, even, of the world – have borders been drawn and redrawn more frequently. This process has never been one of mere administrative adjustment, but also one of physical displacement of populations, large-scale destruction and rebuilding of landscapes – urban and rural – and reorganisation of social structures and cultural relations. One can point, too, to the complex linguistic and demographic composition of nearly every territory in East Central Europe over the past two centuries and to its implications for the impact of processes of modernization. If, in France or Britain, modernity was intimately bound up with the experience of empire, in East Central Europe it meant both the creation of multi-lingual and multi-ethnic cultures on a hitherto unparalleled scale and resistant nationalisms based on ideologies of monolingualism and ethnic purity. The reshaping of the social sphere in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries meant that older, pre-modern, forms of cohabitation accommodating cultural and linguistic diversity came under severe pressure; the new forms of sociality that emerged with modernity became a focus of unprecedented competition and rivalry for status and hegemony. Art, architecture and, later, design, became intimately drawn into this process and served as a medium for the articulation of ever shifting identities, as well as the exploration and questioning of aesthetic norms.

*Art East Central* is founded on the premise that while, over the past twenty years, East Central Europe has managed to gain a place on the map of art history, its presence is still tentative. The emergence of global art history has ensured the long overdue 'provincializing' of Europe, as Deepesh Chakrabarty has termed it, and renewed attention to the art, architecture and design in East Central Europe can be viewed as part of that same process.[4] The art history of East Central Europe has its own role to play in wider global questions.[5]

Debates continue over how to conceptualise the relation between art centres in East Central Europe – Kaunas, Warsaw, Budapest, Belgrade, for example, – and those, such as Paris, Berlin, New York and Moscow, that have dominated the historiography of art hitherto. The tentative presence of east central European art is also often due to the pragmatic fact that knowledge of most of the languages of East Central Europe are little known outside of their respective linguistic communities. The same could not be said of, for example, Spanish, English or French, for example, which, due to the legacy of empire, have a global reach, or of Italian and German which, for reasons to do with their traditional prestige within the discipline, continue to be internationally used languages. Hence, research on art and architecture in, for example, Poland, Hungary, Estonia or Romania is little read outside of these respective states, and even less is undertaken by scholars based elsewhere. *Art East Central* is consequently motivated by

4) Deepesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

5) On this issue see Beata Hock and Anu Allas, eds, *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present,* London, Taylor and Francis, 2018.

the sense that much work remains to be done, if this zone of Europe is to claim appropriate critical international attention of art historians. It is of course no small irony that we choose English as the language of publication. Yet it has fast become the *lingua franca* of art history and nowhere more so than in Central Europe. Our use of it may perhaps also be justified by the fact that despite its role as a tool of *global* intellectual and cultural hegemony, it has, in East Central Europe at least, never had any associations with the political domination and imperial rule that characterised much of the history of the region over the past two centuries.

A brief final note should be added about our chronological range. Chronological divisions are often arbitrary and, to some degree, reflect the preoccupations and values of whoever sets them. Interested in publishing papers on art, architecture and design up to the present day, we take as our starting point 1795, the year of the final partition of Poland. A catastrophe for the Polish state and a marker of the power of the ambitions of Russia, Prussia and Austria, it nevertheless coincided with the growing influence of the French revolution, that traditional marker of political modernity in Europe. Our primary focus is therefore on publishing papers that explore the distinctive experience of modernity in East Central Europe, as it was expressed and reflected on in architecture and the visual arts. However, as with the question of geography, we are open to contributions on topics that fall outside of this strict boundary, but which we feel have salience and significance for our broader concerns.

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# articles

# Faces of Modernism after Trianon: Károly Kós, Lajos Kozma and Neo-Baroque Design in Interwar Hungary

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## Abstract

In comparing the careers of Károly Kós and Lajos Kozma between c. 1907 and 1930, this article explores the impact of the First World War and its aftermath on the work of two leading Hungarian architect-designers. These circumstances not only affected their working practices and professional opportunities, but also reflected changes in taste, theory and the source materials of Hungarian domestic design. While Kós clung ever more desperately to the values that shaped his pre-war practice, Kozma embarked on a new direction embracing the Neo-Baroque, a style that emerged with distinctive regional characteristics in many of the successor states of Central Europe in the 1920s. The article discusses some of the sources and meanings of this style.

## Keywords

Károly Kós; Lajos Kozma; Gyula Szekfű; Neo-Baroque; Transylvania; Fiatalok; Czech Cubism; folk culture; design; Hungary

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# Faces of Modernism after Trianon: Károly Kós, Lajos Kozma and Neo-Baroque Design in Interwar Hungary

**Paul Stirton**

## Introduction

This article compares the parallel careers of two Hungarian architect-designers, from their early success in Budapest prior to the First World War, to their contrasted fortunes in the 1920s. In presenting this material mostly as an account, rather than a thematic analysis, it is intended to provide examples of two issues in the design culture of Central Europe. The first is to highlight some of the ways in which the practice of architect-designers were transformed, directly and indirectly, by the seismic shifts in the political landscape at the end of the War. In some respects, this may seem obvious; dramatic socio-economic changes generally have a direct and immediate impact on design practice. Nevertheless, it is worth looking more closely at the ways in which external events opened up opportunities for some, while thwarting the ability to continue working in previously successful modes. The second aim is to examine the shift in taste and critical values that occurred between the pre- and post-war cultural environment, reflected here in the move from a preoccupation with rural or peasant crafts to one based upon the eighteenth-century 'folk Baroque.' Although the 'Neo-Baroque' had a considerable vogue throughout Central Europe in the 1920s, especially in the field of interior design, it remains relatively understudied by historians. In addressing this gap in scholarship, the present article seeks to bring out some of its distinctive regional and national meanings in the context of inter-war Hungary.

## Kós, Kozma and the vernacular revival

The two figures to be considered are Károly Kós (1883–1977) and Lajos Kozma (1884–1948), both members of the *Fiatalok* (The Young Ones), a group of students who completed their training at the Architecture School of the Royal Josef Technical University (now the University of Technology and Economics) in Budapest between 1906 and 1908.[1] This group produced the journal *A Ház* (The House, 1908–11), one of the finest Arts & Crafts or National Romantic journals, which served as a mouthpiece for their views on the use of traditional vernacular or village sources in the creation of a Hungarian National Style (Figure 1).[2] It is well known

1) There is a considerable literature on both designers, mostly in Hungarian. Modern monographs are, Anthony Gall, *Károly Kós,* Budapest: Holnap Kiadó, 2019; Anthony Gall, *Kós Károly műhelye / The Workshop of Károly Kós,* Budapest: Mundus Kiadó, 2002; Ėva Kiss & Hilda Horváth, *Kozma Lajos, az iparművész (1884–1948),* Budapest: Iparművészeti Múzeum, 1994; Éva Horányi, ed., *Kozma Lajos modern épületei,* Budapest: TERC Kiadó, 2006.

2) *A Ház,* edited by Béla Málnai and Dezső Székely, was published in Budapest in 4 volumes between 1908 and 1911.

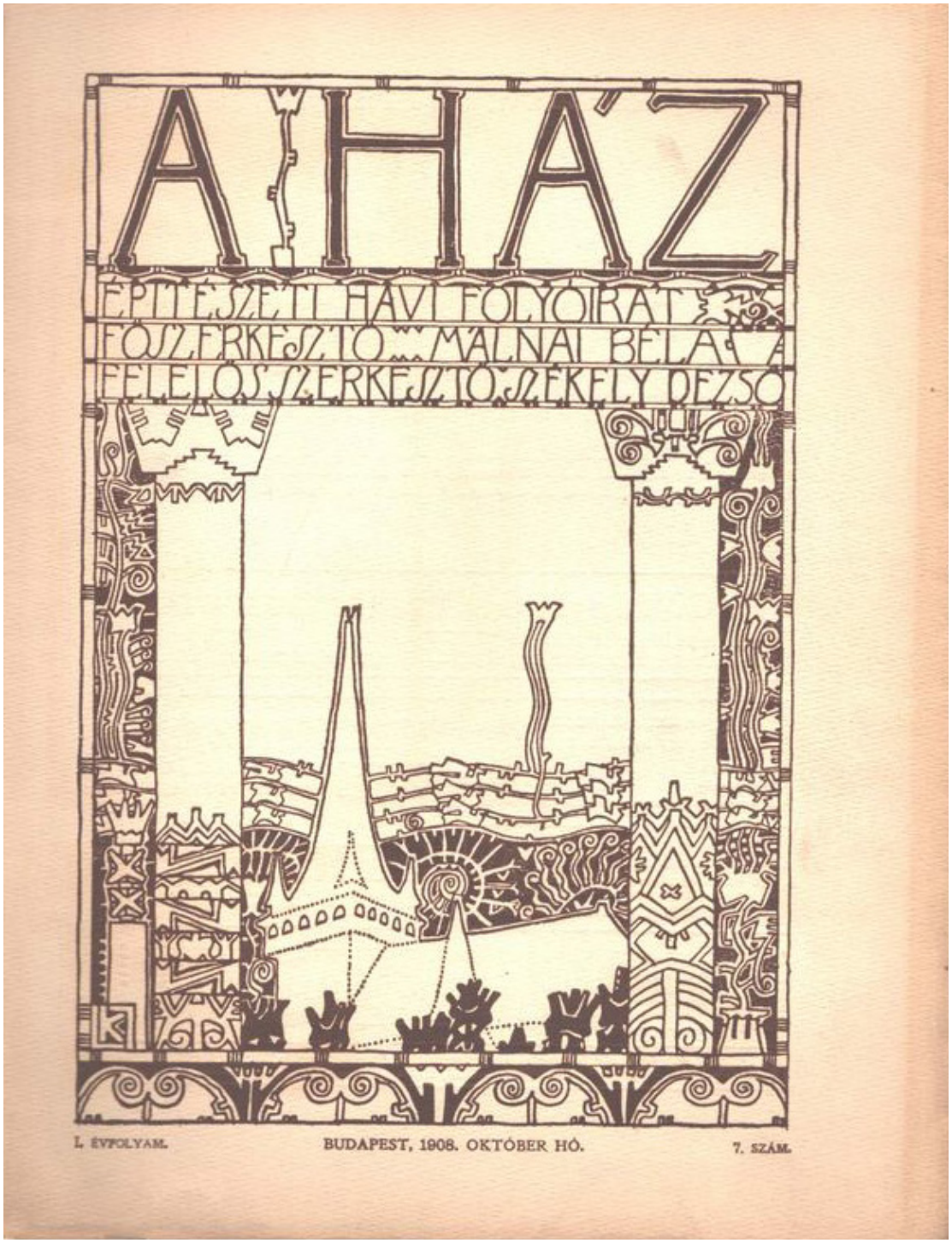


**Figure 1:** Cover of *A Ház*, 1, April 1908. Woodcut by Lajos Kozma.
Source: Bard Graduate Center, New York.

that, as with other 'smaller nations' or ethnic groups seeking to assert some form of national identity, this had been a burning issue among Hungarian architect-designers for some time before 1908.[3] No less a figure than Ödön Lechner had opened a rousing article with the clarion call, 'So far, there has not been a Hungarian language of form. But there will be. Because there must be.'[4]

Many individuals and groups had already attempted to address this perceived lack of an indigenous 'language of form,' notably those at the crafts colony at Gödöllő, but there is a case to be made that the members of the *Fiatalok* were the most committed and the most rigorous in their search for authentic craft traditions, looking especially to the region of the Kalotaszeg in Transylvania, at that time, eastern Hungary. The *Fiatalok* had certain advantages over previous groups seeking inspiration in the vernacular. Above all, they had the benefit of Dezső Malonyay's ambitious ethnographic project; fieldwork campaigns throughout the Hungarian crown lands, or Greater Hungary, which began in 1904 documenting examples of traditional crafts, interviewing villagers, and producing drawings, paintings and diagrams from their research.[5] In fact, several Gödöllő and *Fiatalok* members participated in these information gathering projects thus ensuring a rich visual dimension when the research was published in the monumental five-volume series, *A magyar nép művészete* (The Art of the Hungarian People).[6]

Malonyay was only the most recent, and the most conscientious, in a series of metropolitan intellectuals and curators who took an ethnographic interest in the folk arts of Greater Hungary.

The most important of his precursors was József Huszka (1854–1934), a drawing master who, in the 1880s, embarked on a series of expeditions throughout the Crown lands measuring cottages and churches, and making watercolour studies of everything he saw, from cushion embroideries to carved gateways, christening bonnets to grave posts.[7] Huszka maintained a determinedly anti-historical attitude towards the folk arts, seeing this treasury as a resource of vital and meaningful forms for modern creative activity.[8] It was a view that carried much weight in the decades that followed. In 1898, for example, the art critic Károly Lyka could

3) The question of 'national identity' expressed through the folk arts in Europe around 1900, and its uses by architects and musicians especially, has been the subject of numerous studies although mostly limited to a single ethnic or linguistic group. For an overview, see Nicola Gordon Bowe, ed., *Art and the National Dream: the Search for Vernacular Expression in Turn-of-the-Century Design*, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993. For critical analyses of this movement in Central Europe, see David Crowley, 'The Uses of Peasant Design in Austria-Hungary in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,' *Studies in the Decorative Arts*, 2:2, Spring 1995, 2–28; Paul Stirton and Juliet Kinchin, 'The Hungarian Folk Arts Debate,' in Gyula Ernyey, ed., *Britain and Hungary: Contacts in Architecture and Design*, Budapest: Hungarian University of Craft and Design, 1999, 30–46.

4) Ödön Lechner, 'Magyar formanyelv nem volt, hanem lesz,' *Müvészet*, 1:5, 1906, 1–18.

5) After the Ausgleich of 1867, when Hungary was given nominal equal status in the Habsburg Empire, the territory of 'Greater Hungary' was known as the Lands of the Crown of St. Stephen (a Szent Korona Országai) or Lands of the Hungarian Crown (Magyar Korona Országai). As well as the territory of modern Hungary, 'Greater Hungary' incorporated Slovakia, Transylvania, and parts of modern Romania, Ukraine, Serbia, Slovenia, Austria and Poland.

6) Dezső Malonyay, *A magyar nép művészete*, Budapest: Franklin-Társulat, 1907–22. Volumes 1 and 2 were devoted to the folk arts of Transylvania.

7) On Huszka, see Zoltan Fejős, ed., *Huszka József: a rajzoló gyűjtő*, Budapest: Néprajzi Múzeum, 2006

8) Huszka stood in opposition to the historicist views of the archaeologist Moritz von Hoernes who, on setting up the permanent ethnographic display in Vienna in 1905, placed the folk arts in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the fine arts as expressions of an earlier or 'primitive' culture. See Katalin Sinkó, 'Megjegyzések a 19. századi ornamentika-teóriák antropológiai vonatkozásairól,' in *Ornamentika és modernizmus*, Budapest: Ernst Múzeum, 2006, 22–24.

write that ethnography was a historical science that 'transposes the past into the present.'[9] In this spirit, Huszka prepared a series of worksheets with patterns and motifs to be copied as a way of mastering 'Magyar díszítő styl' (Hungarian Decorative Style) (Figure 2).[10] Thus began a tradition of teaching the repertoire of folk ornament through albums of printed diagrams called 'Mintalapok' with a programme of exercises based on copying and adapting various forms and patterns. This carried on throughout the inter-war and Communist periods, encouraged by a climate of shortages in which do-it-yourself home decorating and dressmaking were common practice.

In a tendency common to radical groups seeking to outdo their predecessors, the *Fiatalok* were more extreme in their devotion to the folk arts, more elemental, and more thorough than many of the groups that came before them. They also developed a body of theory about the meaning and significance of the folk arts in fashioning a new visual language for both domestic and grander public design. Kós, in particular, upheld the notion that the true spirit of Magyar culture, which had achieved its highest form in the middle ages and Renaissance, had been all but wiped out by the Ottomans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and further suppressed by the Habsburgs, but that it had survived in the folk arts, especially those of Transylvania, his native region.[11] This theory was not unusual in the first two decades of the twentieth century, largely informed by an idealised view of the peasantry, as if they had not been subject to the same processes of historical and cultural change that the higher classes and urban proletariat experienced. This now seems questionable, but there was certainly a theory among nationalist historians that the peasantry stood outside of mainstream history.[12]

For Kós, therefore, the spirit of Hungarian medieval culture and lifeways survived in the 'unchanging' village communities, and by studying them closely and faithfully one could reach back to a purer, uncorrupted well of native culture. 'Our people chose the Middle Ages as their stylistic base, and they have never abandoned it, even to this day,' Kós wrote in 1907, going on to add: 'Medieval art forms the basis of Hungarian folk-art, and folk-art forms the basis of our national Art.'[13] These views were laced throughout *A Ház*, in both the articles and the illustrations, especially the woodcuts by Kós and Kozma. The distinctive profile of churches at Körösfő and Magyarvalko were particular icons of the movement, the former appearing on the title page of *A Ház* in October 1908. This focus on a few identifiable monuments was summed up in an article on the *Fiatalok* by Elemér Czakó: 'All have roamed the countryside, and all have returned to Körösfő in Kalotaszeg. They have drawn houses, interiors, grave posts,

9) Ibid.

10) Huszka's book *Magyar díszítő styl*, Budapest: Deutsch, 1885, had 45 sheets of designs. Other publications by him on the theme of decoration and national identity include *Teremtsünk igazán magyar műipart*, [Let's Create a Truly Hungarian Art Industry] Sepsiszentgyörgy: 1890; 'Hazai ornamentikánk eredete és nemzetisége' [The origin and national character of our ornament] in *Magyar Mérnök és Épitész Egylet Közlönye*, 25, 1891, 154–67, 'Nemzeti épitészetünk múltja és jelene' [The past and present of our national architecture], in *Magyar Mérnök és Épitész Egylet Közlönye*, 26, 1892, 203., and *Magyar Ornamentika*, Budapest: Patria, 1898.

11) It is significant that Kós played down the Turanist view in which the sources of Hungarian language and culture were thought to originate in Central Asia.

12) Tanya Harrod, ' "For Love and Not For Money": Reviving Peasant Art in Britain 1880–1930,' and David Crowley, 'Haslemere and the Edges of Europe,' in David Crowley and Lou Taylor, eds, *The Lost Arts of Europe: The Haslemere Museum collection of European Peasant Art*, Haslemere: Haslemere Educational Museum, 2000, 13–24 and 44–56.

13) Károly Kós, *Erdélyország népének épitése*, [Architecture of the Transylvanian People], manuscript from 1907 in National Széchényi Library, partially reprinted in *A Ház*, 2:1, 1909, 125–132.


**Figure 2:** József Huszka, plates from *Magyar Ornamentika*, Budapest: Patria, 1898.
Photo: author.

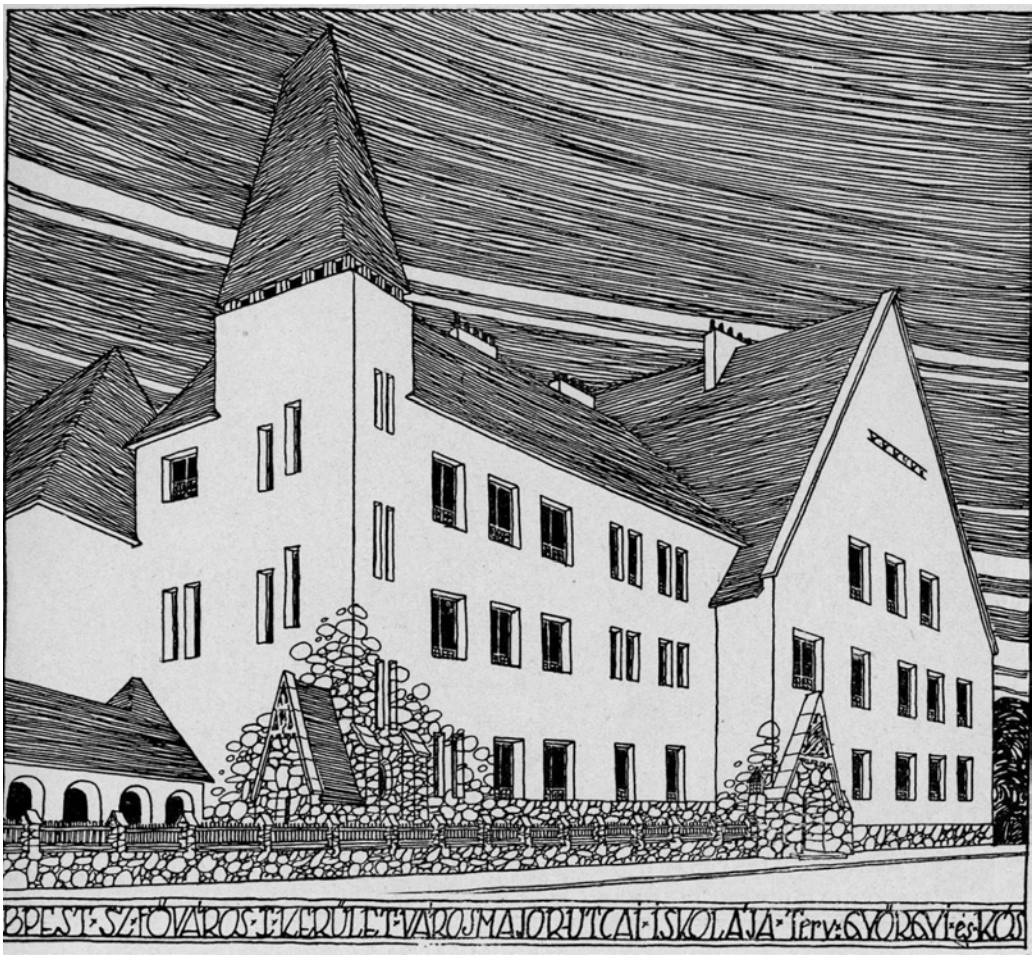


**Figure 3:** Károly Kós, Perspective Drawing of Primary School on Varosmajor Utca, Budapest, 1910.
Source: *Magyar Építőművészet*, 10.9-10, 1912.

and embroideries, but most frequently the tower of the Körösfő church. Its sensitive lines, together with those of its four small towerlets, have become engraved upon their spirits to the extent that they regard it as the Japanese artists regard their sacred Fujiyama.'[14]

Of the *Fiatalok*, Kós was, by some way, the most successful.[15] Between 1907 and the outbreak of the First World War, he was responsible for the design of two churches, two schools (Figure 3), a museum, the garden suburb of Wekerle in the southern part of Budapest (Figure 4), several independent houses and a series of buildings for the animals and birds in Budapest Zoo.[16] In each case, we can see elaborations of his research into the vernacular architecture and crafts of rural Hungarian communities. The Zoo buildings and Wekerle are perhaps the most dramatic examples of Kós's application of village vernacular to metropolitan building types, but the

14) Elemér Czakó, 'Mai magyar egyházmüvészet,' *Magyar Iparmüvészet*, 11:3, 1908, 120–125.

15) According to Kós, the Fiatalok was a loose grouping consisting of around eight or nine members, although several others were also involved in their activities. See Károly Kós, *Életrajz* [Biography], Budapest: Kriterion Szépirodalmi, Kiadó, 1991, 55.

16) In some of these projects, notably the zoo buildings, Kós was assisted by his Fiatalok colleague Dezső Zrumeczky.

**Figure 4:** Károly Kós, Main square at Wekerle, designed 1912.
Photo: author.

Cock Church in Kolozsvár (now Cluj-Napoca) is the most comprehensive demonstration of his aesthetic ideals (Figure 5). In this building for a modest Calvinist parish in Transylvania, he was able to control all aspects of the design from the choice of materials and overall massing of forms down to the hand-crafted door fittings and wall lamps.[17]

It should be remembered that Kós was only two years out of college when he was awarded the major commissions of the zoo and the schools, and that they came from august public bodies like the Ministry of Education and Budapest City Council. It would be difficult to think of a young architect-designer who had such precocious success; perhaps only Eliel Saarinen in Finland would be comparable, and he was a friend and correspondent of Kós during these years, each believing that they were on a shared path to asserting the living presence of their regional vernacular in a modern architectural idiom. Given this success it is not surprising that Kós was able to build a studio house for himself and his family, named *Crow Castle* (1909–10) in the countryside near Sztana in the Kalotaszeg region of Transylvania (Figure 6). Although remote, this became his studio and the base of his operations from then on.

Kozma enjoyed some success in these years but nothing like Kós. Being Jewish may have limited his opportunities, or perhaps his commitment to the kind of National Romanticism that often came with issues of ethnic purity or religious orthodoxy – Kós was brought up

17) There was considerable literature on the Cock Church when built, cited in Gall, *Kós Károly műhelye* (as in n. 1), 260–271.

**Figure 5:** Károly Kós, Cock Church, Kolozsvar/Cluj Napoca, 1913–1914.
Photo: author.

a Calvinist which was regarded as the ur-religion of the Transylvanian peasantry. Anti-Semitism was rife in Hungarian society, but there had been major strides in opening up the professions, banking, manufacturing and the capital investment sector under Habsburg rule.[18] In these circumstances, the urban Jewish ideal of assimilation within a multi-ethnic empire could be empowering, especially in contrast to the restrictive laws that prevailed before the 1867 Ausgleich.[19] There were also opportunities from within the emancipated

18) The *numerus clausus,* restricting the numbers of Jewish entrants to the professions was only introduced in 1920 under Admiral Horthy.

19) Kozma's family name was Fuchs, but like many others, including Lajta (formerly Leitersdorfer), he changed it to an overtly Hungarian surname, thus confirming his identification with the modern state.

**Figure 6:** Károly Kós, Crow Castle, Sztana, Transylvania, 1910.
Photo: author.

Jewish middle classes who fully subscribed to the construction of a distinctive Hungarian identity in architecture and design. Between 1911 and 1913 Kozma worked in the office of Béla Lajta, whose Jewish background secured a number of major commissions, such as the Institute for the Blind (1905–08) and the Jewish Home for the Elderly (1907–11). Both these buildings are conceived in a manner inspired by vernacular building types, and employ details, particularly in the metalwork, derived from peasant chip carvings and embroideries (Figure 7).

Lajta is sometimes described as a proto-modernist, and there is some justification for this if we base these terms solely on formal values.[20] The Commercial School on Vas Street (1909–12) is one of the earliest buildings in Budapest to employ the kind of stark rectilinear massing associated with the modern architecture of the 1920s and 30s, but the decorative features, notably the relief carving around the doorways, indicates the extent to which folk sources were still felt to be relevant to architect-designers who placed emphasis on abstract form and the juxtaposition of solid and void (Figure 8).[21] In this case, the reliefs were again based on textile designs bearing out the widespread belief in Central Europe that textiles, especially

20) Pál Nádai, 'On a Modern Urban Builder: The Art of Béla Lajta,' in Katalin Keserü, ed., *A modernizmus kezdetei/The Beginnings of Modernism in Central European Architecture*, Budapest: Ernst Muzeum, 2005, 233–234

21) In Keserü, *A modernizmus kezdetei*, 2005, 234, the design of the carved doorway is attributed to Kozma.

**Figure 7:** Béla Lajta, Metalwork detail from the Jewish Institute for the Blind, Mexikói ut, Budapest, 1908. Photo: author.

peasant embroideries, were the most effective bearers of cultural memory and identity.[22] Kozma's work for Lajta covered the full range of projects that came through the office, but he was particularly involved in designing the interiors and furniture which were, of course, planned to co-ordinate with the themes and details of the rest of the building. Kós, Kozma and Lajta were fond of 'plank' style chair forms adapted from the most basic rural prototypes, as can be seen in the furniture Kós designed for Crow Castle and which Lajta and Kozma designed for several buildings (Figure 9). In fact, the overall design, materials and construction techniques are similar in several examples across the *Fiatalok*, indicating the coherence of the

22) Gottfried Semper and Alois Riegl are frequently cited as the main theorists of the relationship between textiles and architecture, but the notion of textiles as repositories of national/ethnic identity had independent currency in Hungary. József Huszka, for example, cites the shepherd's overcoat (szűr) as 'the ten commandments' of Hungarian style, on which 'can be read the temperament of the people.' *Magyar díszítő styl*, Budapest: Deutsch, 1885, 46.

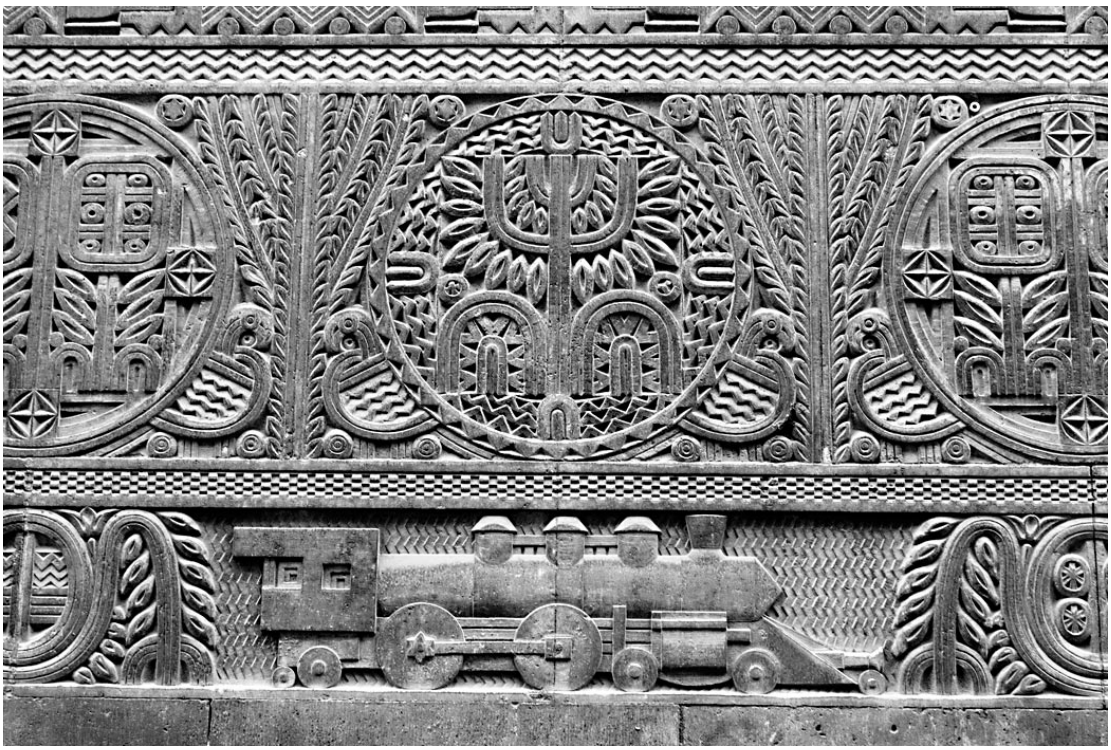

**Figure 8:** Lajos Kozma, Carved doorway to Commercial School in Vas Utca, 1912

group's approach to furniture design around 1910, even when intended for a variety of settings and contexts.[23]

In the period leading up to the First World War, however, Kozma was best known for the interior of the music shop in the so-called Rózsavölgyi-ház (Rózsavölgy shop and apartment building) in the centre of Budapest (1911–13) (Figures 10 and 11).[24] This interior, and the furniture that Kozma designed for it in collaboration with the craftsmen who formed the *Budapesti Műhely* (Budapest Workshops), marks a definite departure from the Transylvanian vernacular that had dominated the furniture designs of the *Fiatalok*.[25] Not only are the materials and cabinetmaking of a higher order, there is a richer and more volumetric treatment of floral and bird motifs in the carved detailing than was found on his earlier designs inspired by Transylvanian prototypes. Kozma clearly saw this as a significant moment in his own work, but also a turning point in modern design. In an article for *Magyar Iparművészet* (Hungarian Applied Art), the leading Hungarian applied arts journal of 1913 he wrote, 'We now stand at a major line demarcating the tail end of the development of modern applied arts. Looking back on two decades of work, we see the hidden flow of our aspirations – and

23) The Gödöllő designers, especially Ede Toroczkai-Wigand, also favoured plank style furniture.

24) The interior and other recent work by Kozma was published in *Magyar Iparművészet*, 16:8, 1913, 315–326.

25) The Budapesti Műhely was set up by Kozma in 1913 to reform domestic design and make a direct link between craftspeople and consumers, along the lines of the Wiener Werkstätte. The same year he also established the Budapesti Textilművészeti Műhelyt [Budapest Textile Art Workshop] with Klára Goldzieher and Artúr Lakatos.

**Figure 9:** Károly Kós, Plank style chair for Crow Castle, c. 1920.
Source: Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest.


**Figure 10:** Lajos Kozma, Interior of the Rózsavölgyi music shop, Budapest, 1912.
Source: *Magyar Iparművészet*, 16.8, 1913.


**Figure 11:** Lajos Kozma, Rózsavölgyi music shop, detail of carved decoration.
Source: *Magyar Iparművészet*, 16.8, 1913.

looking ahead, we can already hear the great rumbling power of the new.'[26] The approaching war could be seen as that 'great rumbling power,' and it would mark a definitive break in the careers of both men.

## The First World War and its aftermath in Hungary

As is well known, the events at the end of the war were very different for the various national and ethnic groups of Central Europe. While the peace was marked by celebrations in the Czech, Slovak and Romanian lands, it was mourned as a disaster by those on the losing side, especially the Hungarians for whom it inaugurated a period of unprecedented political turmoil. The period between 1918 and 1919 alone, witnessed four regime changes: in November 1918, a liberal government under Mihály Károlyi replaced the Habsburg monarchy. Five months later, in March 1919, Károlyi's government was overthrown by a communist revolution led by Béla Kun which, in turn, lasted only four months before invasion and occupation by foreign powers. This was followed by a right-wing counter-revolution led by Admiral Horthy

26) Kozma Lajos, 'Az iparművészet fejlődésének új irányáról' [On the new trend In the development of applied arts], *Magyar Iparművészet*, 16:8, 1913, 307.

and a reign of terror that was waged against political opponents lasting until 1921. Finally, the Treaty of Trianon, signed in June 1920 and enacted the following year, dismembered Greater Hungary, reducing it to just over one third of its former size, and its population by an equivalent amount. As a consequence, there were massive population movements as the dispersed ethnic groups crossed the redrawn borders to rejoin their compatriots. This was particularly marked in Hungary, where many ethnic Magyars fled from the successor states to the rump of a much-reduced state. These measures created a powerful sense of injustice in Hungary and a corresponding clamour for 'revanchism' that dominated Hungarian domestic politics and foreign policy, as well as a massive amount of propaganda, throughout the inter-war period (Figure 12).

How did the two architect-designers fare in this? During the war Kós continued to work on a number of projects, including the decorations for Charles IV's coronation in Budapest in 1916. But most building was suspended, and he tended to concentrate on his prints and illustrated books. In 1917 Kós moved to Turkey to supervise the building of a 'Hungarian Institute' in Istanbul, remaining there for the duration of the war. Kozma served in the artillery at the Balkan and Italian fronts, and it was there that he produced the first designs for a children's book, written for his daughter, that points towards the direction his work would take in peacetime. This book was eventually published in 1921 with the title *Zsuzsa Bergengóciában* (Susie in Fairyland) (Figure 13).[27] The drawings are wildly extravagant depictions of a fantasy Baroque in which the small but sturdy Zsuzsa wanders through grand halls and up staircases that, while employing the familiar repertoire of high Baroque ornament, are reminiscent more of theatrical sets than actual buildings. This was not merely an exercise in fantasy book illustration. Kozma was rehearsing the decorative vocabulary of a new style of domestic design that would dominate his interiors for the next decade, translating the Baroque and Rococo into extravagantly camp and performative settings for the middle-class home.

## Kozma-Baroque

The finest, or most comprehensive example of this new manner was the woman's dressing room of 1924 (Figure 14).[28] This was the most theatrical of Kozma's interiors of the 1920s, partly because he was able to control the design, decoration and lighting of the entire space, creating a stage-like setting on which the client could perform her dressing and toilet. One cabinet, or variant of the pieces seen in the dressing room, survives in the Wolfsonian collection in Miami (Figure 15).[29] Made of ebonized walnut and constructed using the refined techniques of eighteenth-century cabinetmakers, this sophisticated and luxurious piece of furniture seems a far cry from the self-consciously crude, pre-war plank-style chairs of the Fiatalok.[30] Not only does it

27) Lajos Kozma, *Zsuzsa Bergengóciában*, Budapest: Sacelláry, 1921, in a limited edition of 500 copies.

28) *Möbel und Raumkunst von Ludwig Kozma*, Leipzig/Vienna: Friedrich Ernst Hübsch Verlag, 1926. Also published in *Innen-Dekoration*, 35:1, 1924, 9. The interior has not been traced so may have existed since c. 1920.

29) See the detailed analysis of this piece in Juliet Kinchin, 'Modernity and Tradition in Hungarian Furniture, 1900–1938: Three Generations,' *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 24, 2002, 64–93.

30) There is a similar 'perfume cabinet' by Kozma in the Iparművészeti Múzeum, but with a varnished walnut finish. See Figure 17.


**Figure 12:** 'Nem, Nem, Soha' (No, No, Never). Hungarian irredentist propaganda against the terms of the Treaty of Trianon, 1920.
Photo: author.

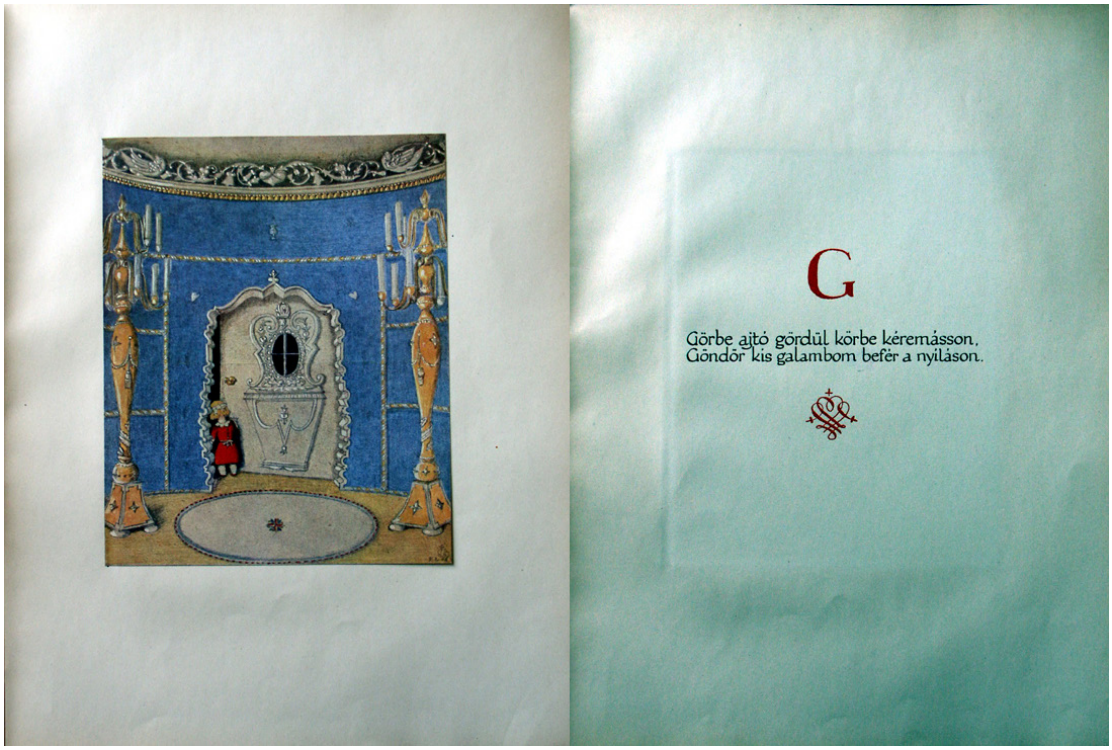


**Figure 13:** Lajos Kozma, 'G – the curved door rolls open on request. My curly little pigeon fits into the opening.' Illustration from *Zsuzsa Bergengóciában* [Susie in Fairyland], Budapest 1921.
Source: author's collection.

display the formal vocabulary of the Baroque and Rococo, with all their courtly associations; the historical references are further overlaid by a curious range of expressive psychological qualities. As one commentator noted, 'In the apartment there are distinctively shaped pieces of furniture, in different colours, which look to us like animated figures ... just as close relatives bring fresh life into the family circle with their individual quirks of character, so the differences (in the furniture) introduce an elegant vitality into the unity of the room.'[31] One could go further and attribute insect-like qualities to the shiny black object, its polished outer surface like a carapace and its legs primed for scuttling movement. The carved decoration is especially refined, closely following the motifs that Kozma was employing at the same time in his graphics.

Working with the publisher Imre Kner at the end of the war, Kozma had begun studying examples of eighteenth-century fine printing to develop a house style or corporate identity for Kner's firm.[32] This first emerged in a number of individual books at the end of the war, but it was in the various literary series, 'Kner Klasszikusok' (Kner Classics) and 'Monumenta Literarum', that the full impact of Kozma's design innovations would become apparent. Rejecting the standard cuts available from German foundries, Kozma designed a series of

31) Jenő Mohácsi, 'Das Schlafgemach einer Dame,' *Innen-Dekoration*, 35:1, Jan. 1924, 6.

32) Kozma's book and graphic designs deserve an article on their own, but for information see György Haiman and Botondné Lévay, eds, *A Kner-nyomda, kiadványainak tükrében 1882–1944*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982, 2 volumes, and György Haiman, 'Imre Kner and the Revival of Hungarian Printing,' *Design Issues*, 7:2, Spring 1991, 41–53. In addition to his work on their books and publicity, Kozma designed a house for Imre Kner in 1925 at Gyoma in a Neo-Baroque style.

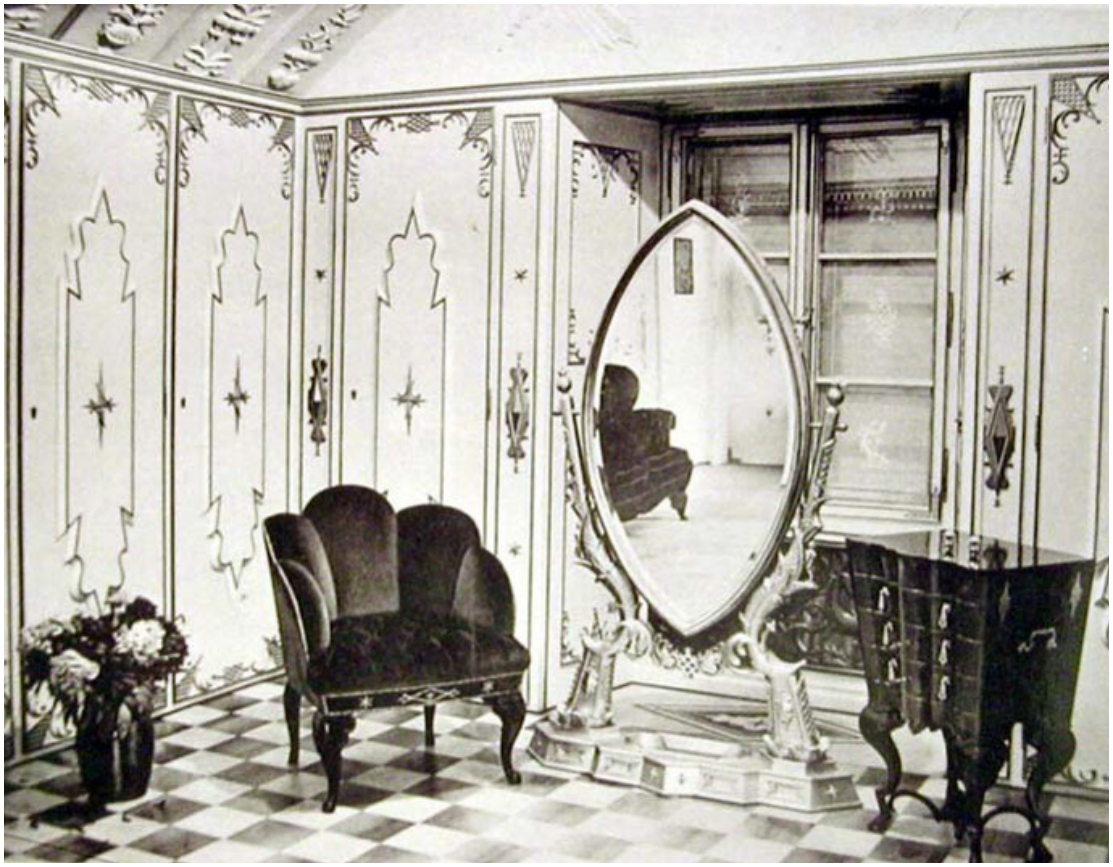

**Figure 14:** Lajos Kozma, Woman's dressing room, Budapest, 1924.
Source: *Innen-Dekoration*, 35.1, 1924.

richly ornate borders, initial letters, vignettes and tailpieces that were cut by Hungarian engravers to complement the old typefaces that Imre Kner selected (Figure 16). Kner was a connoisseur of fine printing and a close friend of the arch-modernist Jan Tschichold, but he departed from his German counterpart in his views on modern typography, believing that a high point of clarity and elegance had been achieved two centuries earlier and that the modern book designer should continue to use letterforms, layouts and ornaments that were proven to delight the reader without straining the legibility of the text.[33] Kozma's designs struck a similar balance between history and contemporaneity. As one critic wrote in 1927, 'The Baroque spirit of his art is not a simple variation of the stylistic elements of the Baroque: his whole artistic career is a rigorous opposition to the cult of historic styles. [Kozma] creates his own style.'[34]

Throughout the 1920s, Kner's books maintained high editorial and print standards, while setting contemporary and historic literature within the context of Kozma's Neo-Baroque ornaments. It quickly caught on and other publishing houses produced similar lines of gift

33) On Kner and Tschichold, see Paul Stirton, *Jan Tschichold and the New Typography*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019, 175, and Christopher Burke, *Active Literature: Jan Tschichold and New Typography*, London: Hyphen Press, 2007.

34) András Komor, 'Lajos Kozma,' *Magyar Iparművészet*, 15:1, 1927, 23.

**Figure 15:** Lajos Kozma, Cabinet in ebonized walnut, 1923.
Source: Wolfsonian-FIU Museum, Miami.


**Figure 16:** Lajos Kozma, Initial letters for Kner publishers, c, 1921.
Photo: author.

books in their lists, although rarely achieving the design or presswork standards of Kner. Writing in the Kner Almanach of 1922, Kozma described the character and appeal of his sources in a manner that reveals something of the possibilities that the new repertoire offered a designer: 'Rather than animation, restlessness and what is finished, it is preparation, the growth of life, fever, the driving force which finds delight in flashes of lightning, as in the burgeoning growth of fleshy tendrils; in short the dynamic power of portrayal which is fundamentally related to Baroque ornament.'[35] The print ornaments that Kozma designed for Kner are repeated in the carved details of the Wolfsonian cabinet and throughout the interior of the woman's dressing room, as well as countless other pieces of furniture from the 1920s, recreating that sense of a consistent but endlessly variable design vocabulary that is associated with the Baroque and Rococo.

For commercial purposes, Kozma was able to develop this repertoire in collaboration with various furniture manufacturers since it did not require the entire *Gesamtkunstwerk* of a coordinated interior. Individual pieces of furniture could as easily be designed and marketed to furnish specific rooms in the middle-class home. In fact, the style enjoyed considerable popularity in Hungary in the 1920s, coming to be known generically as the 'Kozma Baroque.' Chairs, beds, wardrobes, cabinets, book cases, mirrors, even domestic altarpieces were produced in significant numbers, often employing intense colours or exaggerations of scale

35) Lajos Kozma, 'Individuality and Traditions,' in *Kner Almanach az 1922*, Gyoma: Kner, 1922, quoted in Haiman, 'Imre Kner and the Revival of Hungarian Printing,' 45.

that served to emphasize the playful, witty elaboration of the historic motifs in a distinctively contemporary manner for the middle class consumer (Figures 17, 18 and 19).[36] Kozma also attracted followers from among the furniture and interior design community, partly through his teaching at the School of Applied Arts in Budapest, giving the Neo-Baroque the appearance of a movement rather than the singular expression of one man.[37] Despite its popularity in the market, however, the style did not attract much comment in Budapest. Kozma's work received much more attention in Austria and Germany, notably in the pages of *Innen-Dekoration* and *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*, published in Darmstadt by Alexander Koch, or through the books of the Stuttgart publisher Julius Hoffmann. Towards the end of the 1920s, Hungarian critics began to recognise this development as a new and positive departure from the 'Transylvanian' vernacular of the pre-war period.[38] As Gyula Háy commented in 1929, 'The style that Lajos Kozma and his group appear to be reviving never in fact existed. They are doing considerably more than throwing over the existing style; they are producing something brand new, meanwhile employing historic features.'[39]

The discourse surrounding the revival of this style at the time was not based upon its bourgeois appeal, its playfulness, or its theatricality, but on its reinterpretation of an indigenous folk tradition that was widespread in Central Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was the so-called 'folk-Baroque' or 'gentry Baroque,' the building and decorative style favoured by the rural gentry that had trickled down from the court to various provincial centres. For Hungarians the most important feature of the style was that it recalled the distributed Magyar culture of the early Habsburg period, a time when Budapest was a backwater and the more modest rural landowning classes upheld a high standard of education and culture in their libraries, manor houses and furniture. A key to this link can be found in Kozma's first mature version of the so-called 'Mesélő Szék' or storyteller's chair designed for a school in 1914, which was based on an armchair owned and possibly made by the eighteenth century general and national hero Ferenc Rákóczi (1676–1735).[40] What Kozma-Baroque offered, therefore, was not a rejection of historic folk sources as the raw material of the national style, but rather a transfer of allegiance within that debate to a different set of sources that could claim an equivalent degree of prestige or legitimacy in the expression of modern Hungarian culture. Even Kós, although wedded to the Transylvanian vernacular, acknowledged the validity of this source. Discussing the designs for a house in Kolozsvár in 1921, he affirmed the view that there was a specifically Transylvanian Baroque. 'It came from Vienna, through Budapest and then to us. The Viennese Baroque of Maria Teresa's time is no longer the same as the Italian, the French. The Hungarian was simplified. And as it came

36) In 2018, marking the 70th anniversary of Kozma's death, an exhibition on this subject was held at the Műcsarnok in Budapest under the title *Kozma Klasszik: A Budapesti Műhely és Kozma Lajos* [Classic Kozma: The Budapest Workshops and Lajos Kozma].

37) The leading interior designers in Budapest working in this manner were József Gróf, Ödön Dankó, Pál Fábry, and Kozma's student Gyula Kaesz.

38) Pál Nádai was just about the only critic to write seriously on 'Kozma-Baroque, in the early 1920s. See his *Az iparművészet Magyarországon* [Applied Arts in Hungary], Budapest: Biró Miklós Kiadása, 1920

39) Gyula Háy, 'Kozma Lajos, ahogy ma látjuk' [Lajos Kozma as we see him today], *Tér és Forma*, 2:7, 1929, 278–287.

40) The Mesélő Szék was shown at the Children's exhibition in the Budapesti Műhely, 1914, and discussed by Pál Nádai in the article 'Gyermekművészet' [Childrens' Art], *Magyar Iparművészet*, 17, 1914, 219 and 237–240. Rákóczi's armchair had been exhibited in Budapest and Košice in 1906 at the time of the hero's reburial in Hungary.

**Figure 17:** Lajos Kozma, Perfume Cabinet in walnut, c. 1923.
Source: Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest.

**Figure 18:** Lajos Kozma, Display cabinets, c. 1924 as displayed in exhibition 'Kozma Klasszik: a Budapesti Műhely és Lajos Kozma,' Műcsarnok, Budapest, 2018.
Photo: author.

**Figure 19:** Lajos Kozma, bedroom suite, as displayed in exhibition 'Kozma Klasszik: a Budapesti Műhely és Lajos Kozma,' Műcsarnok, Budapest, 2018.
Photo: author.

further east, it became even simpler and intertwined with earlier styles, which by that time had spread everywhere in the hands of the folk craftsmen. … Baroque architecture had begun to have a local characteristic style. … The Baroque was also absorbed into folk architecture.'[41] But it was not unique to Hungary, by any means.

## The Neo-Baroque in Central Europe

At the same time that Kozma turned to the Baroque, or even earlier, Dagobert Peche in Vienna was producing designs for furniture, textiles, ceramics, glassware, graphics and especially metalwork and jewellery using the same decorative vocabulary. This became the dominant style of the Wiener Werkstätte in the 1920s, following Peche's appointment as director of the main Vienna workshops and their outlets at the end of the war. This was not regarded as a rejection of the pre-war, rectilinear style of Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser but a development or diversification of the earlier manner. Peche maintained the workshop's commitment to innovation and craftsmanship while placing greater emphasis on ornament as opposed to utility. He also departed from the earlier pre-occupation with totalizing interior design or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, in favour of a multiplicity of decorative objects related through their common design vocabulary. For this, Peche looked back to the Baroque and Rococo of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a golden age of the Habsburgs, while deliberately rejecting the monumental Neo-Baroque of the later nineteenth century. In contrast to the grandiose public buildings and formal interiors of the Ringstrasse, Peche mined the Baroque for motifs to create a range of decorative objects and patterns that domesticated and feminized the style. Indeed, when Peche died in 1923, Hoffmann declared that he was 'Austria's greatest genius in ornamentation since the days of the Baroque … All of Germany has experienced a new stylistic epoch thanks to Peche's designs.'[42]

Peche may have led the way, but he was not alone in following this route. Looking to contemporary work in Austria, Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia throughout the 1920s, one can find a number of prominent architect-designers, such as Eduard Pfeiffer in Munich, Fritz August Breuhaus in Bonn and Dusseldorf, Emanuel Josef Margold in Darmstadt, Wilhelm Foltin, Ernst Lichtblau, and Otto Prutscher in Vienna, and many others in the pages of *Innen-Dekoration*, all of whom turned to the Baroque as part of a new repertoire of forms for the bourgeois interior.

The group that engaged in the most innovative revival of the Baroque in the years leading up to, and after the First World War were the Czech Cubists, although this is not always given prominence in the literature. There is, however, no doubt about the presence of folk-Baroque as a key source in both their writings and designs.[43] In 'The Prism and the Pyramid' (1911) Pavel

41) Samu Benkő, 'Őszi beszélgetés Kós Károllyal Erdély köveiről' [An Autumn Discussion with Károly Kós about the 'Stones of Transylvania], *Utunk Évkönyv*, Kolozsvár/Cluj, 1977, 119–125; quoted in Gall, *Kós Károly műhelye* (as in n. 1), 301.

42) Peter Noever, 'Introduction,' P. Noever, ed., *Dagobert Peche and the Wiener Werkstatte*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002

43) The Baroque is frequently invoked in Czech and Slovak discussions of a 'national style' in architecture and design during the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth. See Alena Janatková, *Barockrezeption zwischen Historismus und Moderne. Die Architekturdiskussion in Prag 1890–1914*, Zürich: GTA

Janák made the link to vernacular sources of the Baroque quite explicit: 'Our local architecture has been determined by two large European architectural families: Southern Antiquity and that of Northern Christianity. … [The Southern spirit] developed its full potential above all in the Baroque, a period again controlled by abstraction. It was typical of our national character.'[44] The link is clearly indicated in the House of Dr. Fára at Pelhřimov. This was not a new building in 1912–13 when Janák redesigned the facade; it was previously an inn dating back to the eighteenth century, so the overall design was largely defined by an existing plan and streetscape. Nevertheless, the finished ensemble indicates how effectively Cubist planar faceting overlays the forms and details of the pre-existing vernacular, i.e., the folk-Baroque. On new buildings, such as the Kovařovic Villa by Josef Chochol (1912–13) or the Bohdaneč spa pavilion (1916) by Josef Gočár, the architects preserved the essential repertoire of forms, details and disposition of elements around a central axis that was established by the seventeenth century. Similar effects can be seen in such Rondo-Cubist buildings as the Legio Bank (1921–23, Figure 20) or the Adria Palace (1923–25) in Prague where the monumental forms and rigid geometry of the facades may suggest something modern, but there is no mistaking the use of a stylized repertoire of Baroque architectural decoration; the volutes, capitals and cartouches may be simplified and exaggerated in scale, but they still carry the echo and meaning of their sources. Czech Cubism before and after the war was a multifarious movement with many sources, but the historic Baroque references are a key element in both its formation and its reception.

The Baroque sources are less explicit, but they are even more deeply embedded in the furniture designed by the Czech Cubists. Some pieces emphasize the faceting of form that can be linked to both Cubism and to Janák's theories of the crystal, but the massive scale and solidity of many items recall seventeenth- and eighteenth-century prototypes. The materials used (generally expensive dark woods and veneers with rich graining) and the cabinetmaking techniques also hark back to historic models associated with the grand settings of the palace and country manor house. However, it is in their use or deployment within the home that their traditional and historic character is most evident. Unlike modernist interiors of the same date, Czech Cubist furniture was rarely intended to re-orientate the domestic space. Generally, the bulky tables and sideboards reaffirmed the role of furniture as items of display or conspicuous wealth, rather than altering the patterns of domestic life. This is especially true of the large-scale pieces that were produced in the newly created Czechoslovakia after the war – pieces such as the sideboard designed by Gočár in 1921 for the villa of textile magnate Josef Sochor at Dvůr Králové in north-eastern Bohemia, where the historical references are quite explicit (Figure 21). Far from opening up the space to more flexible and informal activities, these pieces solidify traditional patterns of room use and function.

These aspects were uppermost in the mind of the avant-garde designer Karel Teige when in 1929 he published a withering attack on Cubist architecture as 'a return to Baroque thinking and possibly even (because of its dramatic qualities) to Baroque form.'[45] For

Verlag, 2000, and Vendula Hnídková, ed., *Národní styl: Kultura a politika* [National Style: Culture and Politics], Prague: Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design, 2013, 154.

44) Reprinted in Timothy Benson and Éva Forgács, eds, *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes*, Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 2002, 86.

45) Karel Teige, *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia and Other Writings*, trans. Irena Murray and David Britt, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2000, 143.


**Figure 20:** Josef Gočár, Legio Bank, Prague, 1923.
Source: Prázdné domy.

**Figure 21:** Josef Gočár, Sideboard for Josef Sochor at Dvůr Králové, 1921.
Source: period photograph.

Teige, 'The perpetual use of oblique deformed planes, the violation of the material and the disregard for the construction and function were but the expressions of a false Baroque spiritualism resurrected by the Secession.'[46] He was no less scathing about the furniture: 'Thus, the dynamic architecture of Czech Cubism dwindled to nothing but a chaotic play of forms affixed to some lamp, impractical sideboard, or useless desk – an armchair in which we couldn't sit without keeling over, a vase or goblet that toppled when touched. ... Their massive furniture, dynamically multidirectional, is full of heavy-handed, pathetic, and oppressive materiality.'[47]

## Neo-Baroque society in Hungary

It should be apparent from these examples that the Neo-Baroque can be traced through a range of sources testifying to its presence, if not its precise meaning, in intellectual and aesthetic discourse. Furthermore, there can be little doubt that the term and its historical interpretation was undergoing something of a revision in the early years of the twentieth century. The period before and after the First World War was when the Baroque became accepted as a serious style in the eyes of historians of the Vienna School and further afield, thus lending the style a greater degree of respectability.[48] At the same time, it is questionable if this trickled down to the people who were buying 'Kozma-Baroque' bedroom suites and hall mirrors. A fuller explanation for the rise of the style in the 1920s would have to look more closely at the world view shaped by the broader social and cultural shifts of the period – the *Weltanschauung*, to use a term now distrusted among social historians of art and design.

What might account for its appeal to a broad public in Hungary? One factor was the emergence of the Roman Catholic church as a political force under the regency of Admiral Horthy, and the redefinition of Hungary as a narrowly Christian nation by the more assertive nationalists following the humiliation of Trianon. Baroque was the historic style of the church militant in the age of the Counter Reformation, so it struck a chord with the mood of 'Christian Hungary.'[49] This period also saw a renewed focus on the Hungarian aristocracy, indicating the explicitly nostalgic and retrogressive mood of the country growing out of the fanatical irredentism of the 1920s. Just such a combination of religion, politics and modernity was the focus of an influential book by the conservative political commentator Gyula Szekfű in which he first coined the term 'Neo-Baroque society.' *Három nemzedék* (Three Generations), first published in 1920 but revised and expanded later to take in the post-war developments, set out to trace the political ideologies and values of the Hungarian ruling class from the Reform Generation of the 1840s, symbolised by Count István Széchenyi, up to the First World War and

46) Ibid., 146.

47) Ibid., 152.

48) The key figures in the reinterpretation of Baroque architecture were Max Dvořák and especially Heinrich Wölfflin, whose book *Renaissance und Barock* (1888) was a landmark.

49) On the role of the Roman Catholic Church in public life in Horthy's Hungary, see Paul A. Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary: Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890–1944*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009. See especially chapters 3 and 4.

post-Trianon society.[50] Like most conservatives, Szekfű found the public figures of his own day lacking, and the political discourse misguided and delusional. In particular, he highlighted a tendency towards willful nostalgia and a conscious failure to acknowledge contemporary political realities. This 'Neo-Baroque society' brought the aristocratic stratum back into public life, but it was a deeply flawed class of men, penetrated by the mercantile middle classes and lacking any sense of their traditional role or national responsibilities.

Szekfű had no time for the revolutionaries of 1919, but there was a grudging respect for their commitment to an ideal and the galvanising impact this had exerted on cultural life. By now, however, the writers, artists and composers of 1919 were in exile in Vienna, Berlin, Moscow or Dessau, leaving a vacuum at least among the avant-garde. In addition, Szekfű drew attention to the failure of the clergy to uphold moral standards, alongside a compliant public prepared to 'respect authority quite generously.' In this climate, the metropolitan middle class stood behind a state led by an admiral without a navy, and balanced its illusions of a glorious history and a sense of tradition alongside a cynical collusion with the regime to maintain the benefits of the status quo:

> It is also understandable from the nature of the Neo-Baroque that all this well-being is, after all, just an outward appearance, and that the people within themselves are further removed from respect for authority than ever before. This backwardness of the critical spirit then avenges itself in the fact that the person who admires the Neo-Baroque in public, persecutes the object of his adoration with evil-mouthed, murderous jokes in his private life: mocking people and situations with the help of this Viennese Baroque spirit.[51]

Szekfű's pessimistic view of post-Trianon politics and society has cast a pall over most analyses of the period, not least the broader assessments of Hungarian art and design of the 1920s. This has played into the classic modernist views of history that give priority to the avant-garde. In that reading, most innovative Hungarian design was produced by those forced to flee after the collapse of the Hungarian soviet republic in 1919. Even today, accounts of Hungarian architecture and design tend to feature work by Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer, and Ernő Goldfinger, all of whom left Hungary before they had produced anything that might be described as mature work, while the actual design that was produced, exhibited, discussed and sold within the country during the 1920s is passed over cursorily.

The Neo-Baroque has had very mixed fortunes in the historiography of Hungarian design, with most writers tending to dismiss Kozma's turn to the Baroque as either an aberration or a compromise due to restrictions placed upon his architectural practice. Kozma's activities in the Arts Directorate of the Soviet Republic in 1919 certainly limited his professional advancement under the right-wing regime of Admiral Horthy. But the popularity of the Neo-Baroque seems also to have alienated left-leaning groups like the Association of Hungarian Engineers and Architects, who excluded Kozma from

50) Gyula Szekfű, *Három nemzedék: Egy hanyatló kor története* [Three Generations: the history of an epoch of decay], Budapest: Élet, 1920. A later edition of 1934, entitled *Három nemzedék, és ami utána következik* [Three Generations and what follows], Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1934, included a fifth chapter bringing the analysis up to date.

51) Szekfű, *Három nemzedék, és ami utána következik*, 420.

membership until 1928. Even in a monographic essay, the left-wing critic Ernő Kállai (1890–1954) dismissed Kozma as an 'artist of the mercantile and financial bourgeoisie.'[52] Among later critics and historians one finds the persistent view that furniture and interior design could only ever be regarded as an inferior activity for a trained architect, undertaken solely because there was no building work available. In that vein, both Máté Major (1949) and Judith Koós (1975) viewed the Neo-Baroque as a 'compromise,' a temporary piece of opportunism on Kozma's part until he could re-establish his architectural practice.[53] For László Beke, this phase was a sign of the 'difficulties' Kozma experienced on his journey towards a full blown modernism, as if the end point (i.e. Kozma's modernist work in the 1930s) was a pre-ordained and logical conclusion to the complex and turbulent currents of the 1920s.[54] Only the curators at the Museum of Applied Arts and the Kiscelli Museum, who concentrate on the decorative arts, seem prepared to accept Kozma-Baroque as a serious design movement on its own terms, expressed through a range of media including furniture and interiors, graphics and textiles.[55] Among recent publications, one tendency has been to treat Kozma-Baroque as the Hungarian version of 'Art Deco,' although this is hardly a satisfactory interpretation.[56] The inclusion of the Neo-Baroque within an international style defined in Paris tends to oversimplify the rich diversity of the sources and meaning of the style within Hungary, just as the merging of central European national romantic tendencies with Art Nouveau smooths out the distinctive regional meanings while serving little serious purpose other than offering a platform for promotion and tourism.

There is also a gendered dimension to this discourse. Kozma-Baroque had a brilliance and wit, a sparkling vivacity that was best seen in a light-hearted and playful treatment of historical styles rather than any larger moral purpose. In fact, it is often at its best in the decorative packaging of feminized luxury goods such as those designed for the Floris confectionery company, but also found in greetings cards, ex libris and various types of printed ephemera (Figure 22). These are not the type of designed objects upon which historians feel able to hang larger analyses of style and society, so the widespread appearance of the Neo-Baroque throughout the 1920s remains in a historical limbo: present in all the source material of the period but unacknowledged by the historians.

52) Quoted in András Ferkai, 'Bevezető,' in Éva Horányi, ed., *Kozma Lajos modern épületei*, Budapest: TERC Kiadó, 2006, 13.

53) In 1926 an amnesty was granted to those who had been involved in the Soviet Republic of 1919, leading to the return of many emigres and the freeing of restrictions on those who remained in Hungary. Two years later, in 1928, Kozma was admitted to the Chamber of Architects.

54) László Beke and Zsuzsa Varga, *Kozma Lajos*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1968, 5

55) See Éva Kiss and Hilda Horváth, *Kozma Lajos, az iparművész (1884–1948)*, Budapest: Iparművészeti Múzeum, 1994; Éva Horányi, ed., *Kozma Lajos modern épületei*, Budapest: TERC Kiadó, 2006.

56) See Éva Horányi, *Art deco és modernizmus: Lakásművészet Magyarországon, 1920–1940*, catalogue to an exhibition in 1912 placing Kozma's Neo-Baroque works at the centre of the movement.

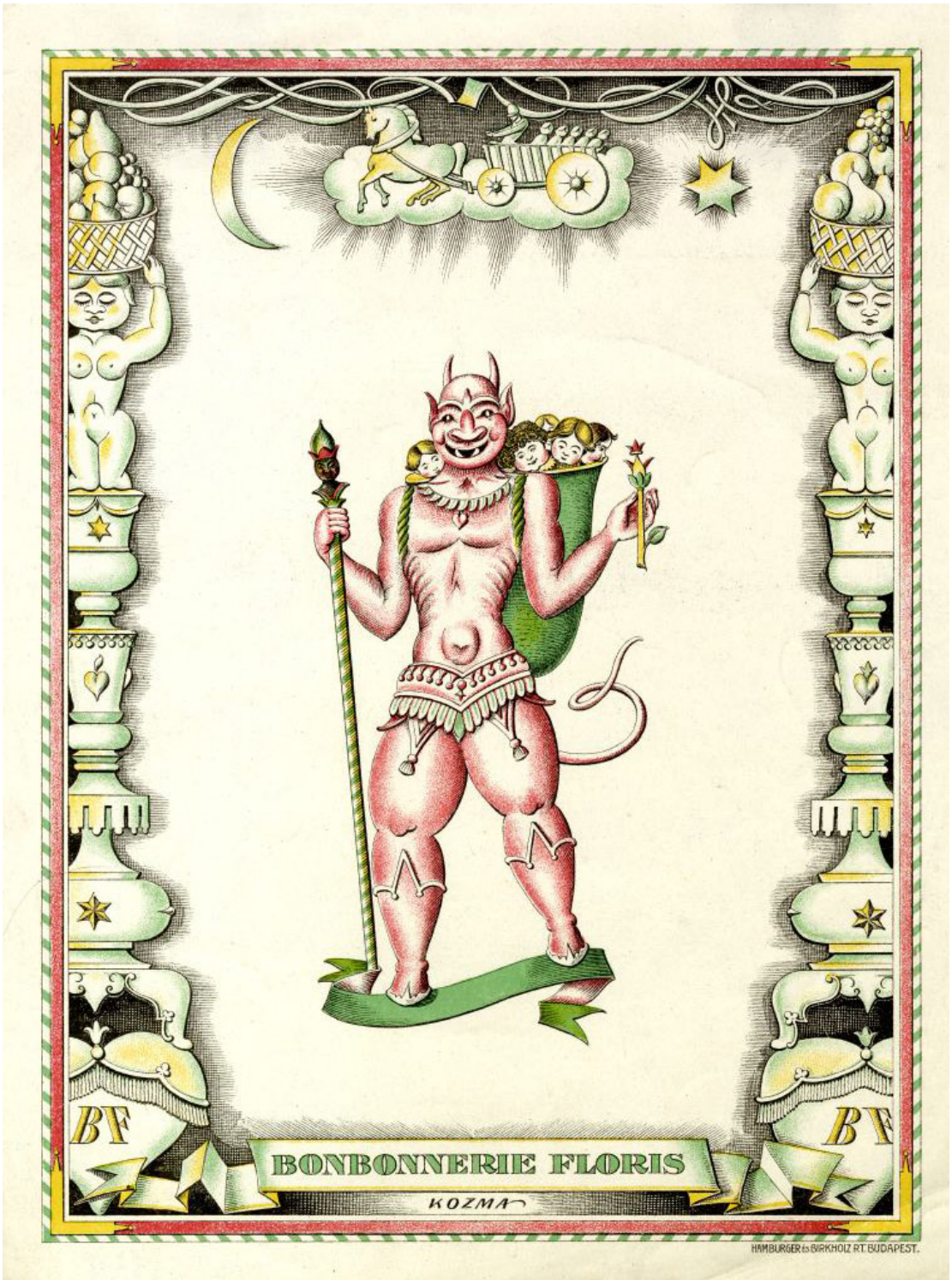


**Figure 22:** Lajos Kozma, Advertisement for Floris confectioners.
Source: Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest.

## Károly Kós after Trianon

As mentioned earlier, Kós spent the latter part of the war in Istanbul, and he returned to a broken and volatile Hungary, soon to lose two thirds of its territory and people to the successor states. The most important, or at least the most personal, loss was Transylvania, which became part of Romania. Transylvania was not only the substantial territory in eastern Hungary, but it had been regarded for some time as the heartland of Hungarian peasant culture and therefore, for Kós's generation, the repository of the true essence of Magyar history and identity. It was held to be the only place with an unbroken link to the pre-Ottoman Hungary of Matthias Corvinus stretching right back to the early Middle Ages, when the seven Magyar tribes had first occupied the Danube basin. This was the foundation myth of Hungarian legitimacy, just as other ethnic groups in the region, not least the Romanians, upheld and propagated their own foundation myths. By the time of the census in 1910, it was apparent that the largest single ethnic or linguistic group in Transylvania was Romanian or 'Vlach.' This simple calculation would determine the borders set by the victorious Entente powers at the Paris peace conference of 1918–20. Kós returned, therefore, to a situation in which the community into which he was born and which he had championed through his design work – one that had enjoyed hegemony under the Empire – was now an embattled minority within the territory that they took for granted as their homeland.

Trained in the reform tradition of Ruskin and Morris, where design and architecture could never be seen as something distinct from society, nor separate from the demands of morality and social responsibility, Kós was faced with a dilemma. The community that he was so proud to belong to, the wellspring of his ideas about history, culture, and identity, was facing marginalization or, at least, a loss of that identity. In response, and despite offers of positions in Budapest, Kós chose to settle in Transylvania and attempt a dual role of architect-designer and all-round defender of the culture of the Hungarian and Szekler communities, although he must have known that the opportunities he had enjoyed in the pre-war period would not be extended under the regime based in Bucharest. A case has been made that these reduced circumstances forced Kós to become more environmentally conscious in the 1920s and 30s.[57] In the absence of major building commissions, he worked on a range of modest projects, such as farm buildings, animal pens, home and church extensions, which served the needs of his community in a practical way. Moreover, these simple works were often in a stripped down, modern formal language without the overt references to the vernacular that characterized his pre-war buildings. Nevertheless, one cannot avoid the fact that the environmental argument, which only came to the fore in the 1990s when the concept of eco-friendly architecture gained currency, was more a matter of necessity than choice. Kós was distrustful of the internationalism at the heart of the Modern Movement to such an extent that when in 1930 he saw designs by Eliel Saarinen, by this time resident in the USA, who had moved irrevocably from a National Romantic style to a mature modernist manner, Kós declared that the work was anonymous and that he no longer recognized his friend.[58]

57) See Gall, *Kós Károly műhelye* (as in n. 1), 85–89.

58) Károly Kós, 'Saarinen Eliel, a legnagyobb finn építőművész' [Eliel Saarinen, The Greatest Finnish Architect], *Pásztortűz*, 26:2, 1940, 86–90.

By settling in Transylvania, Kós was, in effect, sacrificing his career as architect-designer for a special role as protector of cultural history and identity. To this end, he was responsible for establishing a political party, The Transylvanian Peoples' Party, a cultural association, the Transylvanian Guild of Fine Arts (Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh), a publishing house to produce books on Transylvanian themes, and *Erdélyi Helikon* (The Transylvanian Helicon), the first of several journals based in Cluj to promote research and interest in the Hungarian heritage of the region. It is worth noting the name of the main cultural organization: Transylvanian Guild of Fine Arts. Kós was still thinking in terms that were familiar to followers of William Morris and Charles Robert Ashbee, who felt there was a way through the appalling conditions and social alienation of industrial capitalism, by seeking to bring back the engagement with work and materials that they felt was characteristic of medieval guilds. In this case we might regard Kós as someone who could envisage restoring a certain balance to the current situation through the revival of guild socialism; only in this case, it might be a form of 'guild nationalism.' There is a certain poignancy in the impassioned plea he made in a Sunday newspaper regarding the task in hand:

> Someone may ask, why are you telling us all this? Don't you realise it is 1923, that we are in Transylvania, and we have neither a Ruskin, nor a Morris, nor or an Ashbee, and our people are not English. Nor do we have anonymous patrons who are able to dedicate large sums of money to communal purposes, work co-operatives, or to artistic goals in general. … We need art, and we need artistic works, just as we need the other products of culture. And because we need them, we must produce them. We have our past; our people live, and their folk art lives too. All we need is a Ruskin, a Morris, and an Ashbee.[59]

Kós followed his own appeal, turning to the English model of the private press which he established under the colophon of his home, Crow Castle, rising up out of the pages of an open book (Figure 23). In the absence of any substantial architectural commissions, this press became his most significant achievement in the 1920s. In a series of books, some of which are still available in popular trade editions, he celebrated the vernacular architecture and folk traditions of the region. The finest of his books has the evocative title, *Erdély Kovei* (The Stones of Transylvania); the reference to Ruskin was unmistakable. For the illustrations he employed the most basic printing method, the linocut. Not only was this practical, in that he could work on these with minimal equipment, but the very simplicity (even crudeness) of the technique seemed perfectly suited to the subject matter. It also allowed him to experiment with bold reductions of form and colour in the depiction of a range of building types, from peasant cottages to castles (Figure 24).

Interesting and attractive as they are, however, one must ask whether they are more than a form of nostalgic romanticism; keepsakes for a beleaguered society that was getting moral sustenance through collectible, limited edition books of their built heritage. The private press movement was at its height in the 1920s, especially in the English-speaking world and in Germany, just as the Livre d'Artiste was thriving among the avant-garde in France. But Kós's work seems to have less to do with that form of elite modern collectible than his

59) Károly Kós, 'Kézműves Céh' [The Guild of Handicraft], *Vasárnapi Újság*, 1 July, 1923.


**Figure 23:** Károly Kós, colophon of private press at Crow Castle, 1923.
Source: author's photo.

personal revival of the principles of the Arts & Crafts movement. This indicates that Kós was thrown back onto the set of values that had formed his taste and practice in the pre-war years, when Ruskin, Morris, Ashbee and Walter Crane were still vital forces in the discourse on contemporary design and national identity; but these Victorian prophets seem somewhat anachronistic in the restructured Central Europe of the 1920s. Kós himself had doubts, asking in the preface to his 1929 book *Erdély* (Transylvania), 'Can this closed Transylvanian land have the spiritual power to know the different, or even opposing, voices of other human societies in consonant harmony? Is there a Transylvanian culture at all, and if so, for what reason?'[60]

60) K. Kós, *Erdély*, Kolozsvár: Erdély Szépmíves Céh, 1929

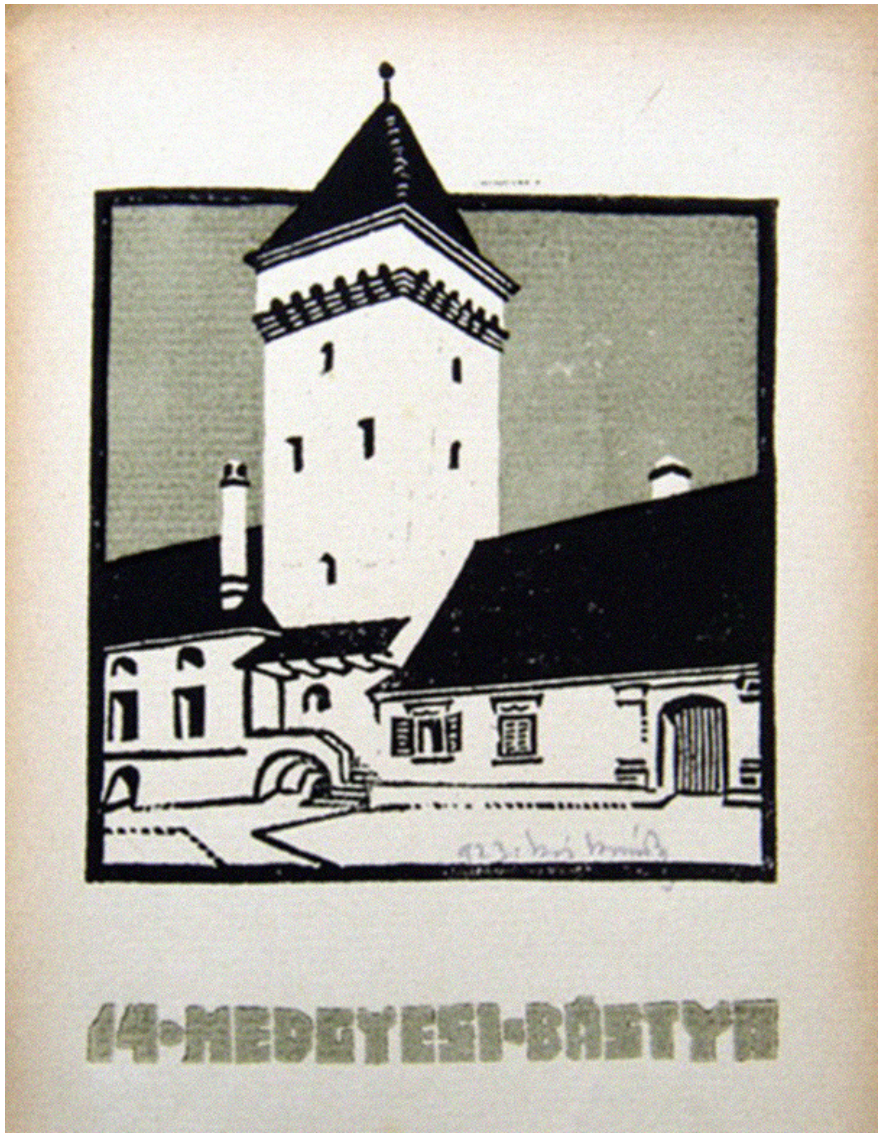


**Figure 24:** Károly Kós, 'Medges Bastion' illustration to *Erdély kövei* [The Stones of Transylvania], Linocut, 1923.
Source: author's photo.

## Conclusion

This article has indicated some of the ways in which two leading architect-designers responded to the changed political and cultural environment at the end of the First World War. By its very nature, design is a social activity, in that it requires the participation of the designer, the manufacturer or builder, the client, and a range of other related actors. In that context, the work of the architect-designer is often affected directly by changes in the economic and political climate. This is certainly true of the two figures discussed above. Kós, the most successful Hungarian architect of his generation in the years leading up to the First World War, witnessed

the disintegration of the economic and political base that supported his early career. Upholding the reformist ideals of Ruskin, Morris and Ashbee, in which the architect-designer is expected to assume an almost priestly role, he could not renounce the moral responsibilities as custodian of the cultural identity of the much-diminished postwar Hungarian community in Transylvania.

Whatever his innate talent as an architect-designer, Kós's early success was dependent on the considerable political and economic resources, and the prevailing cultural climate, of Greater Hungary. This enabled him to develop a programme of architectural reform based on the revival of vernacular design and craft as part of a nation-building project. Once the scaffolding of his earlier career had been removed and his beleaguered community was exposed to new political realities, Kós could not repudiate his earlier values, but instead redoubled his commitment to the principles that had informed his earlier work, even at the expense of his architectural career. By contrast, Kozma, who had come to maturity in the same reformist environment of pre-War Budapest, responded to the changed cultural landscape by confirming his commitment to the new and commercial manner of the Neo-Baroque, for which he became a standard bearer throughout the 1920s.

Beyond recounting the contrasted careers of these two figures, however, this article also raises certain questions about the design culture of the 1920s and the ways in which it has been interpreted. In blunt terms, it asks: what is the nature and status of the Neo-Baroque in Central Europe, and why has it been marginalised or excluded from most histories of design? The first problem is the apparent lack of any larger theoretical or moral position in the Hungarian Neo-Baroque. The 1920s was the great period of modernist discourse, but Kozma and most of his supporters rarely felt motivated to justify their line of work beyond their recognition of its internal coherence and broader appeal to the market. The Neo-Baroque did not come armed with any higher moral or social theory in its arsenal.

A more obvious problem has been the position of this historicist style in the grand narratives of twentieth century design. The Neo-Baroque cannot easily be accommodated within the model of teleological development first advocated in Nikolaus Pevsner's classic *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, which traced a singular line of descent from William Morris to Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus.[61] One might have expected this narrative to have fallen away somewhat after more than 50 years during which the modernist reading of history has been repeatedly challenged, but the values of essentialism, formalism, internationalism, and moral seriousness – what the Kozma scholar Eva Kiss describes as 'the puritan thirst of the twentieth century' – are still taken to be defining characteristics of significant design developments.[62] Kozma's emphasis on the decorative and the playful, or on qualities like irony and wit seem more suited to a postmodern sensibility, but this has not carved out a space for the Neo-Baroque in most synthetic histories of design.[63]

61) Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, London: Faber, 1936, and several later editions.

62) Eva Kiss, 'Népművészet és dekorativitás: A fiatal Kozma Lajos tulipános tervei' [Folk art and decorativeness: Tulip designs by the young Lajos Kozma], *Magyar Iparművészet*, 17:7, 2018, 23.

63) The term 'Neo-Baroque' has gained currency in film and literary studies, particularly in relation to the visual culture forms of the 1980s that display 'a loss of entirety, totality, and system in favor of instability, polydimensionality, and change.' See Omar Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times*, Princeton NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1992, xii. In the same context it is taken to mean 'Postmodernism.'

A further problem arises from the very words used throughout the literature to describe the Neo-Baroque: 'decorative', 'playful', 'ironic', 'entertaining'. These are all gendered terms with feminine connotations. In a complement to the modernist argument, they are qualities or attributes that are widely felt to have less substance than the more earnest movements promoting function and morality in design. Kozma-Baroque is an unashamedly light-hearted, witty and playful manner whose originality lies in the revitalisation of a pre-existing historic repertoire, often undermining its more pompous, aristocratic origins in favour of a humorous play of colour and scale that appeals to the educated, middle class consumer. This serves to remind us of the extent to which questions of historical importance are still shaped by traditional assumptions prioritising a combination of modernist, masculine and utilitarian concerns.

A different set of problems arises when one asks whether the Neo-Baroque might be interpreted as a regional expression of 'Art Deco'? From the examples cited above, it should be clear that the Neo-Baroque was a rich and complex movement that, while enjoying some degree of breadth across Central and Eastern Europe, also had specific iterations and meanings in separate countries. The 'Cubist Baroque' that would come to dominate in Czechoslovakia is quite different from the Kozma-Baroque of Hungary, although they share many features in terms of their decorative vocabulary, function and the ways in which furniture was deployed in the domestic interior. Since it appeared in mature form by 1920, and simultaneously in several countries, it seems misleading and possibly anachronistic to fold the entire movement into a broad stylistic label like 'Art Deco.'

Finally, can the Neo-Baroque be seen as the expression of a 'decadent' and 'misguided' society, as Gyula Szekfű proposed with regard to the early Horthy era in Hungary? This raises a major methodological question: to what extent can the visual arts be taken as an index of society, and therefore a manifestation of the health or otherwise of a particular culture. This linking of social morality with aesthetics has a long history but it seems to be a conceptual analogy that owes more to speculative philosophizing than the practice of cultural history.[64] As such, it remains a shadowy assumption that can be invoked when convenient rather than a means of interpreting the design and material culture of any period or society. In 1934, when Szekfű coined the term 'Neo-Baroque society,' there was more to play for, and the concept played a useful role in his critique of modern Hungarian politics. As such, *Three Generations* is an important primary source but to take it at face value is merely to repeat Szekfű's prejudices and re-join his conservative attack on modernity. There is, however, a nagging sensation that Szekfű may have put his finger on something when he identified an underlying hypocrisy in Hungarian society under Admiral Horthy, or at least a failure to reconcile certain contradictions: the re-emergence of an aristocracy that had lost any true meaning; the heightened role of a Catholic Church that lacked moral leadership; the continued belief in the re-establishment of Greater Hungary in the face of a realigned map of Central Europe. Might there be something here to explain the taste for a style in domestic interior design that offered a playful reinterpretation of history for a cynical middle class who, while recognising the contradictions, chose to support the regime which assured their continuing prosperity?

64) The key figure is Lord Shaftesbury whose *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) became a touchstone for a discourse carried on by Baumgarten, Hume, Kant, Burke and many others.

There can be no question about the economic, political and social catastrophe that post-Trianon Hungary experienced – possibly the most turbulent and dramatic phase in its history. In view of that, there is more to be said about the effect of these experiences, particularly in Budapest but throughout the country. Furthermore, this should be developed to consider the broader cultural values that were instituted in the period of stability under Horthy in the 1920s and 30s. That is a major project that cannot be undertaken here. Instead, it seems safer to make the more modest claim that 'Kozma-Baroque' provided sufficient support and validation to an embattled society for which the grand claims of the Transylvanian vernacular with its sense of ethnic destiny were no longer valid or meaningful. A full analysis of the history and meaning of the Neo-Baroque, however, remains to be written.

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# Karel Čapek's Graphic Britain: A study of the visual intermodernism of Čapek's *Letters from England*

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## Abstract

Best known as a science-fiction writer, Karel Čapek's drawings from his 1924 tour of Great Britain are here analysed in terms of what is categorised as 'intermodernism.' As an integral part of the travelogue he published in English as ***Letters from England***, they are seen as coordinates for navigating identity, detailing, through their construction and composition of lines, a subtle and perceptive understanding of difference and unity. That they are biographical as well as ostensibly documentary is conveyed through exploring the development of their visual language and its blending of modernist and historic conventions. Simultaneously, their assessment of society and nature is revealed as a nuanced explication of community and place. Čapek's visual journey beyond the country of his birth is evaluated in terms of the meanings to be found in the acute, quirky and ironic nature of his drawings. Ultimately, the distinctions in form, seeing and understanding are revealed in terms of Čapek's non-canonical, synthetic and humanist intermodernism.

## Keywords

Karel Čapek; Travel literature; intermodernism; England; Scotland; London; Liverpool; Glasgow

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# Karel Čapek's Graphic Britain: A study of the visual intermodernism of Čapek's *Letters from England*

**Jeremy Howard**

## Introduction

Published in English, first through serialisation in the *Manchester Guardian* between 20 September and 8 November 1924 and then in book form in March 1925, Karel Čapek's collected *Letters from England* comprise the first of four self-illustrated travelogues that appeared in the 1920s and 1930s.[1] With his inimitable whimsical, impressionistic and individual style, Čapek's visual and literary tour of Britain set out the stall for what he would subsequently do with his visits to Spain, the Netherlands and Scandinavia.[2] As such, it introduced his quirky, humorous yet serious study of culture and customs that we might best describe as 'intermodernist.' The term comes from the work of Kristin Bleumel, who has described it and the device of intermodernism thus:

> … intermodernism deconstructs *multiple* binaries, not just the highbrow / lowbrow opposition. So while intermodernism might initially function as modernism's other in academic practice, it has the *potential* to be the concept or space that inserts itself between modernism and its many structuring oppositions, reshaping the ways we think about relations between elite and common, experimental and popular, urban and rural, masculine and feminine, abstract and realistic, colonial and colonised.'[3]

Bleumel has gone on to define her term as a retroactive invention of an interdisciplinary category applicable to a certain modern 'kind' or 'movement' of creative work produced between 1920 and 1950 that is at once aesthetic, institutional (materialist) and ideological. As such it is both a 'critical compass' and an 'analytical tool' designed as a revisionary, eccentric and radical interjection in the field of cultural studies.[4]

1) The book appeared as Karel Čapek, *Letters from England*, translated by Paul Selver, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925. It was presaged by the first Czech edition of his *Letters from Italy*, i.e. *Italské listy*, Prague: Aventinum, 1923. However, this appeared without images, and when an English translation was eventually published it only included six highly conventional drawings of well-known sites by Richard Howard Penton, *Letters from Italy*, London: Besant & Co., 1929. The self-illustrated travelogues were posthumously followed by his *Letters from Home* (see below).

2) The first editions of the other three 'foreign' travelogues were published as follows: *Letters from Spain*, translated by Paul Selver, London: Geoffrey Blas, 1931, after the Czech edition *Výlet do Španěl*, Prague: Aventinum, 1930; *Letters from Holland*, translated by Paul Selver, London: Faber and Faber, 1933, after *Obrázky z Holandska*, Prague: Aventinum, 1932; and *Travels in the North*, translated by M. and R. Weatherall, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1939, after *Cesta na sever*, Prague: Fr. Borový, 1936.

3) Kristin Bleumel, 'Introduction', in Kristin Bleumel ed., *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, 4.

4) Ibid. 4–5.

Playing with the attributes of avant-garde formalism and conventional visual illusionism, Čapek navigated a non-canonical artistic middle path through British society. An essential ingredient of this was his eccentric, interwoven exploration of history and modernity, town and country, tradition and innovation. Hence Čapek articulated vital interlocking facets of art, architecture and design, both contemporary and historic, revealing through his graphic language how they coalesce into what he conceives as relational material culture. In so doing he extrapolated, exaggerated and distorted in order to convey truths and aspects with a freedom and insight of an outsider from a foreign culture little known to those he observed. His lack of personal investment in British society and his being informed by a continental, indeed Czech, humanitarian background resulted in a rare form of behavourist encapsulation of British social relations. This involved visual analysis of both the seemingly irrational and natural performance of those relations as witnessed in material culture. As such, through the drawings of *Letters from England*, Čapek creatively enquired into social process and agency, his interpretation being conditioned by an attempt to both locate and contextualise the modes he observes. Ultimately, this attempt dovetailed with his vocation, as close confidant and political ally of President Tomáš Masaryk, to simultaneously configure and articulate, for both international and local community consumption, a sense of correlated place and identity for newly founded, empire-ridden, Czechoslovakia.[5]

Karel Čapek (1890–1938) was a pioneer. His intellectual and artistic prowess was amply illustrated through his interwar literary output when he emerged as one of Czechoslovakia's most insightful and incisive commentators on, for instance, socio-political trends, human folly and questions of aesthetics. Often exploiting modernist idioms of constructive deconstruction, his ability to both invent with high craft yet simultaneously speak with a language marked by a common touch made him stand out among his contemporaries. He joined the most radical new Czech artists association *Skupina* (The Group), along with his painter-writer brother Josef, when it was formed in 1911 and, like his brother, was able to build upon its advocacy of Cubist principles. But, also like his brother, Čapek was not to be constrained by the *Skupina* leadership's calls for Cubist orthodoxy and left a year later to go his own experimental way. In the wake of the First World War, that path included both Čapek brothers heading the *Tvrdošíjní* (Stubborn Ones) group, whose stylistic diversity has been critically intimated by conflated categories, such as 'conscious primitivism,' 'expressionist naturalism' and 'crystal cubism.'[6] In *Letters from England* Čapek followed suit, with his version of crystalline modernism, derived as it is from his experience of 'Gothic' crystals in London's Natural History Museum, being axial. Since our principal concern is Čapek's visualised study of a cultural patchwork, we read his British drawings as a major counterpart to his literary probing of a distinct-yet-common identity. With this in mind this article examines his sketches in terms of their combination of elements of figuration and abstraction, this conveying awareness of diverse modernist trends, opposition to ideological

5) Čapek's recounting of Masaryk's autobiography (initially *K. Č. Hovory s T. G. Masarykem*, Prague: Čin, 1929–1935) was published in multiple editions and translated into at least nine languages. It was first published in English as Karel Čapek, *President Masaryk tells his Story,* London: George Allen & Unwin, 1934.

6) Concerning *Skupina* and *Tvrdošíjní* as well as the wider Czech modernist context, see, for example, Marie Rakušanová, 'Prague-Brno: Expressionism in Context,' in Isabel Wünsche, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Expressionism in a transnational context,* New York: Routledge, 2018, 33–55.

and aesthetic absolutism, and also an abiding, pedagogic, concern for a readily learnable lexicon of life.

This then is Čapek's intermodernism. While comprising his most signficant self-illustrated work, *Letters from England,* along with his subsequent travelogues, can be viewed alongside two others in his oeuvre for which he creates narrative images. One of these, *Dashenka, Or the Life of a Puppy* (1933), is a children's story with a mix of doggy cartoons and photographs whose simple tales of canine learning simultaneously, and eloquently, convey Čapek's concern with human development.[7] The other, *Pictures from Home* (1954), is a posthumously published collection of his columns focused on Bohemia (including a section on Prague) and Slovakia.[8] As such, it is this second book that provides the closest parallel to the visual interpretations of cultural dynamics found in *Letters from England*. That said, it contains just thirty images, most of these relating to fishing, mountain holidaying and Slovak country life. Nevertheless, it also includes a sketch borrowed from the British travelogue, which accompanies a written reference to his earlier observation of British ways of being.

Čapek's representation of British environments, from the busy, assertive, restrictive and converging diagonals of metropolises to his more visually illusionistic and expansive treatment of country life, is particularly significant for our reading. This article analyses his approach to habitation and space, with its relish of things local, and of harmonised relations between man and nature (often denied in his British experience), in terms of his preferred combinations of curved and straight lines, which convey his deep desire for peaceful community based on continuity between present and past. In fact, his visual criticism of the British metropolis and relative appreciation of the British vernacular (especially as found in provincial Scotland) relates to the critique of technology, industrial progress and urban life that was prevalent in his anti-authoritarian, dystopian, fictional writing. It is the latter for which he is well known, both in his homeland and internationally, whether through the ultimately human-destroying, robot-controlled world of his play *R.U.R.* (1920), for example, or the satricial indictment of socially divisive and militaristic European and USA politics that was his 1936 science-fiction novel *War with the Newts*.

This advocacy of the local can be compared with Čapek's quest for signs of early human presence and explored alongside his visual valuing of the small within the larger whole. Its subtext is his contrasting antipathy to the contemporary hegemonic insensitivity to humane order that wreaks ugliness and disrespect. Through analysis of how he visualises his observations of Britain we encounter distinct modes of active form that starkly present his perception of a dichotomy between uplifting and corrupted being. Ultimately, then, this article suggests that Čapek's graphic British travelogue art, with its creative capture of a multiplicity of human design, merits attention as a key component of what I conceive as his intermodernism. If we approach it in the light of Bleumel's conception of intermodernism we thus see Čapek's visual language as possessing three bridging and salient features. It is: 1) cultural, and in this respect of 'the people' rather than the aristocracy or the establishment; 2) political, with an eccentric humane radicalism; and 3) artistic, possessing a commitment

7) Translated into English by M. and R. Weatherall, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1933.

8) Karel Čapek, *Obrázky z domova*, ed. Miroslav Halik, Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1954. To the best of my knowledge there remains no English translation.

to being non-canonical, and mostly enunciated through the 'mass' genre of sketch, caricature and anecdote. For all their humour, parody, unreliability and selectivity, his images become navigational coordinates of social interaction replete with a distinctly personal dimension. As such they are by no means simple illustrations of literary text. This is confirmed by the fact that, for the most part, he created the images before writing the text.

The only scholarly work I am aware of that has undertaken a truly deep analysis of the visual aspect of Čapek's travelogues is Mirna Šolić's *In Search of a Shared Expression: Karel Čapek's Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography of Europe.*[9] Her critically astute and well-informed reading of Čapek's approach to imagery and, with it, his creative 'intermedial narrative,' is highly enlightening. Her third chapter, 'Visual Travels,' explores the sense of the 'iconotext' that permeates the travelogues such that he creates a deliberately unreliable, subjective travel account in opposition to contemporary tourist guidebooks. That Čapek fictionalises the travel experience through his use of very selective and caricatural imagery is probed by Šolić so as to uncover his 'imaginative geographical' stance on folklore, the nature of Europe and, indeed, a higher supernatural realm. In the course of so doing, she analyses his aesthetic position with close regard to that of his brother Josef and other Czech modernists, as well as a range of other practitioners and theorists.

For all her erudite explication, Šolić's study is limited when it comes to evincing her argument from the images themselves. The title of her book gives away where her priorities lie, namely, in the literary aspects of Čapek's work. Furthermore, where she does explore Čapek's visual art, she does so mainly by means of a quick survey in order to confirm what she has discerned as a collective quality of, for instance, noise, the sedentary, movement or primitivism. Thus her study essentially reveals positions, context and formal traits that are not the focus of my enquiry. This being the case, there is more than ample scope for the interpretation offered here, which, as readers of both texts should comprehend, is distinctly complementary to that of Šolić. In this article, form and design are prioritised both for the extrication of meaning, as well as in their own right.

## Čapek's graphic Britain: Perspectives crystallise

Arriving on 28 May 1924, Čapek spent sixty days in Britain that summer. Feted by the recently founded International PEN [Poets, Essayists, Novelists] Club and with introductions provided by his young, then London-based, compatriot, linguist Otakar Vočadlo, he did most of his extensive travelling around Britain with Vočadlo. He was also well-supported by the Scotsman James Bone. He stayed at both men's family homes. The acquaintance with Bone is significant not only because the latter was London editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, where he placed more than half of Čapek's *Letters from England*, replete with drawings, but also due to the fact that he was the brother to the renowned graphic artist Muirhead Bone, whose lithographs of industrial Clydeside bear comparison, as we shall see, with Čapek's image of Glasgow. For reasons unclear at present, and despite the wealth of Čapek drawings reproduced in the *Guard-*

9) Mirna Šolić, *In Search of a Shared Expression: Karel Čapek's Travel Writing and Imaginative Geography of Europe*, Prague: Charles University, 2019.

*ian*, none of the five urban views in *Letters from England* that I consider to be so revealing of his antipathy towards the British metropolis, with its face of ugly 'wilderness,' were included.[10] Nevertheless, at the time, his skill in observing Britain artistically did gain notice in the local press:

> Karel Čapek, the author of the *R.U.R.* and *The Insect Play*, who recently made an exhaustive tour of this country, has another outlet for his originality in pen and ink sketching. His pen was very busy when he was over here, making sketches of buildings and places, and anything out of the way that attracted him, besides caricatures of all sorts of personalities. He saw a lot of Great Britain in a comparatively short time, and returned to Prague with a full portfolio of sketches.[11]

Over its 192 or 149 pages (1924 and 2001 editions respectively), *Letters from England* contains seventy-seven (1924) or seventy-six (2001) Čapek drawings, of which a small selection, based on the principles outlined in the introduction, is analysed here.

## London lines

Čapek, basically, did not like London. From the outset he railed against its inhumane streets and its traffic. He wrote that his depiction of congestion (29 / 38) (Figure 1**)** did not do justice to the torments wrought by its 'repugnant' travesty of modern civilisation: 'the real thing is even worse, because it roars like a factory' (31 / 37). The *Traffic* image, which is the first image conveying his experience of the British capital, adopts an elevated viewpoint high above the centre of a vast, seemingly never-ending, straight street in the middle of which are crammed lines of vehicles, all apparently stationary. In the wake of the pre-First World War celebration of the dynamic and technological modern city by artists such as Italian Futurists Umberto Boccioni and Gino Severini, Čapek's reductive modernism is distinctly anti-metropolitan.[12] Thus

10) Two translations of Čapek's *Anglické Listy*, Prague: Aventinum, 1924, both entitled *Letters from England*, have been published as single volumes. The first is by Paul Selver (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925), the second by Geoffrey Newsome (London: Continuum, 2001). They differ substantially, Newsome claiming (p. 15) to address the 'shortcomings… disappointing… standard… literal mistakes' of Selver. With regard this first citation, Newsome uses 'wilderness' as opposed to Selver's 'savagery' (from the Czech 'divočina'), pp. 69 and 73 respectively. Comparison between the translations and an early Czech edition (Prague: Borový, 1934) in terms of image placement reveals Newsome adhering relatively closely to the Czech, while Selver takes certain liberties. For a digitised version of the Czech, see: http://kramerius5.nkp.cz/view/uuid:de5e9970-ad99–11e3-b833–005056827e52?page=uuid:b59e9730-c54d-11e3–94ef-5ef3fc9ae867 (accessed 20.04.2020). I have found that a combination of both translations can sometimes be useful hence my citations give page numbers for both sources, with Selver first. The Newsome translation edition pays scant regard to design and quality of reproduction. Indeed, in several instances the images are all but illegible. It squeezes a line of text onto the 'Traffic' image page despite having plenty of room for this on the page opposite. In his eleven page introduction he makes no mention of the images. However, in his 'Translator's Note' he acknowledges consciousness of them, if not their significance, by stating 'I… have repositioned his drawings so that they bear a more direct relation to the text' (p. 16).

11) 'Karel Capek,' *Nottingham Evening Post*, 23 September 1924. My own introduction to Čapek came fifty years later when, perhaps appropriately, I played the role of the Blind Ant in the Čapek brothers' *Insect Play* at school.

12) In this he may be compared with some of the British Vorticists, not least C.R.W. Nevinson, whose *A Dawn, 1914* (c. 1915), was painted (and printed), in London, in opposition to the dehumanisations of war. Its stream-like ranks of soldiers with bayonetted rifles, represented from a centralised elevated viewpoint, are crammed between two rows of building with, as in the Čapek, a sense of congested confinement devoid of signs of relief.

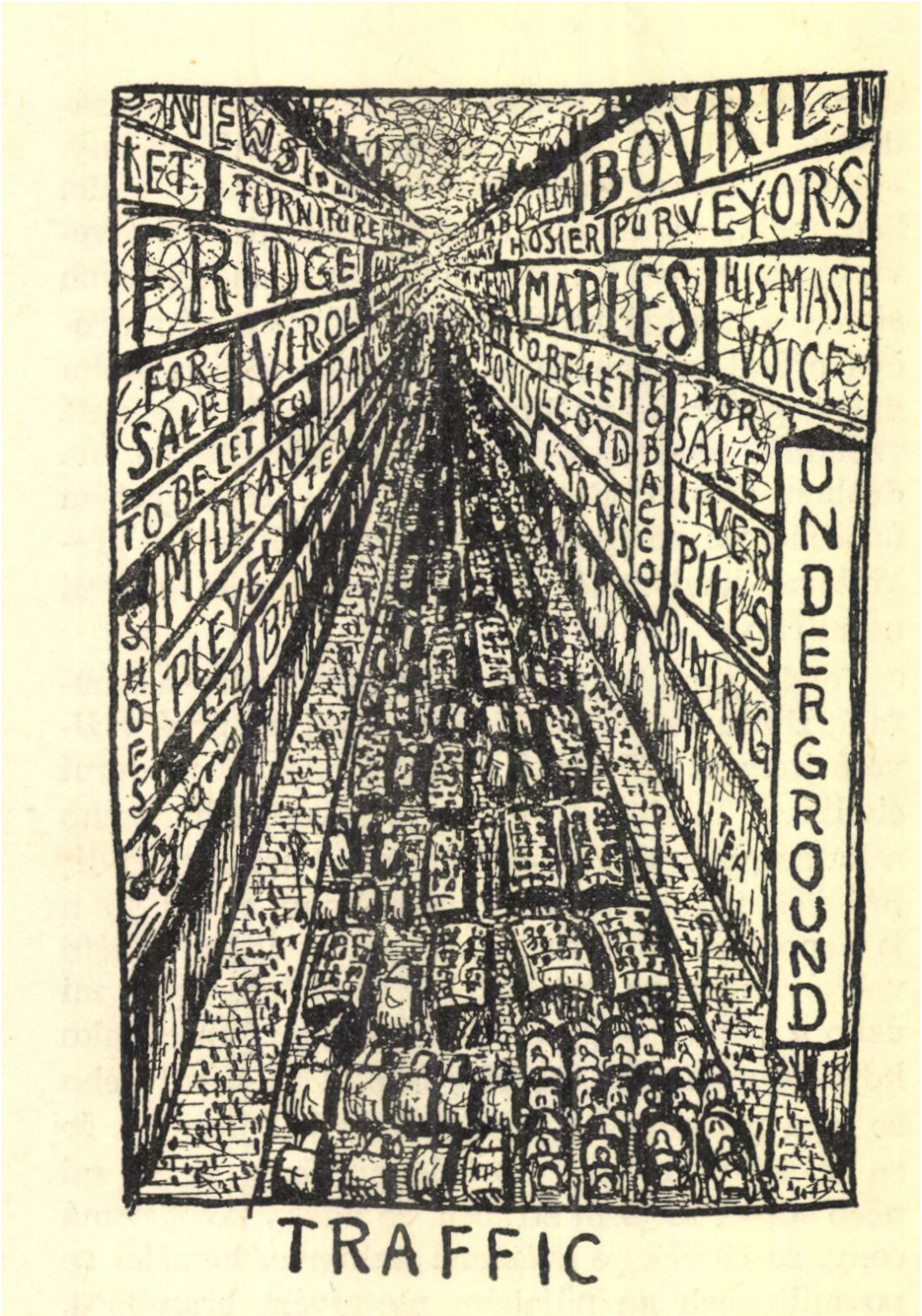


**Figure 1:** Karel Čapek, *Traffic*.
From *Letters from England*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 31.

he turns a long straight street from London's commercial hub into an exercise in exaggerated single-point perspective where serried ranks of parallel lines converge at the infinitely distant vanishing point. The lines appear to be forcefully sucked in or belched out from that high, central point. As a result, we are presented with radiant lines of Gothic design given a secular dystopianism which contrasts with the light-shedding diagonals of Čapek's contemporary Lyonel Feininger, not least his 'Gothic cathedral' woodcut for the cover of the Bauhaus's programme (1919) (Figure 2).

Čapek's parallel lines are made all the more disturbing by their being filled with light squiggles, script and numerous tiny vertical dashes that represent humans. The squiggles are intensified, as if signifying smog, in the small inverted triangle of sky between the black serrations that represent chimneys. The opposing triangle to this is an elongated vertical wedge containing the squashed ranks of cars and buses. Divided by a central vertical axis, those on its left face away from the viewer, while those on its right appear frontally, in keeping with Britain's left side driving, yet all appear static and devoid of individuality.

Above the narrow angles of the ground-floors of the seemingly windowless tall buildings Čapek plays with rampant signboard culture. Emphasising what he discerned to be a distinct lack of aesthetic concern in street advertisement he shows repeated 'TO BE LET' and 'FOR SALE' signs squeezed in amongst other symbols of modern British, capitalist, living. This capitalist scream is a patchwork screen obliterating architecture, and at times it is generic, at times specific, i.e. Fridge, Furniture, Hosier, News, Shoes, Liver Pills, Dining, Tobacco, Underground; and Lyons [tea], Virol [health foods], Midland Bank, Lloyd [financial], Pleyel [pianos], Shoes, Bovril [beef extract paste], Abdulla [cigarettes], Maples [furniture], His Master's Voice [gramophone records], Bovis [builder].[13] With the exception of one 'Lyons' sign, whose cursive writing accords with that of contemporary Maison Lyons signage and package, all appear in upper-case letters, the vast majority of which are sans-serif. Thus, Čapek compiles a composite, negative, assemblage of Oxford Street, Tottenham Court Road and neighbouring West End thoroughfares. By placing 'UNDERGROUND' as an upward-pointing vertical rectangle and as the foremost of all the signage, it acts as a stop, reinforcing Čapek's contention that:

> As such a congestion arises quite often, many people reflect… on what it will be like in twenty years… It has not yet been decided whether they are to walk on the roofs or under the earth; the only certain thing is that it cannot be done on the earth – which is a remarkable achievement of modern civilization (31 / 37).

Significantly, a review in *The Times* noted that these words contain 'only a shadow of the irony with which his largest drawing, *Traffic,* is invested.'[14] This critical appreciation of the image extended to his visual art *per se,* its nuanced observation being lauded over and above that of his written text:

13) Maples furniture store was at 141–150 Tottenham Court Road; His Master's Voice music record shop was at 363 Oxford Street.

14) Anon. 'England and the English. Some impressions of Karel Capek,' *The Times,* 13 March 1925, 10.

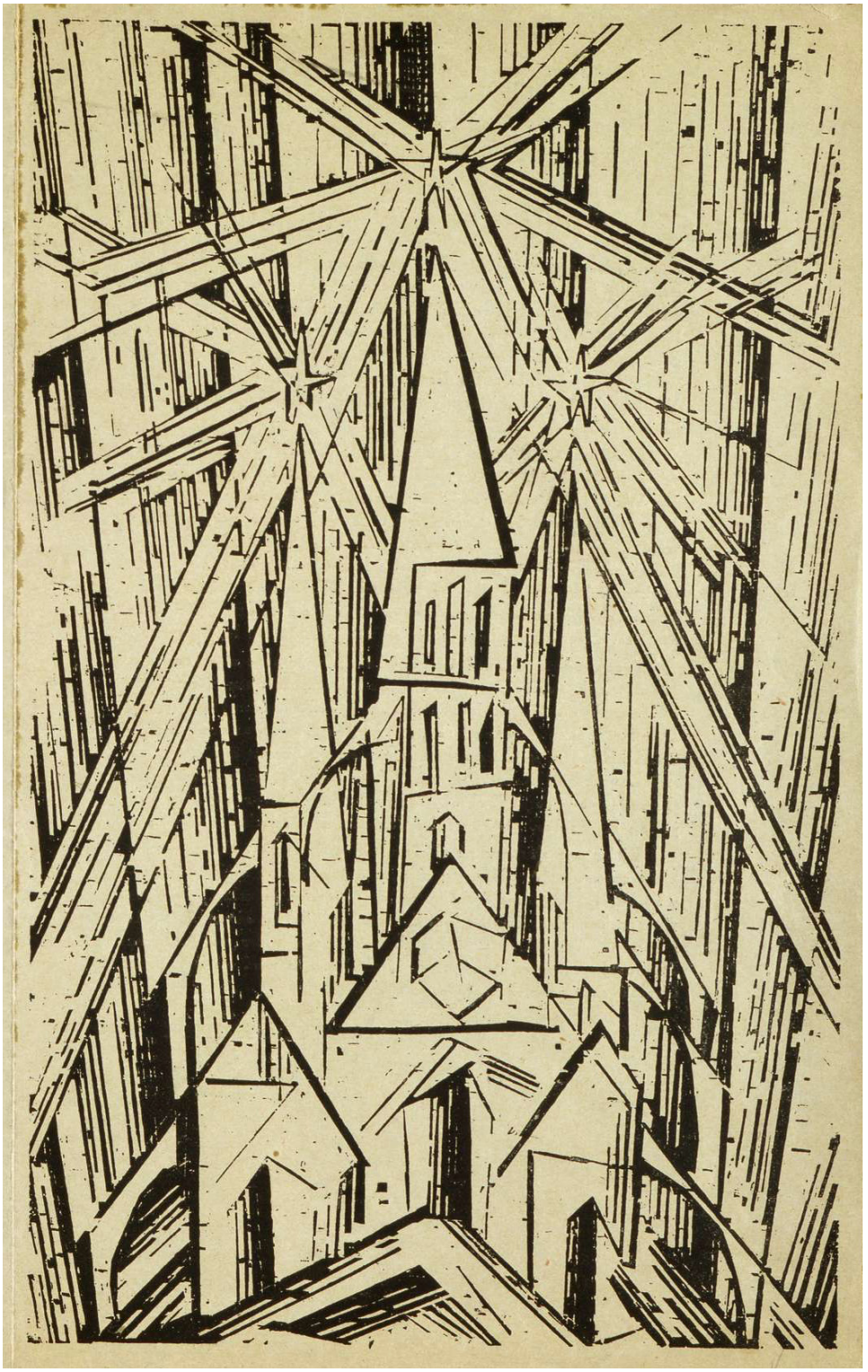

**Figure 2:** Lionel Feininger, *Cathedral*, Frontispiece to the Bauhaus Manifesto, Weimar, 1919.

> … if Mr. Capek's written word is sometimes of light import, the delightful illustrations with which his book is embellished are of the most serious and illuminating character. He is an artist of delicate wit and infinite suggestiveness… His drawings… convey with extraordinary economy a complete idea of his regard for us.[15]

To this may be added the conclusion of *The Observer*'s review, which inadvertently discerned a trait of his most acerbic images with their elevated viewpoints: 'The book is always very rapid – it is, indeed, England seen from an aeroplane. It has the most delicious drawings by the author…'[16] *Traffic* sharply epitomises the dual fractal and collective nature of those drawings, thereby serving as a paradigmatic introduction for Čapek's intermodernist approach.

## Glasgow lines

Glasgow fares little better than London under Čapek's pen and ink. For, again, he provides a visual interpretation from an elevated viewpoint looking down a straight street confined between blocks of buildings covered with bland, upper-case advertising (p. 129/110) (Figure 3). The nomenclature of these is still a chaotic mix of the general and the particular, though now there is a distinct sense of the downmarket locality. Thus, the particular is essentially a set of Scottish names, some of them fragmented, others indecipherable (e.g. McMarr, Mc Gi, McM…, Taylor, MacInnes, McP, McOwl, Smith), while the general is indicative of what Čapek described as the 'crude and grimy and sticky, noisy, reeking and oppressive, disorderly and cruel' Glasgow (129/110) that he quickly sought to escape, e.g. Hotel, Wholesale, Shipping, Dentures, Dresses, Agent, Bank, Hairdresser, Toilet Saloon, Diary, Bar, Sale, Coal, Agency, Pawnbroker, Tempera[nce?]… Light [?] Manufactory, Tobacco, Ltd.

In contrast to the projecting vertical 'UNDERGROUND' sign of London, here the foremost projecting signage is twofold. On the left, 'TOILET SALOON' is projected horizontally out over the street under a striped diagonal barber's pole with knob. Juxtaposed against this is the horizontal 'PAWNBROKER' sign from which are suspended the symbolic three Lombard spheres. That the barber's pole and pawnshop sign are both the most prominent and most decorated of the morass of signage in the image conveys Čapek's distress at Glasgow's 'life… forsaken by the breath of God' (128/110). That said, and despite there being no sign of an actual human being in the scene, the oppression is not so utter as London's. For while now the street is completely empty, there is also more room here for clear sky, and this, like the signs, is devoid of nervous squiggles. Furthermore, the buildings, for all their taint of insalubrity, imply a certain life beyond, through the inclusion of windows, doors, individualised chimney pots, cornices and a gable end. In addition, the viewpoint is not so high, and the street is curtailed by a dissecting view of the River Clyde replete with iron cranes, gantries, a ship, and tall industrial chimneys. As a result, the composition of Čapek's Glasgow contains less aggressive aerial perspective and less symmetry than his London and may be compared

15) Ibid.

16) Anon., 'As Mr. Capek sees us,' *The Observer*, 15 March 1925, 5.


**Figure 3.** Karel Čapek, *Glasgow*.
From *Letters from England*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 129.

with Muirhead Bone's lithographs of the shipyards, despite lacking their championing of the wartime military industrial effort (e.g. Bone's widely disseminated, Ministry of Information commission, *Shipyard seen from a crane*, 1917) (Figure 4).

## From some Liverpudlian lines to a Bohemian´s crystal

Čapek preferred Liverpool to London and Glasgow, his abandonment of the harsh angles of their ranked, converging parallel lines giving way to a broad view across the River Mersey with its variety of ships and boats bobbing on the water's gentle waves (162/128) (Figure 5). So, while the crammed, industrial port beyond is a 'vast, dirty and noisy' place (164/130), with its frenetic lines representing warehouses, smoking factory chimneys, cranes, masts, funnels and the harbour wall, this scene of 'quantity, confusion and expanse' (163/129) is distant and enveloped by plentiful sky and water. These provide solace as well as scope for the human spirit to 'sail forth' (164/130), to avoid the 'somewhat narrow… horizon' of his landlocked homeland, to find beauty in 'departure and arrival' (163/129) and to 'indulge in thought' (163/129).

The opportunity and ambiguity of Čapek's Liverpudlian vision is worth comparing with the image of creative potential he provides in the wake of his visit to London's Natural

**Figure 4:** Muirhead Bone, *A Shipyard seen from a Big Crane*, c. 1917.
From *The Great War: Britain's Efforts and Ideals*, London, Ministry of Information, 1917.


**Figure 5:** Karel Čapek, *Liverpool*.
From *Letters from England*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 162.

History Museum (43 /47) (Figure 6). For all the move towards abstraction this includes, it also now contains one human figure. In some respects, it is a composite equivalent of the Liverpudlian, Glaswegian and London images. Hence, he gives us another distant view of a built environment, this time surmounted by an out-of-proportion array of crystalline forms and seen past a kneeling, beseeching human figure. The diagonals of the crystals jut forward, up and out assertively and randomly. Projecting into and filling the space above the horizon they dominate that line's row of diminutive buildings. Now, rather than the viewer-threatening horrors of serried, shrieking signboards, Čapek presents us with an orderly arrangement of architectural types, the roofs, spires and towers of which point harmoniously towards the heavens. Reading from left to right, the selection of religious and civic buildings moves from a Gothic church to a minaret. The journey takes us past: a pyramid; terrace of three townhouses with pitched roofs; church with twin towers surmounted by cross-bearing cupolas; a low, vernacular- or austere neo-classical- type house with a single central chimney; a building with quadrangular tower and flat roof that may be a modernist church, town hall or factory; and an open structure reminiscent of a large gate with canopy.

This trans-cultural street from which the giant crystals erupt makes manifest Čapek's theory of crystalline structure as a fount for the forces of nature, and, with that, art. In visualising it he accords with the new wave of 'crystal modernism' that derived from Symbolism and Cubism, and which was to be particularly strongly expressed by Czech artists, designers and architects from Kupka, Zrzavý and Foltýn to Chochol, Gočar, Janák and others. He expressed his crystalline theory, and with it an explanation of his image, in the surrounding pages of the book:

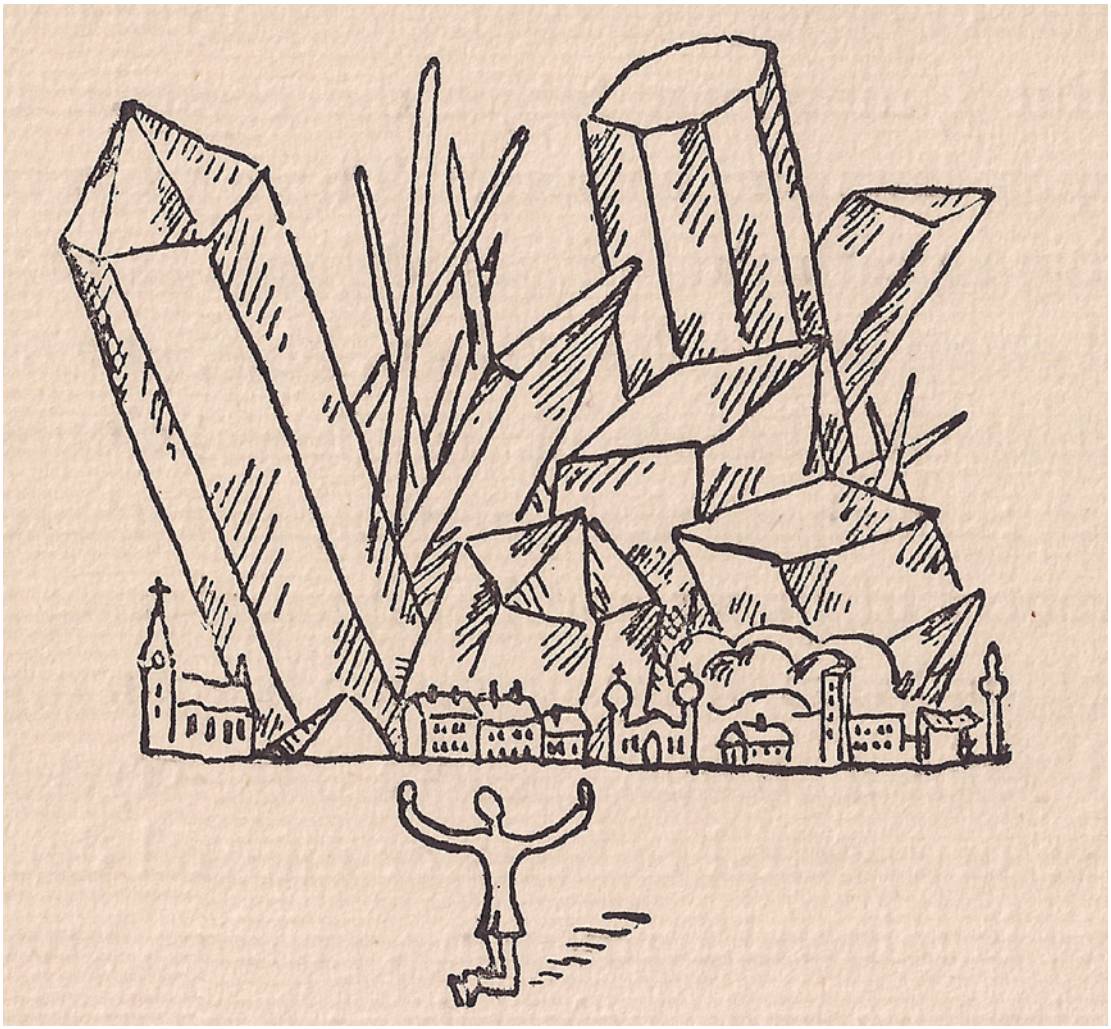

**Figure 6:** Karel Čapek, *Crystal Life*.
From *Letters from England*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 43.

Yes, nature is strange and mighty: and I, an unwearied pilgrim to pictures and statues, must confess that I derived the greatest delight from the conches and crystals in the Natural History Museum... I must not forget the crystals, their shapes, laws and colours. There are crystals as big as cathedral pillars, delicate as mildew and sharp as needles... there is mineral fermenting, melting, growth, architecture and engineering. I vow that a Gothic church is not the most complicated of crystals. Even within us there persists a crystalline power. Egypt crystallised in pyramids and obelisks. Greece in columns. The Gothic in pinnacles and London in cubes of black mud. Countless laws of construction and composition run through matter like secret mathematical lightning flashes. We must be exact, mathematical and geometrical, in order to be equal to nature. Number and fantasy, law and abundance are the feverish forces of nature. Becoming a part of nature does not mean sitting beneath a green tree. No, it means creating crystals and ideas. This means creating laws and forms: penetrating matter with incandescent lightning flashes of divine calculation (41–45/45–48).

This crystalline theory of creativity articulated an aesthetic that is familiar not only from the work of artistic contemporaries such as Feininger, mentioned earlier, but was more generally a topos in Central Europe, as in, for example, Kálman Harsányi's novel *The Crystal Viewers* (*A Kristálynézők*) of 1914, whose cover and frontspiece were designed by the Gödöllő artist Sándor Nagy (Figure 7). Furthermore, both theory and image accord with those of Čapek's fellow Bohemian Wenzel Hablik, evident in his cosmic crystal etchings, such as *Creative Forces* (1909) and paintings such as *Crystal Castle in the Sea* (1914) and *The Path of Genius* (1918) (Figure 8).[17]

## Town, country and human lines

The spread, growth and ordered variety of Čapek's crystal townscape, with its squarish format, provides relief from the compressing, stagnating vertical elongation and one-point perspective of his London street scene. Comparison of the two, with Glasgow and Liverpool in between, suggests a range to his intermodernist worldview that is all the better comprehended by examination of other graphic representations of the built environments and architectural spaces he encounters on his travels around Britain. His treatment of these is encumbered with his ideas concerning the possibility of a positive, peaceful and fair community (and concomitant anxieties about systems of egregious, discriminatory, exploitation). Those images, which employ centralised elevated viewpoints, single-point perspective, symmetry and, often, elongated verticality, might emphasise artificiality and the hierarchical thinking of their buildings' creators, but their formal traits can also show subtle varieties thereby enhancing what Čapek perceived to be their preservation of a humane connection between the traditional and the modern, the rural and the urban. Hence, for example, his 'elevated viewpoint' may well be more appropriately termed 'bird's eye.' That said, the image that most closely follows his aerial view of London *Traffic* is one summarising his appreciation of the stock of London's museums (particularly, no doubt, the British and Victoria and Albert Museums) (47/50) (Figure 9). Now, however, it is the accumulated collections that are ranked along the blind diagonals leading to the vanishing point. Facing one another. the tall, flat, homogenised displays (in which nothing can be seen) squeeze between themselves an endless path. This is populated only by: occasional 'attendants,' hunched over as if sleeping in their upright chairs, their backs turned to the collections; a scampering spaghetti figure (Čapek's caricatural self-portrait); three tiny, still, ant-like figures, isolated in the midst of their giant surrounds. In this case the image is a pointed, reductive, graphic counterpart to a variety of thoughts that are worth citing at length for their biting, witty criticism of systemic British negligence with regard to peoples' art:

> … none too creative herself… [w]ealthy England has amassed the treasures of the world in her collections… I now should assuredly be very learned about various styles and cultures… the development of art… instead… I have rent my garment and… do not know which is more perfect: to be a cave-man or a Briton in the West End… nowhere behind or before us is there a point of rest, of

17) Hablik was a participant in Bruno Taut's *Crystal Chain* chain letter which advocated a form of utopianist, Expressionist architecture (1919–20).

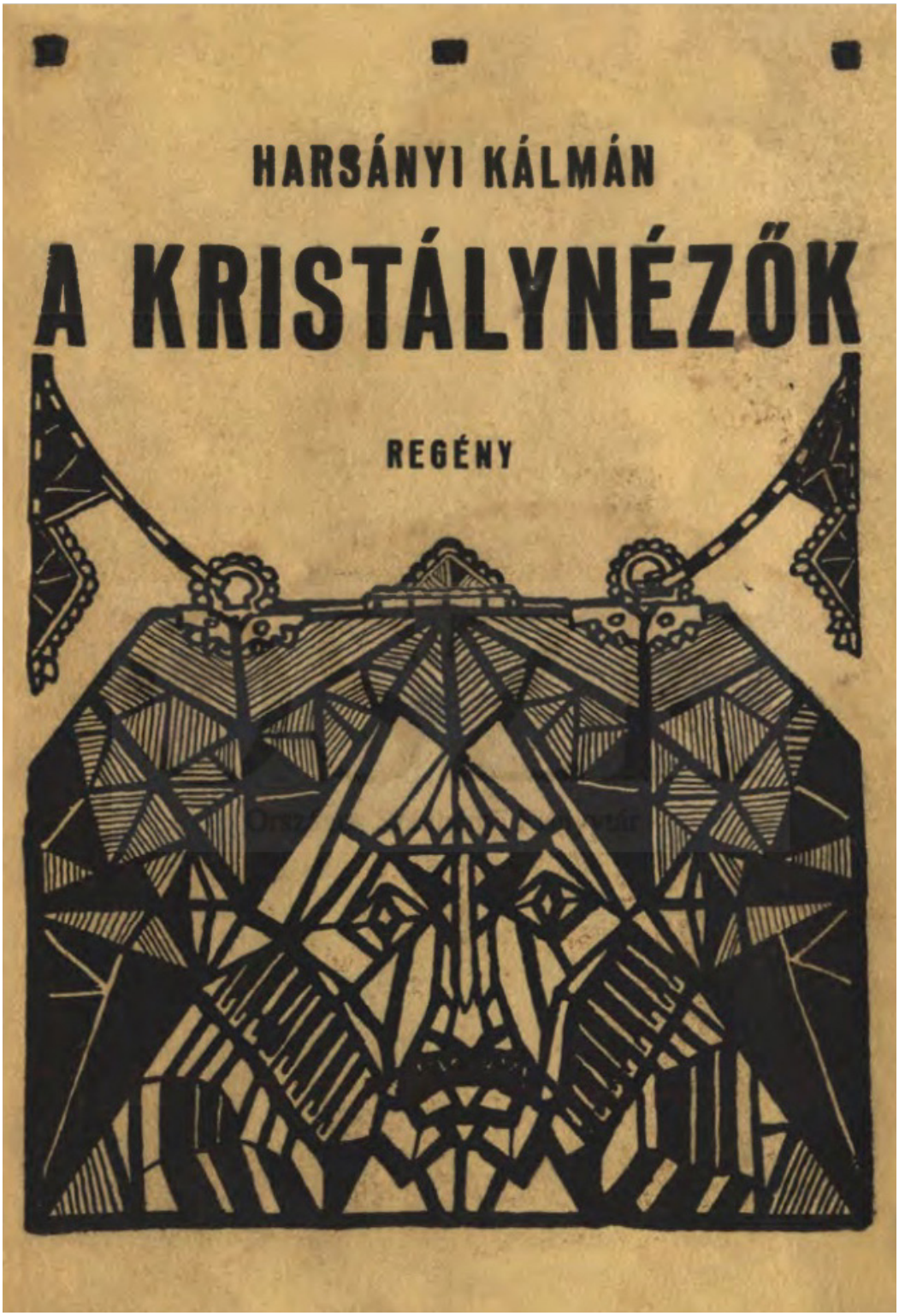


**Figure 7:** Sándor Nagy, Front cover of Kálman Harsányi, *A Kristálynézök* (*Crystal Viewers*), Budapest: Toldi Lajos, 1914.

**Figure 8:** Wenzel Hablik, *The Path of Genius* (1918).

> an ideal, of the completion and perfection of man… it is everywhere and nowhere… there is no 'up' or 'down'… only an unendingly new creativity… the only lesson to be learnt… [is] create like madmen, create unceasingly… leave this accumulation of all the world's treasures and ride for hours and miles on top of a bus from Ealing to East Ham, and Clapham to Bethnal Green… and you will scarcely find any human achievement that will please you with its beauty and luxuriance… Art is what is deposited behind glass in galleries, museums and the rooms of rich people… it does not move about here in the streets… perhaps after all it is simply Protestantism which has drained this country dry artistically (46–50/49–52).

One other image serves to demonstrate the alienation Čapek experienced in establishment Protestant England. This is a view that summarises his experience of the 'English cathedral' (92/84), extrapolated as it is from visits to Ely, Lincoln and York (Figure 10). Here again he adopted the vertical, compressed format we see in *Museum* and *Traffic*. Now, however, the stripping of human and creative spirit is emphasised by the fact that the nave and choir are empty of worshippers and art, their boundaries marked in the foreground by camp 'sacristans' keeping the people out and, in the distance, by an organ. The adjectives he uses to describe this perceived profanation of beautiful, religious space, include: dour, bare, strange, spoilt, absurd (90–91/83–84).

In order to complete our grasp of Čapek's intermodernist perception of British identity, and, indeed, his cry for simple, boundary-crossing, human relations, we should first turn to the 'Reminiscences' that conclude his *Pictures from Home*. Writing in 1938, just before his death and as Czechoslovakia was to become a fulcrum for Fascist-led apocalypse, he summed up his appeal for mutual understanding based on everyday social interaction rather than 'the custom of somehow identifying a country and nation with its politics, regime, government, public opinion or whatever that is called.'[18] For Čapek, 'imagination,' 'memory,' 'something quite casual and mundane,' based on individual direct experience and observation, was primary.[19] Hence he cites chance quotidian encounters and exchanges between travellers and locals as a way of advancing peace and civilised respect. He envisages himself as the archetypal gregarious humanist finding a common language with others through polite, momentary, personal intercourse. In railing against the tide of segregating political forces that are leaving both nations and individuals at odds, and 'all the more and more alone,' he recalls, with warmth, a scene of an old gardener and girl cyclist he noticed by an 'ordinary house in Kent,' which he now misses, and which sums up 'all of England.'[20]

The editor of *Pictures of Home* decided to illustrate Čapek's reminiscences with his picture of a house and garden from *Letters from England* (169 /133) (Figure 11). This had first appeared in *The Manchester Guardian*, where, unlike the book editions, it accompanied his eulogy to Oxbridge life… just before his condemnation of the spirit of English cathedrals. Now the high viewpoint and illusory depth lead the eye past a garden replete with indistinct interacting figures, box forms and bushes to a large cottage whose multiple irregular windows and chimneys argue for picturesque craft and community. He commented: 'I drew, without claim

18) Čapek, *Obrázky z domova*, op. cit., 121. Translation by the author.

19) Ibid.

20) Ibid., 121–122.

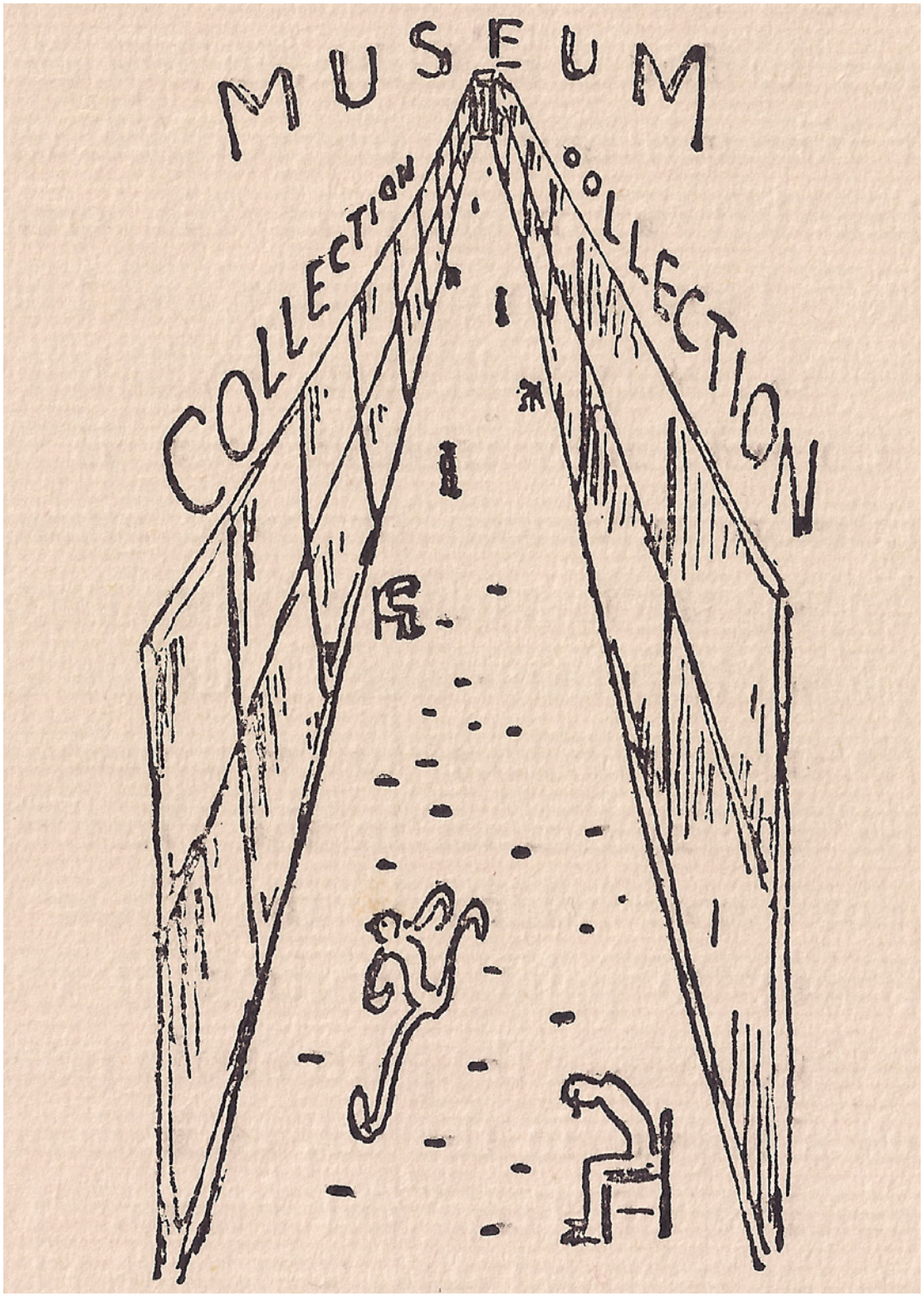


**Figure 9:** Karel Čapek, *Museum*.
From *Letters from England*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 47.

**Figure 10:** Karel Čapek, *Cathedral*.
From *Letters from England*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 92.

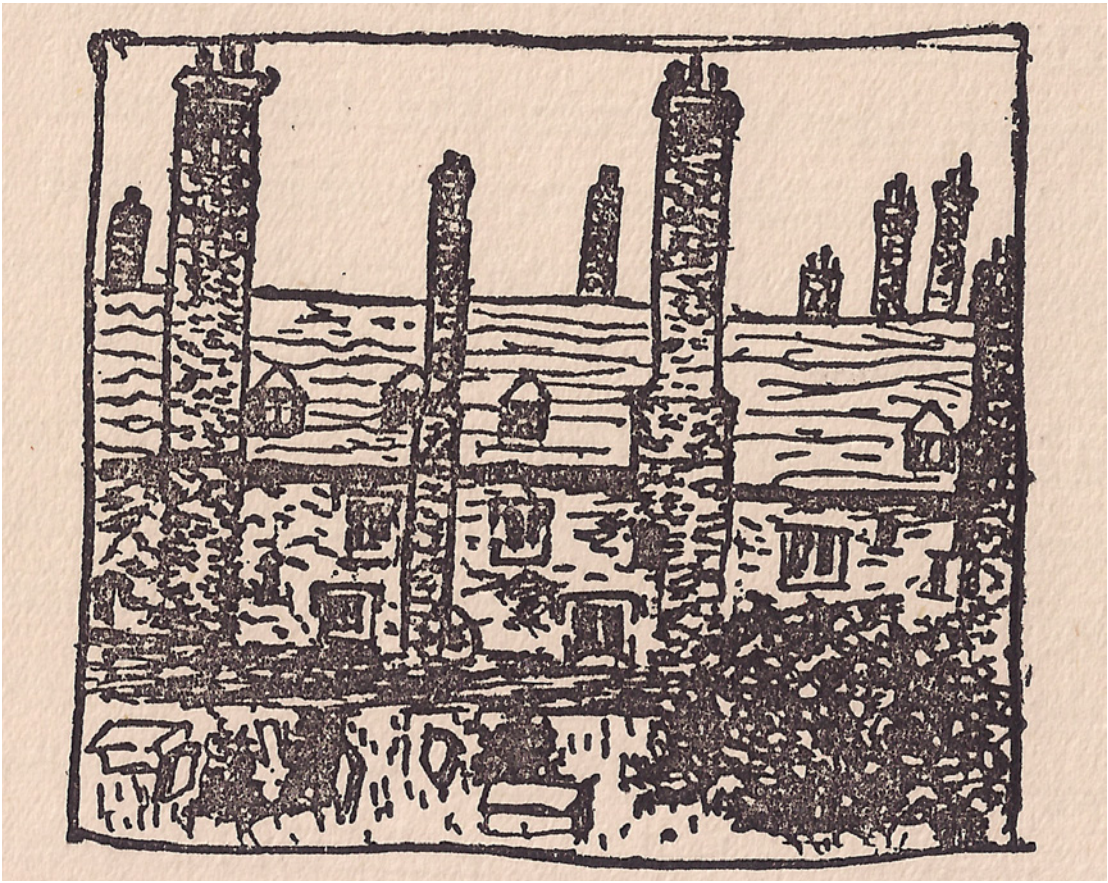

**Figure 11:** Karel Čapek, *Symphony of Chimneys*.
From *Letters from England*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 169.

to recognition, from a window a sort of symphony of chimneys, but that need not have been done in Cambridge; all old English towns possess the same type of chimney.'[21]

Čapek conveyed an abiding empathy for the pastoral in *Letters from England*. And despite the title of his book this is nowhere more apparent than in his images and writing of Scotland. With these he extolled ideas of modern life based on ancient convention and forged over centuries by a combination of migrating and settled folk working with local materials and nature. Suddenly he uses 'beauty,' 'beautiful' and 'sublime' to describe scenes and life that he also sees as 'poverty-stricken,' 'native,' 'terrible and lovely,' but possessing attractive 'strangeness' and, thereby, arousing 'unknown and divine virtues' (119–120/102–104). He sums this up with his image of turf-roofed and ruined cottages set against a backdrop of the Cuillin mountains on the Isle of Skye (Figure 12). Now his high viewpoint and combination of straight and curved lines open up space, giving a sense of organic depth and spread within and across the horizontal composition. The effect is one of harmonic communion of vernacular culture with the landscape. He whimsically locates these alongside, for example, a typecasting of Scots, who, being 'sturdy, with florid faces and powerful necks,' are treated to a caricature of a stolid-headed, 'characteristic' Scottish couple (109/95) (Figure 13).

21) Karel Capek, 'How it feels to be in England,' *The Manchester Guardian*, 27 September 1924, 11.

**Figure 12:** Karel Čapek, *Skye or Terra Hyperborea*.
From *Letters from England*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 119.

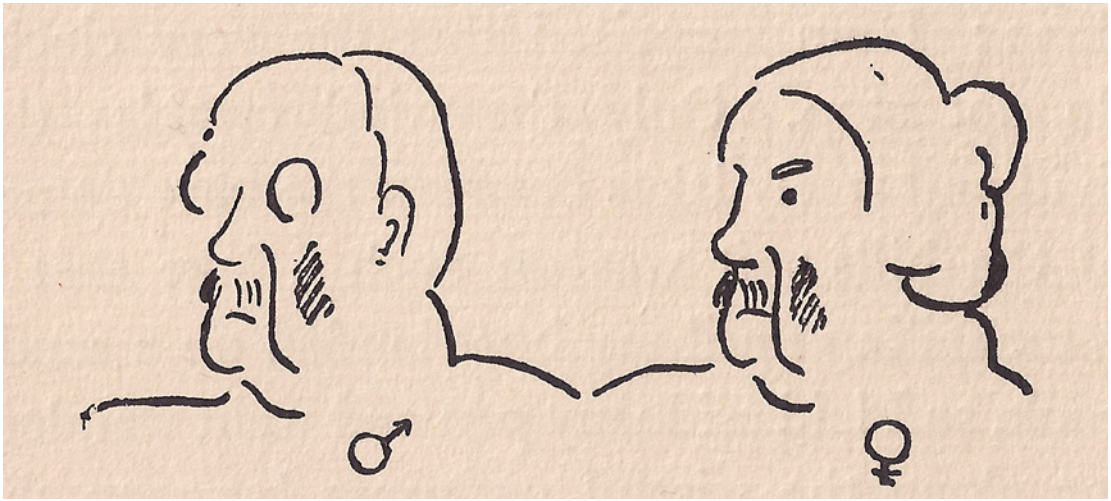

**Figure 13:** Karel Čapek, *A Scots Couple*.
From *Letters from England*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 109.

Čapek's reading of Scottishness through the places and types of his drawings, does have a second English counterpart, this also being the work with which we may complete our enquiry, bringing us full circle back to southeast England. On page 82 / 76 of *Letters from England* he includes a sketch of a large house surrounded by tall trees and a meadow or lawn. He adds the words 'Easton Glebe,' 'Cuckoo' and 'Rabbit,' the latter two with arrows pointing towards them (the cuckoo being invisible in a tree) (Figure 14). Easton Glebe is actually a mid-eighteenth century red-brick house with a pedimented entrance and early-twentieth century semi-circular eastern extension, both of which are visible in Čapek's drawing. It is located

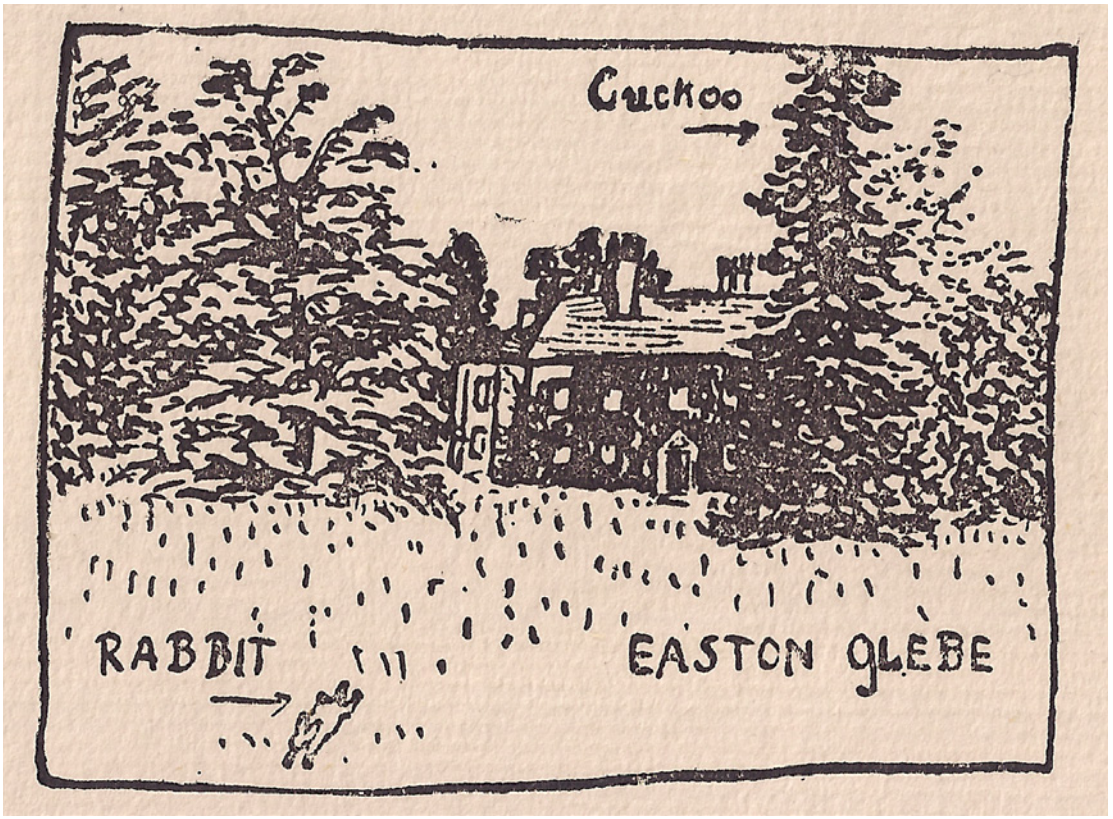


**Figure 14:** Karel Čapek, *Easton Glebe*.
From *Letters from England*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 82.

in rural Essex, five kilometres northwest of the market town Great Dunmow. The pastoral serenity of the scene is enhanced by his low viewpoint, the landscape format and avoidance of vanishing point. His written text is devoid of the jaundiced language found elsewhere, instead according with the lyricism of his view:

> I roamed like a fairy... marvelled at the harmony and perfection of the life with which the Englishman surrounds himself in his home... inside there lives and writes one of the most reasonable men in this world, and outside the cuckoo cuckoos as much as thirty times in succession. Thus, I conclude my tale of the best things in England (83/76–77).

He does not disclose in writing that this 'most reasonable' of men and 'best thing' was H. G. Wells and that it was his country home in Essex, even though the 'Easton Glebe' in the image gives them away. Furthermore, this encounter with the (science fiction) author and man who Čapek regarded as inspirational, is subject to two caricature portraits (public and private faces) much later in the book (180/141) (Figure 15), the appearance of which confirms the familiar terms between the two writers as a result of Čapek's stay there. He sums up Wells's appearance in a way that encapsulates the quest for a balance of integrated tradition, nature and individual creativity that informs his imaginative study of cultural process: 'a massive head, strong,

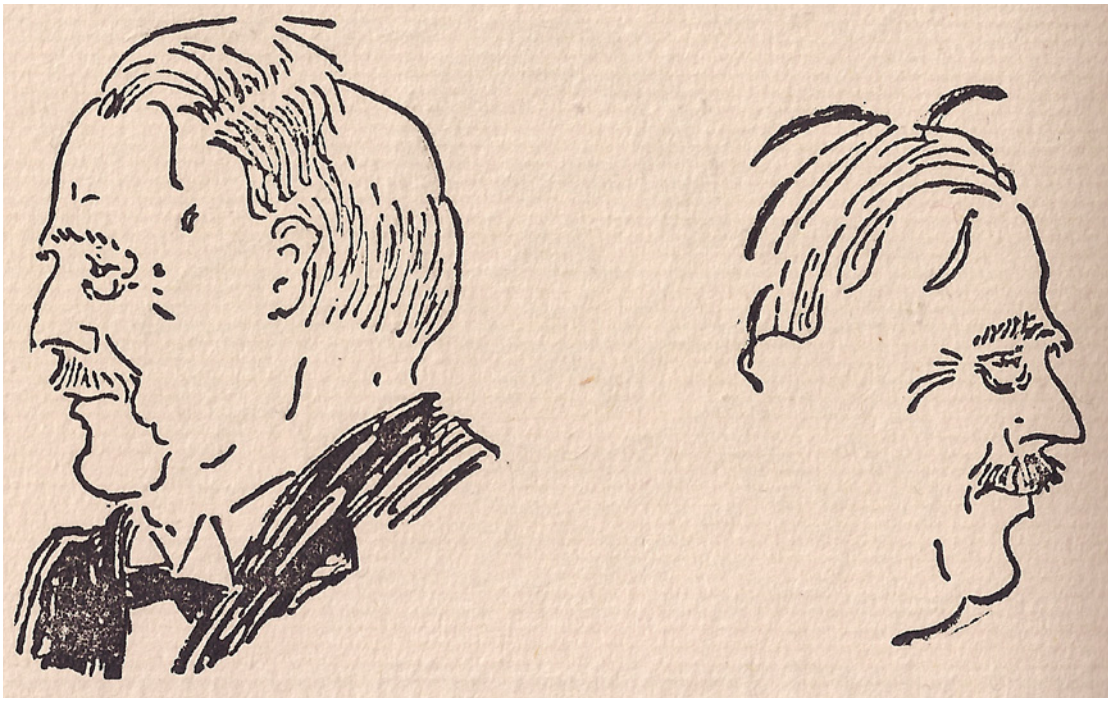

**Figure 15:** Karel Čapek, *H.G. Wells*.
From *Letters from England*. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 180.

ample shoulders, strong and warm hands; he resembles a farmer, a worker, a father and everything in the world' (180/141). One wonders what he would make of Wells's rustic idyll had he lived into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, since it is now directly under the flight path of its neighbour, Stansted Airport. In any case, with 'Easton Glebe' and Wells, Čapek's variegated visual study of the dynamics of social interaction he encounters and perceives with regard Britain can be considered complete.

## Concluding remarks

The social and intellectual sustenance that Čapek found at Easton Glebe is visually articulated through sketches that are reproduced in such a way that they cover barely one-third of a page. This contrasts with *Traffic* which is the only drawing in *Letters from England* afforded a full page (29).[22] While the reasons for such disparity may lie in unknowable editorial decisions, the fact that the image of London is given such prominence belies the overriding anxieties about English modernity that pervade Čapek's book. In any case, what we can glean from the scale, place and slant of his picture lines is that he is articulating what we consider an act of visual intermodernism. This is new for our understanding of Čapek and his oeuvre. While Bleumel's concept of intermodernism is a literary category coined in relation to the mid-twentieth century,

22) The poor reproduction of *Traffic* (p. 38) in the later Newsome edition, as noted above, is accompanied by a line of text.

**Figure 16:** Karel Čapek, *Castle Finlarig Sculpture*.
From *Letters from England*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1925, 108.

her challenge to monolithic concepts of modernism, particularly that of 'high' modernism as a form of experimental self-reflexivity and urban-technological progressivism, is applicable to Čapek. For his travelogue artwork, as reproduced first in *Letters from England*, contains features that accord with Bleumal's notion of the intermodern. His is an eccentric pen-and-ink integrationist perception. And it is one where the slants of his lines are as metaphorical as they are visual. For his is an art that utilises the superficial to probe depth, the momentary to convey the universal. Thus, he derives and conveys truths through skew, in both image and word. This is Čapek's point. These are Čapek's vanishing points.

## Epilogue

Concerning a sculpture at Castle Finlarig, Loch Tay, Scotland (*Letters from England*, p. 107–8 / 93–94) (Fig. 16):

> the castle at Finlarig... there is a chamber with statues there; .... There is a ... statue which is very peculiar, and concerning it the old custodian, evidently following the ancient ballads, stated that it represents a sharp-tongued woman; and because she was beyond endurance, the sheriff decided that all those afflicted should publicly slap her backside, which the statue in question apparently depicts. I differ from the opinion of the local authority, in that this statue seems far older than sheriff, mouthy woman or Castle Finlarig; I think it represents something very ancient, perhaps the suffering of the damned in hell. Anyhow, I made a very careful drawing of it.[23]

23) Newsome (ibid., 175) claims 'there are no statues at Finlarig Castle, the tale of the sharp-tongued woman is not known there'.

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# Lost in Translation? The Idea of the Garden City and its Migration to the Czech Lands, 1900–1938

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## Abstract

The article is the first introduction to the garden city movement in the Czech lands. The dynamic transformations of its trajectory are highlighted by selected upheavals. It spans from its cautious beginnings in the first decade of the twentieth century to its climax in the 1920s, and a singular appropriation of the urban vision by the Czechoslovak government in the 1930s. Encompassing the turbulent era, the way in which the garden city utopia was approached exposes not only implementation of the modern urban concept but also the constant response to political transformations underlined by Czech and Germans conflicts in what was to become interwar Czechoslovakia.

## Keywords

Garden City; Modern Town Planning; Central Europe; Ebenezer Howard; Raymond Unwin; Jan Kotěra; Zlín; Baťa; Hermann Muthesius; Prague; Masaryk.

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# Lost in Translation? The Idea of the Garden City and its Migration to the Czech Lands, 1900–1938

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The history of the garden city movement in the Czech lands is a story that remains to be explored, scrutinized, and reconstructed for the first time.[1] In comparison with other countries, not in Europe, where the adoption and afterlife of Ebenezer Howard's reform vision has been thoroughly documented, the history of modern architecture and town planning in the Czech territories of Bohemia, Moravia and Moravian Silesia, lacks any comparable study.[2] Yet, even from initial research it is apparent that the adoption of the English scheme in the Czech lands was significant because it was always inextricably linked to political transformations.

The garden city movement has its Czech roots in the beginning of the twentieth century. Long before the astonishing growth of Prague and Brno in the interwar era, there were dedicated advocates of the English reform scheme, and when Prague first emerged as the Czechoslovak capital, many Czech patriots enthusiastically generated visions devoted to new urban design and city planning. The instrumental point of departure that unfolds the history of the garden city movement in the Czech lands seems to be closely linked to fundamental political change in the region.

We can get a sense of its political importance from the fact that some of the advocates of the garden city movement indicated an exact point of departure for the adoption of approaches to town planning based on Ebenezer Howard's reform principles in the Czech lands. The architect Alois Kubíček (1887–1970), one of its chief supporters, pointed out that the very beginning of the movement was precisely 28 October 1918,[3] the date of the foundation of Czechoslovakia. He linked it in a straightforward way to the realisation of an actual utopia, namely the founding of the new Republic, with an accompanying urban utopia that took the form of the garden city, albeit one that, ultimately, was never realised there in its complexity. For many of its local advocates, the merger the new political system, epitomised by the newly formed democratic country, with a new social order linked based on the garden cities movement, proved to be an enormously promising vision.

1) This article is part of a project: Idea, Ideal, Idyll: Garden Cities in Central Europe 1890s–1930s, which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 798686.

2) Liora Bigon and Yossi Katz, eds., *Garden Cities and Colonial planning. Transnationality and Urban Ideas in Africa and Palestine*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014.

3) A. K. [Alois Kubíček] and Vladimír Zákrejs, 'Praha budoucí, projekty zítřka,' *Styl*, 3, 1922–1923, 141.

## Masaryk City

In Czechoslovakia the move towards combining the new democratic government with unparalleled urban visions was blended in a very singular town planning objective in the aftermath of the First World War. In 1920, for example, an anonymous author hidden behind the letter 'R' outlined an elusive vision of both urban development in Prague and the eventual political satisfaction of the Czech national aspirations in *Časopis československých inženýrův a architektův*, one of the main journals of engineering and architecture in the new state. Proposing the construction of a new settlement on the outskirts of the city on the site of the historic battle of the White Mountain, he noted:

> In a historical place where the tragedy of 1620 took place, the tragedy in which the Czech nation lost its independence, a garden city should become a living and dignified monument of our national liberation. [...] Its construction is to be started in 1920, just 300 years after the Battle of White Mountain, and should bear for everlasting memory the name of the leader of our liberation by being named Masaryk City.[4]

The use of the name of the first Czechoslovak president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937), for the planned settlement at White Mountain, would contribute to emphasising the legitimacy of a historical claim that the lands of the Bohemian crown belonged eventually and exclusively to Czechs, or the newly invented construction of the Czechoslovak nation in particular. Moreover, the garden city bearing the president's name would be a significant contribution to the cult of personality of the first Czechoslovak leader (Figure 1).

Masaryk's authority and his cult of personality was a key phenomenon in Czechoslovak identity during the interwar period and long after. T. G. Masaryk, a philosopher and sociologist by education and profession, had already become involved in politics in the late nineteenth century. However, at the end of the war, his sophisticated, visionary, and often dangerous mission in exile, namely, that of securing political independence for Czechs and Slovaks, eventually succeeded in the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic on 28 October 1918. His triumphant return later that year to Prague from the United States, where he had been promoting the cause of Czechoslovak independence, confirmed his prominent position, which lasted until his death in 1937. Masaryk, being a philosopher, advocated a very specific view of humanity based on the heritage of Protestantism which he summarized in his book *The Czech Question*.[5] The medieval Reformation, represented by Jan Hus (1372–1415), Petr Chelčický (1390–1460), and the Hussite movement manifested, according to Masaryk, 'the virtues of modernity: the cultivation of reason, altruistic service for one's neighbours, and a democratic, non-hierarchical form of social organization.'[6] To cherish his singular legacy,

4) R., 'Zahradní město na Bílé Hoře', *Časopis československých inženýrův a architektův*, 19:1, 1920, 10: 'Na historickém místě, kde odehrála se tragédie r. 1620, kterou národ český ztratil svoji samostatnost, má stát zahradní město jako živý a důstojný pomník našeho národního osvobození. [...] Se stavbou jeho se má počít roku 1920, tedy právě 300 roků po bitvě bělohorské, a má nésti pro věčnou paměť jméno vůdce našeho osvobození a slouti Masarykovo město.'

5) Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Česká otázka. Snahy a tužby národního obrození* [The Czech question: the pursuit and desire for national revival], Prague: Čas, 1895.

6) Bruce R. Berglund, *Castle and Cathedral. Longing for the Sacred in a Sceptical Age*, Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2017, 43.


**Figure 1:** The Czechoslovak president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk in front of a statue depicting him at the Exhibition of Contemporary Culture in Brno, 1928.
From: *Almanach Výstavy soudobé kultury*, Brno, 1928.

Masaryk's compatriots used his name on a massive scale to name in his honour squares, schools, and many other public institutions. Masaryk City would be hardly an exception, but an early example of the personality cult first president.

The planned Masaryk City became the focus of intense utopian ideals that found a particularly strong resonance among the Czechs. Though there are no plans or descriptions of the urban design in existence, and the town planners of the zealous vision remain so far anonymous, their message is obvious. Since the nineteenth century, White Mountain has been treated as a symbolic location of crucial importance by the members of Czech national movement. Hence, the unprecedented aim of erecting a vast garden city based on an English model at White Mountain in Prague, to be populated by Czech 'legionaries,' in other words, the veterans of the First World War and the Russian Civil War, precisely in 1920 suggests that Ebenezer Howard's scheme was assumed to be the appropriate medicine to heal not only the neglected housing situation in the Czechoslovak capital but, first and foremost, the Czech national trauma.[7]

In fact, the trauma, deeply rooted in the decisive defeat at the Battle of White Mountain, meant not only the beginning of the Thirty Years' War in Europe but, moreover, had grave consequences for the lands of the Bohemian crown. The defeat of the Bohemian forces in the battle led to confirmation of Habsburg rule and forced re-catholicization and the introduction of an entirely new, mainly foreign, ruling elite. In the nineteenth century, Czech historiography merged the painful memory of past and present foreign rule together with a nostalgic longing for the mythical distant past. The popular author Alois Jirásek coined an apt name for this period that ended in 1918, when he published a historical novel in 1915 about the period of recatholicization, giving it the title *The Dark Time* (*Temno*).[8] Deeply rooted in the legacy of historians such as František Palacký and Ernest Denis, the dominant narrative that accompanied the establishment of Czechoslovakia saw it as expression of historical satisfaction after almost three hundred years of the alienation of Czechs at the hands of the Habsburg Monarchy.[9] This foreign rule was to be erased by various symbolical manifestations in the public realm, and the envisioned garden city at White Mountain was one of them.

The ambitions to reform town planning on the one hand would also commemorate a keystone of the Czech national identity on the other. And the anticipated residents, the legionaries, would overcome the historical loss with an ultimate victory. This aggregate of historical and modern meanings was characteristic of the ways that national identity in interwar Czechoslovakia was framed.

7) František Fabinger, 'Zahradní město a bytová otázka,' [The garden city and the question of housing], *Družina československých legionářů*, 1: 1, January 1920, [3].

8) Alois Jirásek, *Temno*, Prague: Jan Otto, 1915.

9) Josef Petráň, 'Na téma mýtu Bílé hory,' [On the theme of the myth of White Mountain] in Zdeňka Hledíková, ed., *Traditio et cultus: miscellanea historica Bohemica*, Prague: Karolinum, 1993, 141–162.

## An English scheme for the Czech lands

Yet, 'the living and dignified monument of our national liberation' in the form of a garden city to be established at White Mountain also suggests that some saw a straight political affinity between the newly founded Czechoslovakia and the international garden city movement with its British origins. In other words, the garden city movement would highlight the links between the new democracy and a traditional one abroad. In this sense, the avid interest in adopting the English model in Czechoslovakia in the early 1920s suggests that it may be understood as to some degree linked to Czechoslovak official policy towards the United Kingdom.

In fact, Czech municipal representatives in Prague, who won ground-breaking elections in 1861 for the first time and replaced their German predecessors ever since, had striven for some time for political autonomy from their Habsburg rulers. The local authorities had already demonstrated their independence from the imperial administration in Vienna by creating conscious links with other European powers – especially France and Great Britain – in the late nineteenth century. From a political point of view, the strategy of the city of Prague achieved a notable, if limited, success that reached its climax at the turn of the century.[10] In 1897 the French Republic opened a consulate in Prague; this was only its second consulate after that in the United States, followed by offices in Switzerland and Great Britain later that year. Such a positioning of Prague, a capital without a country, on the political map of Europe, in which not even Vienna had a French embassy or consular presence from among other leading world powers of the day, proved to be truly exceptional.[11]

Effective networking by Czech political representatives in Prague made these endeavours visible on an international level within a few decades. In 1900, a delegation of Czech representatives of the Prague municipality led by the mayor Vladimír Srb was reciprocally welcomed with official honours by French politicians in the town hall in Paris. In addition, the highest representatives of the municipality of Paris paid a subsequent visit to Prague at the turn of June and July 1901.[12] But the French Republic was not the only place of interest. Anglo-Czech relations also blossomed, and the United Kingdom was highly admired as the model of a modern industrialized nation. Paralleling the enormous cultural interest in Great Britain was a vivid political exchange between Prague and London that culminated in the 1911 visit of Lord Mayor of London, Sir Thomas Vezey Strong, to the Czech capital. The Lord Mayor's official visit precisely coincided with the founding of the first garden city to be built in Prague.[13]

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10) Jiří Kořalka, 'Zahraniční kontakty Prahy jako metropole národa bez státu' [The foreign contacts of Prague as the metropolis of a nation without a state] in: Václav Ledvinka and Hana Svatošová, eds, *Město a jeho dům: Kapitoly ze stoleté historie Obecního domu hlavního města Prahy (1901–2001)* [The city and its house: chapters from the hundred-year history of the Municipal House of Prague the capital city], Prague: Obecní dům / Prague City Archive, 2002, 29–39.

11) 'Francouzský konsulát v Praze,' [The French consulate in Prague], *Národní listy*, 37: 201, 22. 7. 1897, 2–3.

12) 'Na radnici staroměstské' [On the town hall of the Old Town], *Národní listy* 41: 179, 1. 7. 1901, 1–2; 'Vása sèvresská darem Paříže obci pražské' [A Sèvres vase as a gift from Paris to the municipality of Prague], *Národní listy* 41: 180, 2. 7. 1901, 2; 'K pobytu francouzských hostí v Praze' [On the stay of French guests in Prague], *Národní listy* 41: 184, 6. 7. 1901, 3.

13) Stefan Muthesius, *Das englische Vorbild: Eine Studie zu den deutschen Reformbewegungen in Architektur, Wohnbau und Kunstgewerbe im späteren 19. Jahrhundert*, Munich: Prestel, 1974.

Although the cultural and political parallels seem logical and promising, understanding the lively interest in English garden cities in Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of the First World War solely from the perspective of political cooperation with Western Europe would lead to a significant simplification. In fact, to disprove the initial assumption, it is not necessary to leave Central Europe at all. Germany and Austria-Hungary, two leading states of the Central Powers in the war, both belonged among the chief sympathisers of the garden city movement in the region. In Europe in general, a vivid fascination with the United Kingdom had flourished since the eighteenth century.[14] Several waves of interest in British culture could be observed in Central Europe in particular, starting with admiration for landscape gardens around 1800, then Neo-Gothic revival of medieval forms in the first half of the nineteenth century and, eventually, the domestic housing by the end of the century.[15] In this brief cultural genealogy one should emphasize that the Deutsche Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft, founded already in 1902 in Berlin, was the first foreign offspring of the Garden City Association established by Ebenezer Howard only three years earlier.[16]

In this sense, the desire to build the garden city of Masaryk City at White Mountain, refers more to a rebirth of Czech sovereignty than to a new stage of the garden city movement in Central Europe. Furthermore, the Czechoslovak fascination with the garden city scheme in the 1920s cannot be interpreted as the mere reflection of a political alliance with Great Britain, but rather as a more complex aspiration to reform the urban and social milieu according to the respected English model.

## A peaceful path to real reform

The garden city scheme was defined by Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928), a stenographer by profession but also a social reformer, in his extraordinarily influential book *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* published in 1898, which became better known under its revised title *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, published only four years later.[17] The original name of the book highlights the fact that Howard emphasized a peaceful and gradual transition to new urban and social forms instead of any rapid revolution. In times of dramatic social unrest, he mobilized far less violent forces to achieve his ultimate goal of transforming society by way of calm evolution, which meant building new garden cities instead of fuelling violent revolution on the streets of the existing ones. In the principles of self-contained and self-governed communities he outlined, Howard assumed that any efficient municipal reform must be linked with a new social order. In terms of the existing social class divisions of the turn of the century in the United Kingdom, his project was progressive, given its aim of including both workers together

14) Ian Buruma, *Anglomania: a European Love Affair*, New York: Random House, 1999.

15) Jakob von Falke, 'Das englische Haus,' in Falke, *Zur Kultur und Kunst*, Vienna: Gerold, 1878, 3–67; Robert Dohme, *Das englische Haus: Eine kultur- und baugeschichtliche Skizze*, Brunswick: Westermann, 1888; Hermann Muthesius, *Die englische Baukunst der Gegenwart: Beispiele neuer englischer Profanbauten*, Leipzig: Cosmos, 1900.

16) Tobias Roth, ed., *Gartenstadtbewegung: Flugschriften, Essays, Vorträge und Zeichnungen aus dem Umkreis der Deutschen Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft*, Berlin: Verlag Das Kulturelle Gedächtnis, 2019, 234.

17) Ebenezer Howard, *To-morrow. A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1898; Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1902.

with members of the middle-class professions in the new settlement.[18] Howard's urban vision of a garden city was an attempt to articulate the issues that need to be addressed to make a city a good and inclusive place to live for everyone, privileged or unprivileged.

> Amongst the essential differences between Garden City and other municipalities, one of the chief [sic] is its method of raising its revenue. Its entire revenue is derived from rents; [...] the rents which may very reasonably be expected from the various tenants on the estate will be amply sufficient, if paid into the coffers of Garden City, (a) to pay the interest on the money with which the estate is purchased, (b) to provide a sinking fund for the purpose of paying off the principal, (c) to construct and maintain all such works as are usually constructed and maintained by municipal and other local authorities out of rates compulsorily levied, and (d) (after redemption of debentures) to provide a large surplus for other purposes, such as old-age pensions or insurance against accident and sickness.[19]

Soon after, the scheme proved to be truly vital when he was provided with the opportunity to implement it in the real world. In 1903, only one year after *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* was published, the first garden city, Letchworth, was established in Hertfordshire, thirty five miles northeast of London, employing the dynamic infrastructure of modernity, since it was located on a direct train line to London.[20] Architects and town planners at the beginning of their careers, Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, won the competition to translate Howard's vision into the new settlement. Within a couple of years, Letchworth became a focal point for new town planning and housing reform that attracted many reformers from overseas who left overwhelmed by the new community.

## Introducing the English vision in Central Europe

There were a number of keen advocates of garden cities in Central Europe, first of all in Germany, the leading industrial power along with the United Kingdom and in this sense experiencing problems with overcrowded towns, filthy tenements, and poor living standards. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the Deutsche Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft promoted Howard's concept enthusiastically.[21] Their campaigning was fulfilled in 1909 when the industrialist Karl Schmidt established the first German garden city, Hellerau, near Dresden.[22]

Hellerau attracted a number of visitors from Prague and Bohemia, but the Czech advocates of the garden city movement were not as flexible nor as well prepared to adopt the innovative vision as their German predecessors at that time due to their having more limited access

18) Robert H. Kargon and Arthur P. Molella, *Invented Edens: Techno-Cities of the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008, 7–24.

19) Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, 28.

20) Mervyn Miller, *Letchworth: The First Garden City*, Felpham: Phillimore, 1989; Josh Tidy, *Letchworth Garden City Through Time*, Stroud: Amberley, 2015.

21) *Die deutsche Gartenstadtbewegung: zusammenfassende Darstellung über den heutigen Stand der Bewegung*, Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft, 1911.

22) Nils M. Schinker, *Die Gartenstadt Hellerau 1909–1945: Stadtbaukunst, Kleinwohnungsbau, Sozial- Und Bodenreform*, Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2014.

to financial resources, a general emphasis on national instead of social issues, and lack of any leading association that would focus solely on promoting the English scheme.[23] Yet, the example of Hellerau proved to be enormously powerful at this early stage, and it demonstrates that even though there were considerable nationalist political tensions between Germans and Czechs, there could still be a high degree of cultural exchange.[24]

In the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia, long before the breaking point of 1918 that Alois Kubíček marked as the very beginning of the garden city movement in the region, a diverse community, advocating Howard's urban utopia, emerged. The small body of these early proponents of garden cities from the first two decades of the twentieth century may be divided into two main groups. Not surprisingly, on the one hand they were recruited chiefly from the long tradition of national revivalists based in several small towns that were predominantly Czech. To name a few: the general practitioner Zdenko Eger from Dvůr Králové nad Labem; Dr. Emil Halla, a solicitor from Bučovice; Karel Kašpara, a building contractor from Pardubice; the architect Jaroslav Kohoutek, from Chrudim; the Tábor-based building contractor and a head of a building co-operative, Karel Rudolf, and the engineer Eduard Wosatka from Lovosice.[25] These were members of the local educated class: builders, doctors, and lawyers. On the other hand, a number of garden city advocates came from a very different part of the social spectrum, namely from the cultural circles that followed the latest trends in modern architecture and formed an architectural section in the Association of Fine Artists Mánes (Spolek výtvarných umělců Mánes) based in Prague.[26]

The first Czech garden city sympathisers shared and discussed their latest knowledge of the English scheme in the context of various associations, ranging from the Czech National Economic Society (Česká společnost národohospodářská), founded in 1896, and the Union of Czech Cities in the Kingdom of Bohemia (Svaz českých měst v království Českém) founded in 1907, to the Czech Provincial Association for Housing Reform in the Kingdom of Bohemia (Český zemský spolek pro reformu bytovou v království Českém), founded in 1910.[27]

In 1911, several members of the Czech Provincial Association for Housing Reform, including the architect Jaroslav Kohoutek, attended a conference in London convened by the National Housing and Town Planning Council.[28] On their way to London, they visited a number of model housing estates such as Port Sunlight, Bournville, Hampstead Garden Suburb, Letchworth, and before reaching Britain they also went to Hellerau. The overwhelming impact of the study trip is well recorded in many articles and, moreover, Karel Rudolf, an architect, building contractor, and the head of a building cooperative in the small town of Tábor, published a book

23) Rudolf Wels, *Zahradová města* [Garden cities], Prague: Pokrok, 1911, 13–14.

24) Ladislav Blažej, 'Zahradní město Hellerava' [The garden city of Hellerau], *Architektonický obzor*, 10: 9, 1911, 82–84.

25) Jaroslav Kohoutek, 'Mezinárodní sjezd spolků pro bytovou reformu úřednických a dělnických obydlí v Londýně' [The international congress of societies for housing reform for the dwellings of civil servants and workers], *Národní listy*, 51: 214, August 1911, 5.

26) The media platform of Mánes was the architectural journal *Styl*.

27) 'K prvnímu sjezdu českých bytových a stavebních družstev' [On the first congress of Czech societies for housing and building], *Čas*, 25: 284, 14. 10. 1911, 8.

28) Kohoutek, 'Mezinárodní sjezd' (as in n. 25), 5.

dedicated entirely to his observations from the grand tour.[29] Considering the vast reflections in the media, the trip to England might be underlined as an actual point of departure for the more efficient dissemination of garden city ideas in the Czech lands.[30] It was also parallelled, in 1911, by a travelling exhibition staged by the Deutsche Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft in Prague, Chrudim, Hradec Králové, and Kolín.[31]

The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue assembled by Ladislav Blažej.[32] In the Introduction he underlined the meaning of the scheme for the Czech lands:

> A garden city cannot be imagined as any city with gardens - they must not be missing - but their key principle is the economic basis, attached with all aesthetic and cultural requirements that support the healthy mental and physical development of its inhabitants. Thus, a city, in the case of a suburb or settlement, based on open space using an economic method that would permanently prevent any speculation in building plots in the future.[33]

A garden city as a reform device to improve unsatisfactory living standards and in this respect the whole of society; this was the brief message articulated by Blažej and displayed to the public in four towns in 1911. Blažej was the driving force in importing the German exhibition on garden cities to the Czech lands and initiating an association committed to setting up the model settlements.[34] But his objective was only fulfilled ten years later, in 1921, when the Society for the Establishment of Garden Cities in the Czechoslovak Republic (Společnost pro zakládání zahradních měst v republice Československé) started to operate.[35]

Along with Blažej, other professionals familiar with the garden city movement were architects and town planners whose early activities remain largely overseen by the local art historiography. Alois Kubíček promoted garden cities to the Association of Architecture Students (Spolek posluchačů architektury) in 1909.[36] The Prague-based art historian Zdeněk Wirth also prepared a series of talks on English housing and garden cities in 1910.[37]

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29) Karel Rudolf, *Anglická zahradní města: Doncaster, Hull, New Earswick, Bournville, Romford, Hampstead* [The English garden cities: Doncaster, Hull, New Earswick, Bournville, Romford, Hampstead], Tábor: self-published, 1912.

30) Jaroslav Kohoutek, 'Mezinárodní sjezd spolku pro bytovou reformu úřednických a dělnických obydlí v Londýně' [The international congress of societies for housing reform for the dwellings of civil servants and workers], *Stavitelské listy*, 7:20, 1911, 164–165; 7: 21, 1911, 173–175; 7:22, 1911, 181–185; 8:1, 1912, 6–7; 8:3, 1912, 20–21; 8:4, 1912, 27–31; 8:5, 1912, 39–40 and 8:7, 1912, 55.

31) Vladimír Zákrejs, 'Výstava zahradních měst' [A garden city exhibition], *Styl*, 3, 1911, 250–251; 'Výstava zahradních měst a rodinných domků' [An exhibition of garden cities and family homes], *Čas*, 25: 305, 4 November 1911, 3.

32) Ladislav Blažej, ed., *Výstava zahradních měst* [A garden city exhibition], Prague: Dělnická knihtiskárna, 1911.

33) Ladislav Blažej, 'Předmluva' [Foreword], in ibid. 'Zahradním městem nelze si představovati všelijaké libovolné město se zahradami – těch při nich chyběti nesmí – nýbrž hlavním jejich principem jest hospodářský podklad, spojený se všemi estetickými a kulturními požadavky, které podporují zdravý duševní a tělesný vývoj jeho obyvatelů. Tedy město, po případě předměstí neb osada, založená na volném prostranství použitím hospodářské method, jež by v budoucnosti trvale zabránila spekulaci se stavebními pozemky.'

34) Vladimír Zákrejs, 'Zahradní město u nás' [The garden city in our lands], *Styl*, 4, 1912, 68.

35) Z, 'Společnost pro zakládání zahradních měst v republice Československé' [The Society for the establishment of garden cities in the Czechoslovak Republic], *Časopis československých inženýrův a architektův*, 20: 12, 1921, unpaginated.

36) 'Spolkový věstník' [The society bulletin], *Čas*, 23: 307, 7 November 1909, 8.

37) 'O kultuře moderního obydlí a uměl. řemesle' [On the culture of modern housing and design], *Čas*, 24: 317, 17 November 1910, 10.

Among the garden enthusiasts in the architectural section of the Association of Fine Artists Mánes, such as Rudolf Stockar and Vladimír Zákrejs, who published articles in the respected architectural journal *Styl*, the influence of the most important of them, Jan Kotěra, remains somewhat invisible, for he wasn't very productive as an author. But it is highly probable that Kotěra became acquainted with Howard's urban vision during his frequent travels abroad, which included several visits to the United Kingdom at the beginning of the twentieth century when he was in contact with the Royal Institute of British Architects.[38] Moreover, his personal relationship with Hermann Muthesius, the Prussian architect, author, career civil servant and cultural attaché in London, deserves a mention as well.[39] Muthesius was a noted anglophile and became an established expert on modern English housing, which he promoted in the three volumes of his book *The English House* (1904).[40] Kotěra contributed to dissemination of his knowledge in the Czech architectural circles.[41]

In this initial stage, when the first Czech garden city sympathisers travelled to both Germany and the United Kingdom to explore early model villages and garden cities, the idea of reform was already flourishing in Prague. The initial pioneer, who was determined to translate the English scheme into reality, was not an architect nor a town planner but the wealthy landowner Tomáš Welz. In 1911 he summarized his urban vision in a luxuriously designed pamphlet entitled *The Garden City in Bráník and Krč: The Residential Area in Prague XIII*.[42] The reference to 'residential area' in the English translation does not convey the connotations of the original 'villová čtvrť' in the original Czech title, which reveals Welz's understanding of the garden city, as a collection of family houses, *villas*, in a green environment on the outskirt of Prague. In the outline building programme there was no place for any social reform.

Welz possessed large estates in Krč, a small village south of Prague that became part of Greater Prague in 1922; at the beginning of the twentieth century it was only a large piece of open land dotted by some houses. The beautiful, hilly, and forested landscape and its proximity to the town, which was accessible by train from the local station, made Krč attractive for various business undertakings that sought to profit from the green countryside, which had remained unspoiled by any industrial production long into the modern era. Welz himself resided with his family in a Neo-gothic castle in the lush green environment.

From the very beginning, the developer's intention was denounced by local architects. They argued that Welz only took an advantage of the name to appeal to future residents of the housing estate, avoiding the complex social programme inherent in the English scheme.[43] But that was only a half-truth, at least in terms of town planning. A detailed scrutiny of the master plan conceived by the little known engineer and builder František Matějovský reveals

38) 'Report of the Literature Standing Committee,' *Journal of The Royal Institute of British Architects,* 11, 1904, 362.

39) Vladimír Šlapeta, 'Architekt Jan Kotěra' [The architect Jan Kotěra], in Šlapeta, ed., *Jan Kotěra 1871–1923: Zakladatel moderní české architektury* [Jan Kotěra 1871–1923: The founder of modern Czech architecture], Prague: KANT, 2001, 31.

40) Hermann Muthesius, *Das englische Haus: Entwicklung, Bedingungen, Anlage, Aufbau, Einrichtung und Innenraum. Entwicklung des englischen Hauses*, Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth, 1904–5, 3 volumes.

41) Vladimír Šlapeta, 'Gartenstädte in Tschechien und in der Slowakei. Geschichte und Gegenwart,' in Thomas Will und Ralph Lindner, eds., *Gartenstadt. Geschichte und Zukunftsfähigkeit einer Idee*, Dresden: w. e. b. Universitätsverlag, 2012, 180–181.

42) Tomáš Welz, *Zahradní město v Bráníku a v Krči: villová čtvrť v Praze XIII* [The garden city in Bráník and Krč: a villa quarter in Prague XIII], Prague: self-published, [1911].

43) Rust [Rudolf Stockar], 'Zahradní město v Krči' [The garden city in Krč], *Styl*, 3, 1911, 211–212.

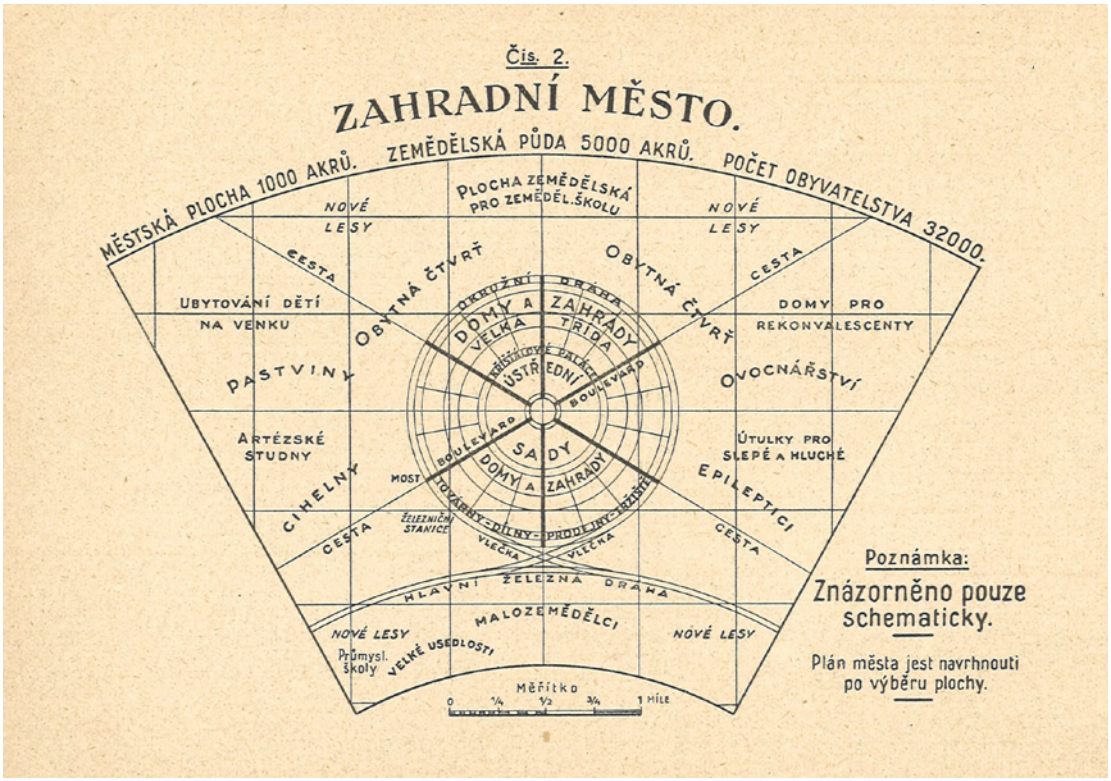


**Figure 2:** Ebenezer Howard, Garden city scheme, 1902.
From: Ebenezer Howard, *Zahradní města budoucnosti*, Prague. 1924.

a close reading of Ebenezer Howard's diagram. Howard accompanied his treaties with a series of diagrams that were to be comprehended as mere schematic sketches of his visions which he repeatedly pointed out.[44] Regardless of how schematic the diagrams were, they proved to be an instrumental urban plan for many of his successors (Figures 2 and 3).

Unlike Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker in Letchworth, Matějovský took Howard's lesson seriously and applied the concentric pattern in a rather orthodox way in Krč regardless of the nature of the chosen plot. Moreover, the rigid adoption of the envisioned ideal is emphasised by the street names such as V Kole (In the Circle), Paprsková (Radial), and U Společenské zahrady (By a Community Garden). From the pamphlet it also becomes obvious that Welz planned a mere garden suburb, avoiding the erection of any public buildings, which thus kept the dwellers fully dependent on the then remote Prague (Figure 4).[45]

The first implementation of the garden city scheme in the Czech lands was limited to a smart advertisement for middle-class clients. Any social reform strategies that were part of Howard's original vision were omitted in Prague as the building programme pursued different objectives. However, the vision set up in 1911 was soon jeopardized by the war. Eventually, only a part of the lay-out was completed and just a few family houses, designed chiefly by

44) Howard, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, unpaginated.

45) Welz, *Zahradní město*, unpaginated.

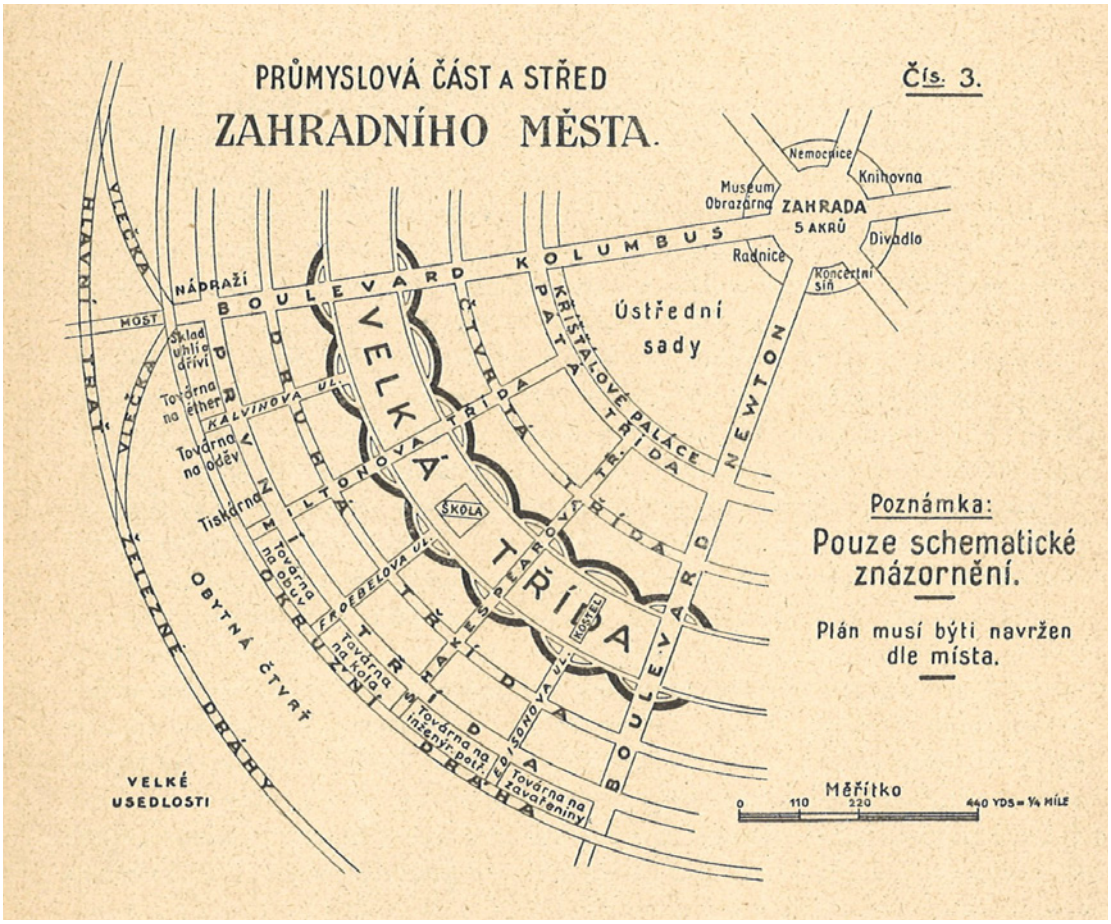


**Figure 3:** Ebenezer Howard, Detail of garden city, 1902.
From: Ebenezer Howard, *Zahradní města budoucnosti*, Prague. 1924.

a local builder Rudolf Tuhý from Nusle near Prague, were constructed. Their decorative style reveals some inspiration in geometric forms of Viennese modernism as in the work of Joseph Maria Olbrich (Figures 5 and 6).

In the pre-war period, the transmission of the garden city movement know-how between the United Kingdom and the Czech lands was often mediated by better-informed German professionals. Their early contact with Howard's scheme led to a fruitful variety of transformations, disseminations, and adoptions of the English urban theory in Germany. Yet, the German example proved also limiting in terms of the appropriation of the concept as a garden suburb or workers' colony (Figure 7).[46]

46) Wolfgang Pehnt, *Deutsche Architektur seit 1900*, Munich und Ludwigsburg: Wüstenrot Stiftung und Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2006, 48–54.

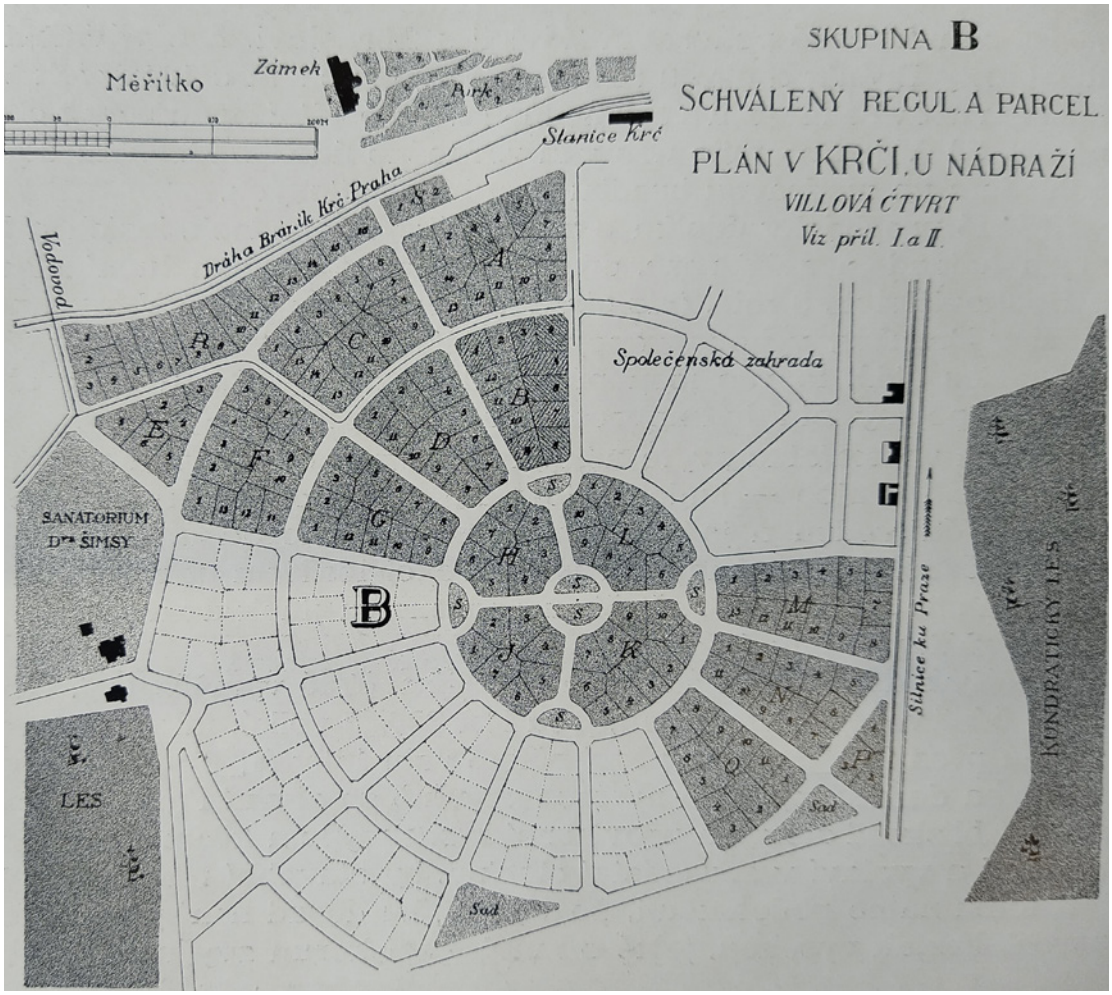


**Figure 4:** František Matějovský, Layout of the Garden City in Bráník and Krč by Prague, before 1911.
From: Tomáš Welz, *Zahradní město v Bráníku a v Krči: villová čtvrť v Praze XIII*, Prague [1911].

## A capitalist garden city

The First World War was marked by a long-term void in architectural production, and not only in Central Europe. The garden city in Krč was abandoned, unfinished, for housing budgets ceased to exist, architects left their professional backgrounds and were forced to put Austrian-Hungarian uniforms on. Nevertheless, one exceptional figure profited from the troubled situation to come. In the course of the War, the idea of garden cities was explored by Jan Kotěra. With his expertise and the professional network that he had acquired, he was well prepared to initiate the first remarkable attempt to transfer the urban utopia into more precise terms in the Czech lands.

In comparison with other European regions, Kotěra's endeavour was conceived comparatively late, in a remote region, far from any big industrial centres, and under highly singular conditions. However, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Kotěra's œuvre ranged from pro-

**Figure 5:** Bohuslav Černý, Model Family House for the Garden City in Bráník and Krč by Prague, before 1911.
From: Tomáš Welz, *Zahradní město v Bráníku a v Krči: villová čtvrť v Praze XIII*, Prague [1911].

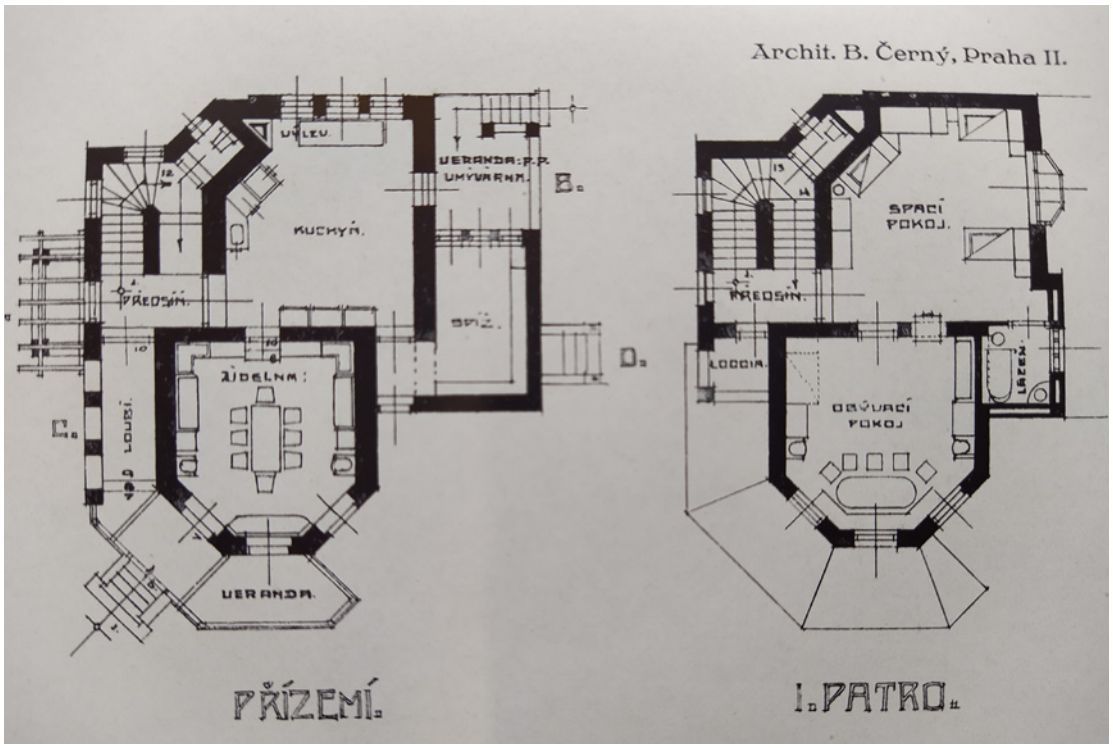


**Figure 6:** Bohuslav Černý, Model Family House for the Garden City in Bráník and Krč by Prague, before 1911.
From: Tomáš Welz, *Zahradní město v Bráníku a v Krči: villová čtvrť v Praze XIII*, Prague [1911].

jects of public buildings such as the Law and Theological Faculty in Prague to several workers' colonies in Louny or Králův Dvůr, as well as family residences on different scales and levels of luxury. Both of the housing typologies provided him with a rich experience needed for the urban assignment he was confronted with: he was appointed by a very affluent customer, Tomáš Baťa, the leading shoe magnate based in the small town of Zlín, to design a vast extension to the town.

When war broke out, Baťa succeeded in securing for his company enormous commissions for the supply of military shoes to the Austro-Hungarian army; the rapid increase in production was not matched by a comparable urban growth necessary for the workers and employees residing in Zlín. The cramped living conditions and lack of public amenities forced Baťa to look for an appropriate solution. In 1915, Kotěra was appointed, with the task of developing Zlín to support the rapidly expanding business. In the times framed by the war economy and military recruitment, the intention was to set up a garden city in the vicinity of the Baťa factory. Yet, implementing a garden city scheme into a town expansion commissioned by a single company owner sounds less like an experiment and more like a total contradiction. For whereas a garden city was to be a self-contained and self-governed community, the new settlement in the vicinity of the Baťa factory was, in contrast, to be acquired, financed, and ruled solely by the company and its owner. Yet, it appears that during the war, such a utopian urban fusion was considered a joint vision shared by both Kotěra and Baťa.

Kotěra's advocacy of the latest English model housing seemed to blend easily with Baťa's personal concern with social issues and his special fondness for Leo Tolstoy's philosophy


**Figure 7:** Rudolf Tuhý, The Villa 'Vilča' in the garden city in Bráník and Krč by Prague, 1911-1912. Photo: author.

commending the simple and allegedly unspoiled lifestyle in the countryside and a utopian factory in Émil Zola's novel *Labour*.[47] In the middle of the 1910s, in a time affected by harsh war conditions, Tomáš Baťa's left-leaning bias might have led him to support the garden cities movement without apparent difficulty. Despite being a successful self-made man in shoe production, director of an industrial concern operating on a global scale, Baťa, looking backwards had labelled himself as 'a collectivist', 'a socialist', or, explicitly, as 'a Communist' in the years preceding the War.[48]

In 1940, when contemplating Baťa's legacy, the keen promoter of garden cities, Alois Kubíček, did not hesitate to praise the overt capitalist Baťa as the very personification of the ideal town founder depicted by Ebenezer Howard.[49] Kubíček emphasized that 'it was an anxious foresight of a good landlord and a social thinker, knowing the maximum of settlement ideals.'[50] Yet, such an ideological background strictly contrasts with Baťa's later economic models employed in his business plans, which focused on achieving maximum efficiency in the production and distribution of his goods. Following Henry Ford's innovations, Baťa

47) Tomáš Baťa, *Úvahy a projevy* [Thoughts and pronouncements], Prague: Dobrovský, 2013, 26.

48) Ibid., 26–28.

49) Alois Kubíček, 'Nové zahradní čtvrti ve Zlíně' [The new garden quarter in Zlín], *Architektura*, 1940, special issue, 277.

50) Ibid.

applied specialization of work processes, rationalization of production, standardization of design, and scientific management since the 1920s.[51] Despite his extreme paternalism, employed in a dual role as the head of the concern and mayor of Zlín, he seems likely to have ideologically merged easily with Kotěra's expertise on the social reform stimulated by English garden cities when he commissioned one in Zlín next to his factory premises in the unstable period of the war.

Jan Kotěra started from scratch, with no intrusive townscape to consider in his urban design. He laid out a new settlement on the moderately sloping hills in the direct vicinity of the Baťa shoe factory.[52] The new urban pattern was arranged into low-density housing and several public buildings at a comfortable proximity to both work and nature. The master plan introduced a crescent form as a starting point of the over-all layout, a feature unusual for modern town planning, which was largely under the influence of Otto Wagner and was anchored in a rational pattern of precise grids. It is possible that Kotěra adopted the crescent from the fashionable spatial relations in English towns, especially from the Georgian age, as it has no parallel in the local area. Still, it was not only an aesthetically satisfying solution but also a very functional arrangement aiming at creating an effective central point for reshaping the rather longitudinal valley (Figure 8).

In the centre of one of the crescents was 'a beehive,' a terrace of family houses directly adjoining the factory premises.[53] From here streets gradually ascended, connecting the factory with the green belt surrounding the new development. The houses with pleasant views of the gardens and orchards avoided excessive density. Public buildings such as schools or office buildings were situated in the vicinity of the old town forming a certain transition between the two worlds. Focusing on the principles of the self-contained and economically self-sufficient community outlined by Howard was a key element employed in the development in Zlín. Two co-operative farms were also located in actual focal points of the estate that differentiated the new settlement from any other garden suburb. Having been planned in the course of the war, the aim of incorporating an agricultural base made sense in times when troublesome food supply shortages were a daily routine in the whole Habsburg monarchy, and the farms' own production may have provided a viable alternative to the local market. Furthermore, it also marked an important transition point for workers of usually rural origin while becoming accustomed to the radically different lifestyle of a rapidly growing industrial town. From a social point of view, therefore, the farms may have contributed to helping the former villagers adapt more easily to the brand new conditions in the new community.

During the course of the war, only the core of the new settlement was built. The eventual output, having been reduced to the beehive and several family houses, emphasises Baťa's concern with the pressing housing issue in Zlín. All public amenities and the co-operative farms were omitted. The design of the simple buildings departed from English models, for

51) Ondřej Ševeček, *Zrození Baťovy průmyslové metropole: Továrna, městský prostor a společnost ve Zlíně v letech 1900–1938* [The birth of the Baťa industrial metropolis: the factory, urban space and society in Zlín in the years 1900 to 1938], České Budějovice and Ostrava: VEDUTA and Ostravská univerzita, 2009, 55–59.

52) Jane Pavitt, 'The Bata Project: a Social and Industrial Experiment,' *Twentieth Century Architecture*, 1, Summer 1994, 37.

53) The 'beehive' was hit by an air raid during WWII and the building was destroyed.


**Figure 8:** Jan Kotěra, Master Plan for Worker´s Colony, Zlín, July 1918.
From, Jan Kotěra, *Dělnické kolonie*, Prague, 1921.

Kotěra employed a mansard roof as a key distinctive feature in his architecture. With their concern to address the housing shortage quickly, both Baťa and Kotěra ended up emulating the established tradition of workers' colonies in Germany, such as that in Margarethenhöhe near Essen that had been commissioned for employees of Krupp-Werke just a few years earlier, or Siemensstadt in Berlin (Figure 9).

Kotěra's adoption of the garden city for the purpose of developing a workers' colony highlights the misapprehension of the social objectives incorporated in Howard's scheme. And in this sense, the colony was closer in concept to the slightly earlier development in Krč, where the building process also remained limited to mere housing, omitting any additional public amenities that may have provided a complex environment on the new urban and community model. No radical social reform took place in either the modern middle-class housing by Prague nor in that for workers in Zlín. Even though the newly built premises in both towns must have been praised highly by the families that moved in, these families definitely could not contribute to any significant social change (Figure 10).

## Translating the garden city to Czechoslovak reality

The flirtation with the garden city idea in the Czech lands both before and during the war suggests that as the English scheme was adopted, its meaning and purpose changed. For it was adapted according to the private interests of particular developers. This observation was a common opinion among professionals, and was pointed out explicitly by a commentator in *Styl*: 'This name [garden city] was misused by several private enterprises.'[54] In order to counter this appropriation of the meaning of the reform vision for particular commercial purposes, František Fabinger, one of the keenest Czech pioneers of the movement, published a book

54) K. [Alois Kubíček?], 'Zahradní město v Praze' [The garden city in Prague], *Styl*, 1, 1920–1921, unpaginated: 'Pro různé podniky soukromé bylo bohužel tohoto názvu zneužito.'

**Figure 9:** Jan Kotěra, House with four living units for Baťa's workers' colony, Zlín, 1922–1923.
Photo: Petr Willert (onomonophotography).

with the long title *The Housing Question and Soil Socialization. I. The Town of Tomorrow. The English Garden City according to E. Howard* in 1920.[55]

Fabinger, a grammar school teacher by profession and a determined promoter of Howard's vision, carefully identified which reform intentions were linked with the garden city idea. To provide the introductory insight necessary for potential dwellers of the garden city, Fabinger summed up his understanding of what a proper garden city should exactly be:[56]

> A 'Garden City' is a settlement built on cheap land based on an advance plan that is well thought through and elaborate. The land remains the property of the company permanently settled there, and no part of the property may be sold to any individual. Building plots and agricultural land and, if needed, premises built on the estate are leased for any period to hereditary tenure. These measures prevent absolutely all land speculation and an increase in the value of the land solely as a consequence of the settlement will forever be secured for those who have merit in its increase, meaning the inhabitants of the garden city. This social and economic base ensures that every

55) František Fabinger, *Bytová otázka a socializace půdy. I. Město zítřka. Zahradní město anglické dle E. Howarda* [The housing question and the socialisation of the land I: the city of tomorrow. The English garden city according to E. Howard], Prague: self-published, 1920.

56) František Fabinger, 'Zahradní město' [The garden city], in *Stavební družstvo Zahradní město. I. Stanovy, II. Jednací řád* [The garden city building society I: Bylaws; II: Rules of procedure], Prague: self-published, 1920, unpaginated.

> inhabitant, even those who are less affluent, can have a garden and it is in this sense that we derive the name: GARDEN CITY.[57]

Fabinger's slightly simplistic version of the English garden city ethos for an audience untrained in modern town planning suggests that knowledge of urban design was not common; hence, the idea of the garden city was often reduced to that of a garden suburb by the general public. To what extent the garden city vision was (mis)understood among its sympathisers and professionals as well can best be illustrated by an example from the quarter of Ořechovka in Prague, one of the earliest and most prominent garden suburbs that were completed in the early years of Czechoslovakia.[58]

Ořechovka marks another shift in the meaning of 'garden city;' this time it was closely associated with the national movement, although not as explicitly as in the case of Masaryk City. If previous attempts to adopt the allusive name, garden city, referred to an idyllic way of dwelling amid gardens and also reflected private interests, now, with the establishment of Czechoslovakia, national political issues entered the scene. The civil servants in the new state were predominantly Czech speakers, as were the architects of all the successful entries submitted for the housing project in Ořechovka. The singular position of Ořechovka in modern Czechoslovak architecture and urban planning derives not only from the building programme but primarily from the Ministry of Public Works's ambition that it should act as a role model for future developments of its kind.[59] Not only were officials involved in the building of the colony proud of their achievement, in addition the German-language newspaper, *Prager Presse,* which was closely linked to the Czechoslovak establishment, praised the outcome: 'Here the state has really created an exemplary settlement, a garden city that, whether you like it or not, can be called exemplary in every respect; [...] The colony on "Vořechovka" which, with its community centre, cinema and school, is more of an independent city [...].'[60]

Only a couple of months after Czechoslovakia was founded, Ořechovka was just part of a vast construction programme in Prague that was launched jointly by the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Social Care in the summer of 1919 to provide decent dwellings

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57) 'Zahradní město' je osada, stavěná dle plánu předem dobře promyšleného a vypracovaného, na levném území. Toto území zůstává trvale majetkem společnosti na něm osídlené, a žádná část jeho neprodává se ve vlastnictví jednotlivci. Stavební místa a rolnické pozemky a eventuelně i budovy na pozemcích postavené pronajímají se na libovolnou řadu let do dědičného pachtu. Tímto opatřením zamezí se naprosto všechna spekulace půdou a přírůstek na ceně půdy, který byl způsoben právě jen jejím osídlením, jest na vždy zajištěn těm, kteří mají zásluhu o jeho vzrůst, to jest obyvatelům zahradního města. A tato sociální a hospodářská základna nové osady právě umožňuje, aby každý obyvatel, i méně majetný, měl svou zahradu, a odtud název: ZAHRADNÍ MĚSTO.' Fabinger, 'Zahradní mesto,' unpaginated.

58) Josef Havlíček, *Kolonie "Vořechovka",* Prague: Ministry of Public Works, 1924; Alexandra Křížová and Kateřina Hubrtová, 'Moderní architektura Střešovic. Od celku k detailu 1: Ořechovka' [The modern architecture of Střešovic. From the whole to the detail 1: Ořechovka], *Staletá Praha,* 26: 2, 2010, 109–121.

59) Vendula Hnídková, 'Ořechovka. Reformní ideje za kulisou buržoazního blahobytu' [Ořechovka: the reform ideas behind the mise-en-scène of bourgeois prosperity] in Veronika Rollová and Cyril Říha, eds., *Art and Evolution: Festschrift pro Jindřicha Vybírala,* Prague: UMPRUM 2020, 346–360.

60) J. H. [?], 'Eine werdende Stadt. Die Vořechovka. – Prags Wohnstädte in der Zukunft: Bubeneč und Dejvice. Das Belvedere und seine Verbauung,' *Prager Presse,* 4: 226, August 1924, 4: 'Hier hat der Staat wirklich einmal eine vorbildliche Siedlung geschaffen, eine Gartenstadt, die man, ob man will oder nicht, in jeder Beziehung mustergültig nennen kann; ... Die Kolonie auf der „Vořechovka", die mit ihrem Gemeindehaus, ihrem Kino und ihrer Schule eher eine selbständige Stadt ist.' – Vořechovka is not a German translation of Ořechovka but an old name of the location.

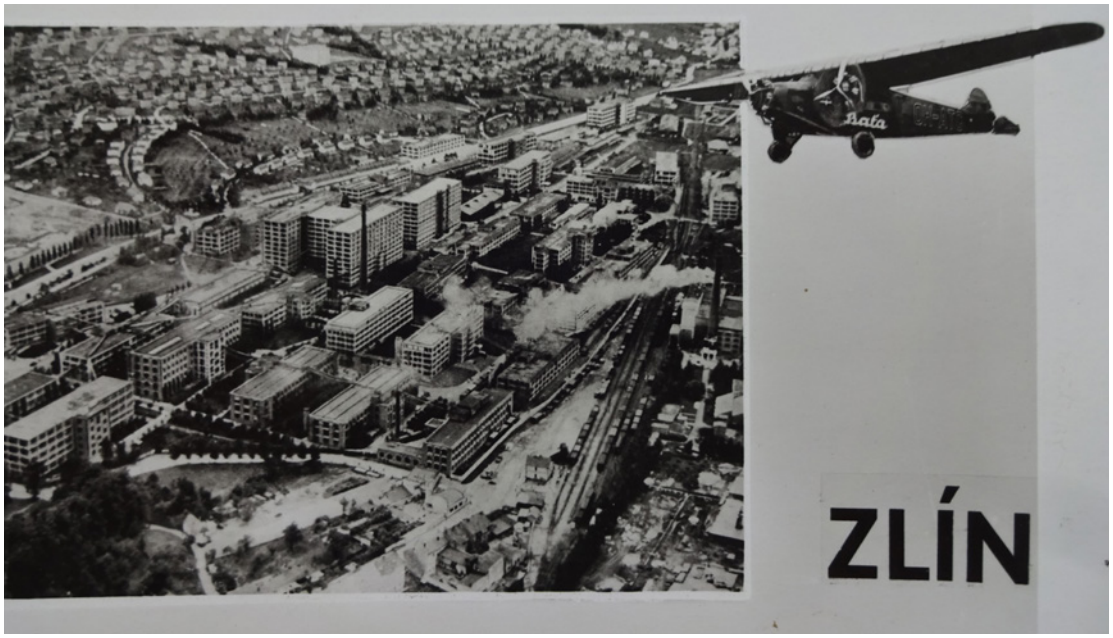


**Figure 10:** Zlín, Aerial View. In the upper part of the image is the Kotěra's town extension with two small crescents along the main road.
Source: Historic Postcard. Author's collection.

for civil servants in a harsh housing crisis in the aftermath of the war.[61] As was common practice, an architectural competition was prepared and architects submitted almost forty proposals.[62] Josef Havlíček, a high official of the Ministry of Public Works who was in charge of Ořechovka development, summarised the final achievement with apparent satisfaction. He emphasized that it was a colony shaped by modern directions in the construction of 'garden cities.'[63] But his own words reveal the use of contradictory meanings for 'garden city' which was, for him, synonymous with 'a housing colony,' lacking any programme for a social transformation (Figure 11).

Today, the urban plan of the 1920s has been swallowed up by later developments in the area. The master plan by the Czech architects Jaroslav Vondrák (1881–1937) and Jan Šenkýř (1885–1948) was outlined on the basis of a rather formal street layout that formed a small centre with a main public building as its focal point. The volume of the latter is symmetrically divided into two wings with a passage in its very heart resembling a town gate. Again, the volume of the building resembles the workers' colony Margarethenhöhe in Essen or Liebigstadt in Liberec. The centrally located, multipurpose building was a bulky structure incorporating several services ranging from a grocery store, a cinema, and a restaurant. Also, the presence of a pub marks the rather socially inclusive character of the newly developed neighbourhood. In Ořechovka examples of terraced houses in the cottage style were also introduced, recalling their English predecessors in a straightforward way.

61) Hynek Kubišta, 'Politika stavební a bytová' [Planning and housing politics], in *Československá vlastivěda*, 6, Prague: Sfinx, 1930, 319–338.

62) Hnídková, 'Ořechovka,' 346–357.

63) Havlíček, *Kolonie "Vořechovka"*, 16.

**Figure 11:** Jaroslav Vondrák, Terraced Houses in Garden Suburb Prague – Ořechovka, 1920-1921. Photo: author.

The prominence of Ořechovka, confirmed by its exemplary role for further developments in Czechoslovakia, may be attributed to the prevailing confusion between the garden suburb and the garden city, which has contributed to the recurrent misuse of the latter term. Later on, the widely accepted model of Ořechovka was followed and expanded on in other garden suburbs such as Spořilov or Zahradní město (literally meaning 'Garden City') in Prague.[64] In fact, these garden suburbs prove that it was not only Ebenezer Howard and his various local sympathisers who longed for settlements where the differences between town and country would dissolve to create a harmonious, healthy, and happy community. Nevertheless, the Czech advocates of garden cities usually did not long for anything more than a carefully designed built environment with family houses, avoiding any uncomfortable merging of social classes (Figure 12).

Although criticised, the Ořechovka garden suburb was intended to serve as an example of model housing and as such was not emulated in other projects within Czechoslovakia; the estate was added to the carefully curated collection of monuments and cultural heritage sites, such as Prague Castle, that were showcased to prominent foreign visitors. As early as 1924, Henry Chapman, the representative of the International Garden Cities and Town-Planning Federation, had enjoyed a guided tour of the sloping streets of Ořechovka. His eye was caught

64) Karel Polívka and Vlastimil Brožek, 'Spořilov,' *Architekt SIA*, 27, 1928, 179–187.

**Figure 12:** Vlastimil Brožek and Karel Polívka, Garden City Prague – Spořilov, 1925-1928.
Source: *Architekt SIA*, 27, 1928.

not only by the modern architecture but, from his English point of view, by the stratified social division of the occupants. Upon arrival to the UK, he approvingly reported with deep affection in the British media that 'The President of the Parliament lives in one of the houses, surrounded by civil servants of all grades. ...'.[65] Yet, the positive impression skipped over any issues concerning the fact that the actual nationality of the residents was predominantly Czech. Ořechovka was commissioned by the Czechoslovak government for its employees who were principally Czech, as well as the architects of the new district.

Only one year before Henry Chapman's visit, in 1923, another prominent visitor from Britain arrived in Prague: renowned architect, town planner, and architect of the first garden city Letchworth, Raymond Unwin. On the occasion of this, the town planning department of Prague, the State Regulatory Commission, arranged a special presentation of the local urban plans.[66] In his welcome speech, the president of the Commission, Eustach Mölzer felt the need to emphasize the fact that 'The plan to ensure Greater Prague's successful future development was hampered by the consequences of the 300-year subjugation of the Czechoslovak people, which did not allow for the construction of the towns to develop

65) Henry Chapman, 'Old Prague and Developments in Czecho-Slovakia', *Garden Cities &Town Planning. A Journal of Housing Town Planning & Civic Improvement*, 14:7, 1924, 150–153.

66) *Státní regulační komise pro hlavní město Prahu s okolím* [State regulatory commission for the capital city of Prague and its environs].

politically, socially and hygienically.'[67] No doubt, Unwin must have been confused by this Czech animosity towards Germans for, given the extensive cultural transfer involved, the garden city movement broke the established hostility between the Czechs and German-speakers living in the Czech lands.

Unwin was welcomed with the highest honours by all sections of the garden city movement in Prague. Like many other artists and intellectuals, he was invited by President Masaryk to his official residence at Lány castle for lunch.[68] The Czech Society of Architects conferred honorary membership of their Society on him, and he also gave a lecture on garden cities and town planning to a large audience at the Philosophical Faculty of Charles University.[69] To the great astonishment of the Czech architects, Unwin's personality and expertise was able to bridge the tensions between local architects of both nationalities based in Prague, Czech and German, at least for that one evening.[70] At a farewell dinner given by the Czech Society of Architects, they were able to discuss the urban issues of the day without any inter-ethnic tension. Nevertheless, the Czech architectural media and daily press omitted any mention of the fact that The German University in Prague had conferred an honorary degree of Doctor of Technology upon Unwin or that the German League of Nations in the Czechoslovak Republic (Deutscher Völkerbundliga in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik) had held a welcome evening for him at the German House.[71] It certainly was no accident that the pacifist Unwin presented his ideas on nationality to the German audience.

Yet, the positive impact of Unwin's visit emphasises the fact that in housing issues and in the garden cities in particular, Czech architects did not hesitate to recognize certain outcomes that were achieved in this field in Germany. In this sense, the rather positive evaluation of housing reform in Germany provides a straightforward model that was studied, acknowledged, and emulated in the pre-war period in the Czech lands. However, with the radical shift in political power after Czechoslovakia was founded, the local Germans residing in Czechoslovakia were excluded not only from the government for a long time but also from any participation in architectural production representing the state, as a gesture of historical satisfaction applied by the local authorities, who were predominantly Czech.[72]

67) 'Raymond Unwin in der Staatlichen Regulierungskommission', *Prager Presse*, 3: 145, May 1923, 2: 'Der Plan, der Groß-Prag eine ersprießliche Entwicklung in der Zukunft sichern soll, sei durch die Folgen der 300jährigen Unterjochung des tschechoslowakischen Volkes erschwert, die es nicht zustießen, dass sich der Bau der Städte in politischer, sozialer und hygienischer Hinsicht so entwickeln konnte.'

68) 'Mr. Raymond Unwin's Visit to Prague', *Garden Cities & Town Planning*, 13: 6, 1923, 118–119.

69) Raymond Unwin, 'Stavba měst' [Town planning], *Styl*, 9, 1923–1924, 79–91.

70) 'Architekt Raymond Unwin do Prahy', *Národní listy*, 63: 119, 1923, 1; Zs, 'Přednáška architekta Raymonda Unwina', *Národní listy*, 63: 145, 1923, 4; 'Architekt Raymond Unwin,' *Lidové noviny*, 31: 268, 1923, 5; 'Anglický architekt Raymond Unwin,' *Lidové noviny*, 31: 266, 1923, 5; 'Architekt Raymond Unwin,' *Národní politika*, 41: 130, 1923, 10; 'Raymond Unwin v Praze', *Styl*, 9, 1923–1924, 22; 'Návštěva arch. R. Unwina v Praze', *Styl*, 9, 1923–1924, 73–74.

71) 'Mr. Unwin in Prag', *Deutsche Zeitung Bohemia*, 96: 116, 1923, 5; 'Mr. Unwin in Prag', *Reichenberger Zeitung*, 64: 116, 1923, 6.

72) Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia. The State that Failed*, London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, 48–49.

## The Institute for Town Planning at the Masaryk Academy of Labour

The historical triumph of the founding of Czechoslovakia linked some Czech architects and reformers with the idea of building Masaryk City at White Mountain in 1920, yet this pioneering vision only got as far as launching a largescale campaign in favour of garden cities, without the project ever materializing. Two years later, in order to achieve a more pertinent platform for the dissemination of the concept of garden cities, some of the Czech garden city sympathisers led by the architects Vilém Dvořák (1886–1937), Vladimír Zákrejs (1880–1948), and Otakar Fierlinger (1888–1941) founded the Institute for Town Planning at the Masaryk Academy of Labour (Ústav pro stavbu měst při Masarykově akademii práce).[73] The Academy bearing the name of the Czechoslovak president aimed at implementing technical expertise into industry, business, and everyday life.[74] The singular attribute of the Academy was a consulting service provided by experts. In the case of the Institute for Town Planning, the architects dedicated their time and knowledge to correcting and envisioning new urban developments for particular towns.

A key objective of the expert department was to spread the latest expertise on town planning in Czechoslovakia. The newly emerging field had no independent base and one of the objectives listed in the official programme of the Institute, was to build garden cities.[75] Significantly, the Institute was joined by several supporters of the scheme who had promoted the establishment of garden cities in the vicinity of Prague already before the war, and who continued to advocate the same vision also in the 1920s.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Institute was joined by many high-profile architects, technical experts, and influential members of the public administration. In its initial stages, members of the Institute became active members of The International Federation of Housing and Town Planning. One of the most active professionals of the Institute was Otakar Fierlinger, a prolific author, garden architect, landscape specialist and urban planner.[76] Having studied in Vienna, at Harvard University and Ann Arbor in Michigan he had a broad-based international education. Thanks to his language skills and broad expertise, Fierlinger represented the Institute at many international conferences. After Czechoslovakia was founded, he was appointed to the Ministry of Public Works where he became the head of the Department of Urban Planning in the 1930s. By then, the Great Depression had hit Czechoslovakia hard and the authorities were trying to cope with desperately high rates of unemployment.

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73) Pavel Kodera, 'Ústav pro stavbu měst při Masarykově akademii práce' [Institute for Town Planning at the Masaryk Academy of Labour], in: *Instituce, osobnosti, ideje a struktura vědy v českých zemích* [Institutions, persons, ideas and the structure of science in the Czech lands], Prague: Archive of the Czech Academy of Sciences, 2007, 243–261.

74) Emilie Těšínská and Jindřich Schwippel, 'Masarykova akademie práce' [The Masaryk academy of labour], in: Alena Míšková, Martin Franc, and Antonín Kostlán, eds., *Bohemia docta. K historickým kořenům vědy v českých zemích* [Bohemia docta. On the historical roots of science in the Czech lands], Prague: Academia 2010, 286–318.

75) 'Ústav pro stavbu měst při Masarykově Akademii práce v Praze' [The institute of town planning of the Masaryk academy of labour in Prague], in: Otakar Fierlinger, *Nutnost péče o výstavbu obcí venkovských* [The need to care for the building of rural settlements] Prague: The Institute of Town Planning of the Masaryk Academy of Labour, 1923, unpaginated.

76) Otakar Fierlinger was also brother of Zdeněk Fierlinger, leader of the Social-Democrats who joined the party with the Communist Party.

As a proper solution to the housing crisis, the Ministry of Public Works aimed at constructing districts for unemployed workers and their families outside of Prague.[77] Every family was to receive a simple detached house with a small garden in newly established satellite towns. But neither aesthetics nor urban planning were the leading principles. The objective of the political representation was twofold: The scheme was meant not only to provide housing but also a significant means of supporting the diet of families in need. Daily work at the private allotments was to replace the jobs lost in the factories.

In the case of workers' colonies, the new dwellings might have provided a higher standard of living for the unprivileged classes in comparison to the existing city slums but at the price of total spatial and social segregation. Furthermore, affordable housing of this kind would be affected by the lack of infrastructure, services, schools and medical care, not to mention the transport connections to towns. Had the developments been eventually completed, the families living there would have been able to practice farming and agriculture, but it would have been highly unfeasible to commute to industrial centres, if jobs reappeared. As a consequence, the overtly paternalistic goal would have provided attractive accommodation, but at the price of total subordination to the limits of the newly conceived settlement.

In 1933, Otakar Fierlinger discussed the idea of the workers' colonies in public at a national conference of architects that took place in Brno. Fierlinger's bold proposal received a negative response immediately from the audience and provoked Karel Teige to articulate an opposing attitude in the pamphlet *Garden Cities of the Unemployed*.[78] Teige, a respected author and representative of overtly leftist positions in the Czech art world, regarded the official intention as clearly dubious. First, he rejected its origins in English garden cities. In general, the leftist avant-garde distanced itself from the garden city movement due to the latter's exclusive focus on the middle class and its housing concerns, neglecting the unprivileged working class. This was in fact a false interpretation of Ebenezer Howard's objectives, but it was characteristic of how leftists interpreted his ideas.

Second, he compared these settlements to urban planning ideas in fascist Italy and Germany, specifically, the promotion of so-called *Stadtrandsiedlungen*; moving workers to such developments, Teige claimed, chained them to the soil.[79] In fact, the National Socialist new garden suburbs stood in direct contradiction to the socialist roots of the garden cities movement. The key difference between their urban plans is embedded in the simple distinction of the particular models informing both schemes in their response to modern society. While the National Socialist settlements were to emulate a traditional village, the English reform vision intended to improve an existing urban model by fusing it with nature not by upgrading to a village.[80]

Though there were rehousing initiatives in Germany, Italy, and Austria, Teige's simplifying comparison missed the point. Rather than comparing Fierlinger's aim to *Stadtrandsiedlungen* in Germany, he would have found a more appropriate parallel in the settlement move-

77) 'Anketa o sídlištích na obvodu měst' [Questionnaire on the settlements on city outskirts], *Stavba*, 11, 1932–1933, 143–144.

78) Karel Teige, *Zahradní města nezaměstnaných* [The garden cities of the unemployed], Prague: Levá fronta, 1933.

79) Ibid., 6.

80) Gerhard Fehl, 'The Nazi Garden City', in: Stephen V. Ward, ed., *The Garden City. Past, Present and Future*, London: E & F N Spon 1992, 88–106.

ment called *Gartensiedlungen* in Austria, which was promoted by Gustav Scheu, a follower of Ebenezer Howard. Scheu, a committed proponent of the common ownership of land and communities based on co-operative principles, was appointed as a municipal advisor on housing matters in the social democrats' Red Vienna in 1919.[81] Scheu, upon entering the office, designated his close friend and the architect of his family house in Hietzing, Adolf Loos, as the chief architect of the Housing Office (*Siedlungsamt*). Teige, blinded by the very limits of his leftist ideology, omitted the preceding example from his critical assessment although he must have been familiar with Loos's reform initiative as he acknowledged the architect's work in general.

No matter what the origin of the envisioned workers' colonies was, the experts gathered at the Institute for Town Planning and at the Ministry of Public Works conceived a plan that would significantly contribute to the social segregation of the communities. What the newly established settlements would facilitate, however, was the sort of improvement from above believed necessary by the Masaryk Academy of Labour to secure a technically based promotion of society to survive the crisis and to pledge for a better future. The plans were eventually never adopted in any colony and the ideas survived only in the expert discourse.

## Conclusion

The climax of the garden cities movement in the Czech lands spans the first four decades of the twentieth century, yet the English scheme was transformed several times and shifted to an altered reading. Eventually, despite numerous private and public initiatives, the garden city idea was never implemented in the Czech lands in its totality. The actual meaning of the garden city was usually lost in very ambiguous appropriations of Howard's concept and subsequently translated into various local versions. Then, the history of the garden city movement performs a series of highly speculative approaches to the English utopian vision.

In addition to that, there is a parallel story to the garden city movement in the Czech lands. In the historical lands of the Bohemian crown there was a lasting national conflict between the Czechs and Germans and this permanent struggle is indeed reflected in the translation of the garden city scheme but with a shifting assessment. The German campaigning in favour of garden cities and the early examples of built settlements were praised by the Czech professionals before the war and suppressed in its aftermath. In brief, the political situation in Central Europe was reflected here in the attitude toward the garden city movement pioneered in Germany.

81) Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919–1934*, Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1999, 91–110.

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# Lajos Vajda and the Russian Idea of Universalism

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## Abstract

This study focuses on the problem of interpreting Lajos Vajda's *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward* (1936) while attempting to rethink the artist's relationship to the ideas of Russian religious philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948). In one of his letters dedicated to Júlia Richter, his future wife, Vajda wrote that Berdyaev's book entitled *The New Middle Ages* had greatly influenced his thinking. Through it, he became acquainted with the notion of universalism – the synthesis between East and West as part of a critique of Western individualism and positivism – which would gain in popularity in the early twentieth century. Based on the proximity between the dates of the letter and the time that Vajda formulated his so-called 'Szentendre Programme,' this article argues that the establishment of the Programme was directly influenced by Berdyaev's thinking. Consequently, it suggests that *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward* can be read as a summary of Vajda's thoughts on culture as renewable through the synthesis of 'two types of European man.' From this perspective, Vajda's criticism of Western individualism leads to a re-thinking of his relationship both to European modernism and to conservative artistic and cultural ideas. This article connects all these broader questions to the interpretation of *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward*, offering new directions in research into this enigmatic key work and masterpiece.

## Keywords

Lajos Vajda; icons; Nikolai Berdyaev; Szentendre; universalism; Russian philosophy

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# Lajos Vajda and the Russian Idea of Universalism

**Lili Boros**

## Introduction

In 2018, the Ferenczy Museum Centre in Szentendre, Hungary, organized an exhibition on the interwar artist Lajos Vajda (1908–1941) with the title *Between Worlds: The Life and Art of Lajos Vajda*.[1] It was the work of a research group that had been formed in 2016, including, among others, the Hungarian art historians Krisztina Passuth, Gábor Pataki and the author of this article. As a member of that group and of the museum staff, I began to research the problem posed by the interpretation of his painting *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward* (1936) (Figure 1) which led me to rethink the artist's relationship to the ideas of Russian religious philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948). This article is based on a study published originally in Hungarian in the catalogue of the mentioned exhibition.[2] It is already known that Vajda was interested in the writings of Berdyaev, but this article expands the existing tradition of scholarship in order to incorporate new points of view and to connect Berdyaev's influence – supportable by written documents – to the problems of interpretation associated with this specific painting, one of the most prominent works of Vajda's oeuvre. In particular, it goes beyond merely registering the *fact* of Berdyaev's influence and engages in a closer reading both of the painting and of Berdyaev's writings including, but not limited to, his major work *The New Middle Ages* (1924).

A very broad range of artists and art historians agree that Lajos Vajda was one of the most important Hungarian visual artists of the 1930s, but it is notable that he was unable to garner fame or recognition while alive. For the most part, his work only became influential following the Second World War thanks to the short-lived (1945–48) art group known as the European School (Európai iskola). He registered at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in 1927, but without ever completing his studies, he first joined the left-wing creative community known as the Munka ('Work') circle in 1928, which had formed around Lajos Kassák, and then moved to Paris in 1930. After three and a half years spent there, he returned to Hungary in 1934 where he became involved in a right-wing creative milieu with Christian leanings. Together with his friend the painter Dezső Korniss (1908–1984), he formulated the so-called 'Szentendre Programme.' As part of the Programme – which he formulated in a letter to his future wife, Júlia, on 11 August 1936, and which will be referred to later – he and Korniss set out to collect sacred, architectural and everyday motifs from Szentendre, a former Serbian trading town

1) György Petőcz and Noémi Szabó, eds, *Vajda Lajos. Világok között* [Lajos Vajda: Between Worlds], Szentendre: Ferenczy Museum Centre, 2018.

2) Lili Boros, 'Vajda és Bergyajev' [Vajda and Berdyaev], in Petőcz and Szabó, eds, *Vajda Lajos. Világok között*, 226–233.

**Figure 1:** Lajos Vajda, *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward*, 1936. Pastel on paper, 90 x 62 cm. Kovács Gábor Art Foundation. Source: Wikimedia commons.

on the Danube bank just north of Budapest, and its environs. The significance of this Serbian connection will become apparent later.

In the Programme Vajda and Korniss sought a path to modernity through the reinterpretation and mobilisation of tradition. There are obvious parallels here with the rejuvenation of European folk music that the Hungarian composers and collectors of folk music Béla Bartók (1881–1945) and Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) undertook at the same time, seeking out and recording performances of folk music by rural musicians. Vajda thus took motifs from the original environment where they were discovered and superimposed them – in a similar fashion to the montage method popular in Paris at the time – in a transparent compositional system based on line drawing, so that he could explore their meanings in a new context. During the period between 1936 and 1937, the artist increasingly employed iconographic elements from Western and Eastern Christian visual culture, usually combined with other – sometimes Jewish – motifs, even in his transparent line drawings such as *Madonna Torso with Jewish Egg Motif* (1936). The 'icon' works from this period followed a reductive mode of representation, conceived in the Byzantine and orthodox spirit, of which *Icon Self-Portrait* (1936) (Figure 2) is a clear example. *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward* combines Vajda's transparent line drawings with his interest in the art of icons. It is the crowning achievement of this period, a significant work from his oeuvre that represents the fullest synthesis of his ideas at that time. It is also an enigmatic painting, which has made it one of the most analysed images in Hungarian art history.

Vajda drew on a number of literary sources, but it was the work of Nikolai Berdyaev above all that was most important for him. The influence of, in particular, Berdyaev's book *The New Middle Ages* (1924) on Vajda's thought and work is well attested and is more than a mere hypothesis; in one of his letters, Vajda himself emphasised its importance.[3] In addition, if we approach *The New Middle Ages* alongside the thought of another notable Russian thinker, the philosopher and theologian Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900), we can see how specific philosophical and artistic ideas that were widespread in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made their way into Vajda's art. Having explored this broad conceptual background, we can then consider how Vajda's *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward* (1936) can be interpreted in light of the idea, expressed by Berdyaev, of the decline of Western culture, which he combined with a belief in the creation of a new (cultural) European unity, based on a synthesis of East and West.

*Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward* can thus be seen as a summation of Berdyaev's view of the fall of Western culture and a synthesis of the East and the West. The triadic character of the figure, with a third form emerging out of the synthesis of the 'realistic' and 'abstract' portraits, can also be viewed as a presentation of the 'Szentendre Programme's call for a culture created anew from such the duality of East and West and out of the unification of the 'two different types of European human being.'[4]

It would be erroneous, however, to emphasize Berdyaev's influence alone, as works connected to the icon period in Vajda's career also indicate he had interest in, and familiarity with, the

3) Vera Jakovits and Gyula Kozák, eds, *Vajda Lajos levelei feleségéhez, Vajda Júliához, 1936–1941* [Lajos Vajda's Letters to His Wife, Júlia Vajda, 1936–1941], Szentendre: Erdész Galéria, 1996, 26, 28.

4) Vajda, Letter to his wife, 11 August 1936 in Vera Jakovits and Gyula Kozák, eds, *Vajda Lajos levelei feleségéhez*, 36.

**Figure 2:** Lajos Vajda, *Icon Self-Portrait*, 1936. Pastel on paper, 90 x 60 cm.
Szentendre: Ferenczy Museum Centre.

theoretical works of the philosophers Martin Buber (1878–1965) and Ferdinand Ebner (1882–1931). Vajda's work was also shaped by a number of Hungarian influences, including the ideas of his friend Lajos Szabó (1902–1967), a philosopher and founder of the Budapest Dialogical School, and Béla Tábor (1907–1992), Szabó's friend, colleague, and co-author of the book *Indictment Against the Spirit* (1936).[5] These latter connections are well known and documented in the literature on Vajda. Nevertheless, it is the figure and thoughts of Berdyaev that are of crucial significance; bringing him into the discussion expands the tradition of interpretation and helps address problems of understanding raised by *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward*.[6]

## Vajda and Berdyaev

In September 1936, Lajos Vajda wrote: 'One person, culture or civilisation fertilises the other – this is the law of life.'[7] The 'Szentendre Programme' he and Korniss formulated was a result of this same belief in the interconnections between cultures coupled with a dualistic view of East and West:

> I, from the West, culturally tend toward Russia and Serbia (in other words, toward the East). Korniss, however, who comes from the East, is oriented toward France and the Netherlands (where he lived for a while as a child). From all this, it is evidently clear that our endeavours are aimed at establishing a Central and Eastern European art – with influences from the two great European centres of culture, the French and the Russian. The (geographical) position of Hungary in Europe is such that it is predestined to connect the West (French) and the East (Russian): we wish to fuse back together that which, at these two poles, culturally (in art) signifies the expression of the *two different types of European human being* [my emphasis – L. B.]. We wish to be the builders of bridges: Hungary forms a bridge between East and West, North and South.[8]

5) The philosopher Lajos Szabó travelled to Paris. Upon meeting Vajda there he recognised in him a 'kindred spirited innovator.' Szabó and Béla Tábor were advocates of dialogic thinking in keeping with the formulations of Martin Buber and Ferdinand Ebner. Zsolt K. Horváth, 'Szubkultúrák forrásvidékén' [In the Headwaters of Subcultures], *Fordulat*, 7, 2009, 58–59. Cf. Stefánia Mándy, *Vajda Lajos* [Lajos Vajda], Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1983, 173. Much of the intellectual milieu in the Hungary of the interwar period was defined, especially in the 1920s, by an outlook based on Oswald Spengler's philosophy, which emphasised the crisis of European culture. On this, see György Petőcz's interpretation in Krisztina Passuth and György Petőcz, *Ki a katakombából* [Out of the Catacomb], Budapest: Noran Libro, 2016, 185–192.

6) Vajda's painting has also been described as having a 'polyphonic' and 'dialogical' character, which also provides a key to its interpretation and resolves the decades-long debate surrounding its meaning. The connection between Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and polyphony – which he developed based on his reading Dostoyevsky – and Lajos Vajda's oeuvre has been explored in particular by Stefánia Mándy. See Mándy, *Vajda Lajos*, 123. In the literature on Vajda this train of thought was not picked up again, however, although works by Dostoyevsky, such as *The Idiot* and *The House of the Dead*, can also be found in the reading list Vajda compiled. The reading list is published in Judit Radák, *Vajda Lajos Pepita füzetei* [Lajos Vajda's Chequered Notebooks], Budapest: Loránd Eötvös University PhD Dissertation, 2013, 158.

7) Lajos Vajda, Letter to Júlia of 3 September 1936, in Vera Jakovits and Gyula Kozák, eds, *Vajda Lajos levelei feleségéhez*, 46. All of the quotations from these letters published in this article were translated from Hungarian to English by Zsófia Rudnay.

8) Lajos Vajda, Letter to Júlia of 11 August 1936, in Jakovits and Kozák, eds, *Vajda Lajos levelei feleségéhez*, 36.

This idea was clearly illustrated by a 'map,' found in the same letter, written in August of 1936. To Vajda, European unity was, first and foremost, a question not of the philosophy of religion, but of art, leading directly to the (millennia-old) problematic of the representability of divine and human essence.

This paradigm of a dichotomy was borrowed from Berdyaev and had its antecedents in the traditions of Russian philosophy and literature: the idea of Western individualism versus the Russian principle of collectivism, of 'artificial' Western society versus and 'natural' Russian society, originated in the eighteenth century and came to a climax in the disputes between Westernisers and Slavophiles in the 19thcentury. Based on the material Lajos Vajda is known to have been reading, it was not only through the work of Berdyaev that he encountered this conception; he most likely also this came across it in his reading of the literary works of Russian authors such as Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), Nikolai Chernyshevsky (1828–1889), Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852) and Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881), as well as the philosophical writings of Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900).[9]

The titles of books by Solovyov and Berdyaev were recorded in the small-format *Chequered Notebook*, which he began using between 1936 and 1938.[10] Indeed, he listed six titles from the German edition of the 1920s of Solovyov's writings, including *The Meaning of Love*, *The Meaning of the War* and *The Spiritual Basis of Life*.[11] In spite of this fact, we find no references to Solovyov in scholarship on Vajda – even though the idea of (Christian) universalism is first and foremost linked to him, and was only made current by Nikolai Berdyaev a good twenty years later. On the other hand, given that Solovyov is not mentioned in any of Vajda's letters, we have no reason to doubt that Berdyaev was indeed of more significance to Vajda, who most probably learned about Solovyov and his works through Berdyaev's writings.

It is almost certain that Vajda read Berdyaev's *The New Middle Ages* in Hungarian since, in the reading list he compiled, it is the Hungarian edition that is listed (Figure 3).[12] It has been confirmed by Vajda's biographer, Stefánia Mándy, that around 1936 he picked up 'probably the only Berdyaev work that had been translated to Hungarian, *The New Middle Ages*. Published in Hungarian in 1934, in its own day, the book must have, in certain respects, given the impression of a utopia of the religious spirit.'[13] We know from the correspondence between Vajda and his wife Júlia, as well as from the biographical notes of Júlia, that the artist was introduced to Berdyaev's writing by the philosopher Lajos Szabó (1902–1967). As Júlia stated: 'He had met Lajos Szabó in Paris, in 1933. (…) at the same time, he was an avid reader and was greatly influenced by Berdyaev's philosophy, among others. He fully believed that we were on the brink of "the new middle ages"; that the world and humanity could only

9) Radák, *Vajda Lajos Pepita füzetei*, 18.

10) Ibid, 30.

11) Vajda listed the following titles: *Die nationale Frage im Lichte der Sittlichkeit* (1920), *Der Sinn des Krieges* (1920), *Drei Reden zum Andenken Dostojevskij gewidmet* (1921), *Die geistlichen Grundlagen des Lebens* (1922); *Geschichts-Philosophie* (1928), *Der Sinn der Liebe* (1930). See Radák, *Vajda Lajos Pepita füzetei*, 156.

12) Vajda's bibliography contains this edition, as well as Berdyaev's *Der Sinn der Geschichte,* published in Darmstadt in 1925. Radák, *Vajda Lajos Pepita füzetei*, 156.

13) Mándy, *Vajda Lajos*, 77.

be saved by a great religious rejuvenation.'[14] In a letter written to Júlia when still his financée Vajda noted: 'the era of secular monkhood has once again arrived. (Berdyaev, too, says this, only he gives it a deeper and more beautiful articulation in his book *The New Middle Ages*, which Szabó has lent to me.)'[15] He added: 'We had many discussions about Berdyaev (Russian emigrant philosopher of religion), in whom we are both equally interested.'[16] At this point, Vajda was interested in cultures where he felt a sense of community – that is to say the force to create form (he noted, for example, 'I seek to unveil the secret, abstract essence of things').[17]

For Vajda the desire for spiritual community signified not only an interest in the disappearing world of rural existence, but also a commitment to icon painting, which manifested itself primarily in structural composition, form and colour, 'and especially in the sense of nostalgia for the way of life that underlay, and gave rise to, them,' as Endre Bálint has put it.[18] The religious commitment underpinning this is clear: in 1943 his wife Júlia wrote: 'During his icon period, he fantasised about placing his works on the wall, like on an iconostasis.'[19] He saw Malevich, Kandinsky, Klee and Picasso, too, as representatives of the same collective ideal, and also viewed the Bauhaus in this light. To quote Júlia on Vajda: 'I feel it's pointless arguing with him; to him, the workings of the Bauhaus evidenced a purity of aspiration – beyond appreciating it for its revolutionary novelty, he saw it as a manifestation of the collective spirit. He sought the spirit of collectivity in everything – the signs of a religion newly forming in our era.'[20]

Paris seems to have been central to Vajda's adoption of such spiritualist ideas. Berdyaev was living in the city at the same time that Szabó and Vajda were in the city. There he was occupied editing works and periodicals on the philosophy of religion. We have no information as to whether Szabó or Vajda met Berdyaev personally, but one might speculate that this may have happened and may be one of the reasons for the painter's later interest in the philosopher. It is also possible that it was there, too, that Vajda encountered the periodical *Put'* [Path], which was edited by Berdyaev and published in Paris.

Nikolai Berdyaev was one of the most significant representatives of Russian Christian existentialist philosophy. After being forced to leave his home country in 1922, he moved first to Berlin, and then, in 1923, to Paris, where he became a prominent figure in emigré circles. His dualistic theory was deeply rooted in the traditions of Russian thinking about cultural history, where a dichotomised view of culture and history was brought to the foreground, partly in response to the reforms introduced by Peter the Great (1682–1725). This dichotomy manifested itself in the oppositions between the foreign and the native, and the urban and

14) Júlia Vajda's biographical notes about Lajos Vajda, quoted by Stefánia Mándy, *Vajda Lajos*, 172. Cf. Júlia Vajda's note (p. 172): 'While I was a Marxist, he talked about the coming of a new middle ages. At some point, he, too, had been a Socialist, but now he believed in the realisation of the collective idea through religious renewal. (...) He looked for the collective spirit in everything, the signs of a new religion forming in our era.'

15) Letter to Júlia, Summer 1936, in Jakovits and Kozák, eds, *Vajda Lajos levelei feleségéhez*, 26.

16) Letter to Júlia, 9 June 1936, in Jakovits and Kozák, eds, *Vajda Lajos levelei feleségéhez*, 28.

17) Letter to Júlia, 23 July 1936, in Jakovits and Kozák, eds, *Vajda Lajos levelei feleségéhez*, 31.

18) Endre Bálint, *A remény négyfelé szakadt. Válogatott írások* [Hope was Torn into Four: Selected Writings], ed., Katalin Mezey, Budapest: Széphalom Könyvműhely, 2015, 147.

19) Notes on Lajos Vajda, written by Júlia Vajda in 1943, is published in Stefánia Mándy, *Vajda Lajos*, 172.

20) Júlia Vajda, *Jegyzetek Kállai Ernőnek Vajda Lajosról* [Notes on Lajos Vajda to Ernő Kállai]. Unpublished notebook. The notebook is currently in a private collection.

the rural, as well as in a critique of the mechanical adoption of Western cultural values and practices.[21] Notions associated with the belief that Russia had a religious mission, coupled with criticism of European society, also originated in the eighteenth century. The critique of Western positivism was already discussed in one of Solovyov's early works, *The Crisis of Western Philosophy*, first published in 1874.[22] He believed that an atheistic civilisation alienated from God could only restore its faith in humanity through the unifying culture of Christianity. The fundamental principle of his philosophy was *pan-unity* (vseyedinstvo), which he outlined in his *Lectures on Divine Humanity* (1877–1881), and which was closely linked to the Slavophiles' principle of *congregation* (sobornost).[23] 'Congregation' signifies more than a mere gathering together of a group of people; the *sobor* is a sacred spiritual community, which represents the unity of the faithful who are devoted to the body of Christ. This principle also appeared in Berdyaev's philosophy as the opposite of the Western notion of individualism: 'the Church is the cosmos christologised,' he argued, 'sobornost represents the opposite of both Catholic authoritarianism and Protestant individualism.'[24]

Berdyaev's book *The New Middle Ages* was first published in Russian in Berlin in 1924.[25] It was quickly translated into French and German in 1927 and then, in 1935, into Hungarian; the symbols of sickle, hammer and cross which appear on the cover page of the Hungarian edition are worth noting (Figure 3).[26]

The 'new Middle Ages' referred to in the title constitutes a way out of world crisis – that is to say, the exhaustion of nineteenth-century culture as heir to the legacy of ancient civilisation.[27] For Berdyaev, the industrial capitalism of the modern age was individualistic and atomistic and the idea of universalism had lost its significance. In this paradigm of Eurasian cultural history, a universalism that realises Christian unity would overcome national character; people were to embody the idea of *homo universalis*.[28] The task of realising this unification

21) The exploration of the traditions of Russian cultural history, fine arts, philosophy of religion, and fine literature, including Dostoyevsky's poetry and Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, in Vajda's oeuvre has been most comprehensively worked out – and emphasised in its significance – by Stefánia Mándy. See Mándy, *Vajda Lajos,* 85–86 and 122–124. This is not exactly surprising since, as a translator of literary works, Mándy had an excellent grasp of Russian. In addition to Poltoratsky and Krylov, she also translated Viktor N. Lazarev's *Studies in Byzantine Painting* into Hungarian, together with Béla Tábor. See Viktor Lazarev, *Bizánci festészet* [Byzantine Painting], trans. Béla Tábor and Stefánia T. Mándy, Budapest: Magyar Helikon, 1979.

22) Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov, *The Crisis of Western Philosophy: Against the Positivists*, trans. Boris Jakim, Hudson, N.Y. : Lindisfarne Press, 1996. The text was his Master's thesis and was first published as *Кризис западной философии*, St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg University Press, 1874.

23) Zoltán Hajnády, *Sophia és Logosz. Az orosz kultúra paradigmatikus-szintagmatikus rendszere* [Sophia and Logos. Paradigmatic-Syntagmatic Structure of Russian Culture], Debrecen: Kossuth University Press, 2002, 184.

24) In his work entitled *The Meaning of History,* Berdyaev describes 'sobornost' not as collectivism, but as an experiment in creating that which is new and the organic. Quoted in Zoltán Hajnády, *Sophia és Logosz*, 185.

25) Published as *Новое средневековье: Размышление о судьбе России*, Berlin: Obelisk, 1924.

26) Nikolai Berdiaeff, *Un nouveau moyen âge: réflexions sur les destinées de la Russie et de l'Europe*, trans. A. M. F., Paris: Plon, 1927; Nikolai Berdjajew, *Das neue Mittelalter: Betrachtungen über das Schicksal Russlands und Europas*, trans. Alexander Kresling, Darmstadt: Reichl, 1927. Berdyaev's book was published in Hungarian as *Az uj középkor: Szemlélődések Oroszország és Európa sorsán* [The New Middle Ages: Pondering the Fate of Russia and Europe] and included three studies: 'Az uj középkor,' 'Az orosz forradalom,' 'Demokrácia, szocializmus, theokrácia' [The New Middle Ages; The Russian Revolution; and Democracy, Socialism, Theocracy]. Nyikolaj Bergyajev, *Az uj középkor*, trans. János Lotz and Géza Sebestyén, Budapest: Pro Christo Diákszövetség Szövétnek Kiadóhivatala, 1935.

27) Nyikolaj Bergyajev, *Az uj középkor* [The New Middle Ages], 13.

28) Ibid., 34.

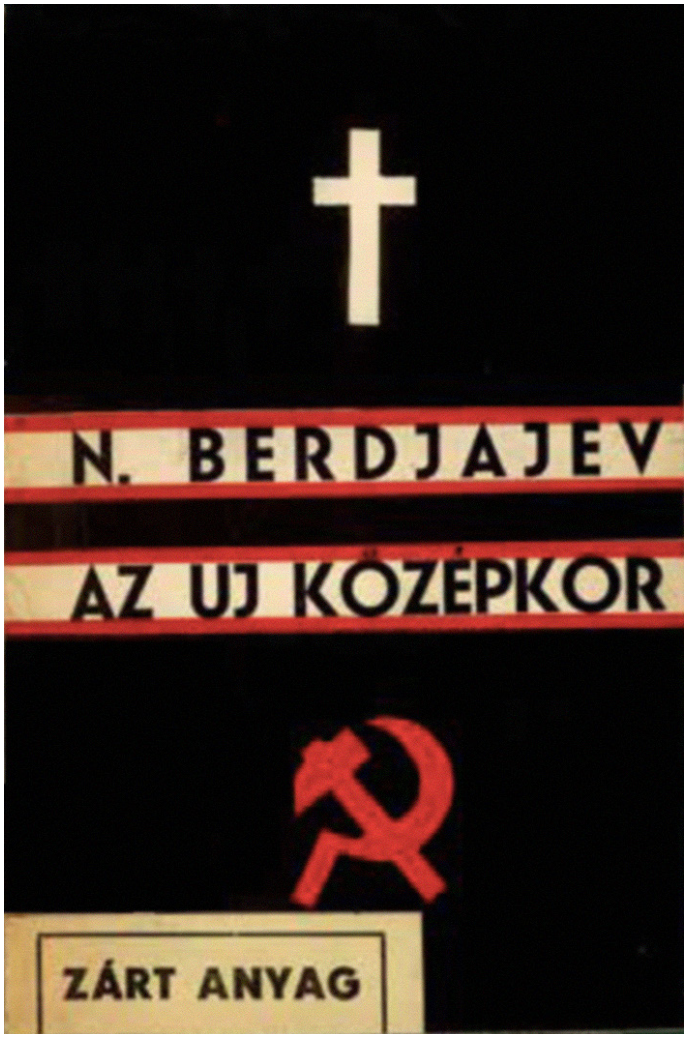


**Figure 3:** Cover of Nikolai Berdyaev's book *The New Middle Ages*, 1935. Budapest: National Széchényi Library.

of the world fell to the Russian people, however, as the Russian soul stood closest to the pan-human and to universalism. As Berdyaev argued in his text *The Fate of Russia* (published in 1918, six years before *The New Middle Ages*), in medieval times Europe lived in a unified religious spirit, but then this organic unity based on tradition and religious principles had been lost with the rise of humanism, and especially the Protestant Reformation.[29] This view of Russian culture set in opposition to that of Western Europe was rooted in the Slavophilic tradition. Berdyaev, however, spoke not of the superiority of Eastern culture, but of a culture that integrated the East and the West, with Russia playing a privileged role in making this a reality.[30]

29) Berdyaev, *Судьба России (Опыты по психологии войны и национальности)*, Moscow: Leman and Sakharov, 1918.

30) In spite of the fact that he builds on the traditions of Slavophilic and Western Enlightenment thinking, he rejects both, while the Eurasian ideal of unifying the cultures of the East and the West, shared by both groups – does appear

This system of thought, and especially the principles of 'sobornost' and homo universalis, may be connected to Vajda's so-called icon period of the 1930s, as well as to his self-portraits created between 1934 and 1937. An additional important element was Berdyaev's idea of *theurgy*, exploring the relationship of people to each another and to the gods. Artists are meant to facilitate the *divination* of the human being – that is to say, the artist is the one who shapes that which is divine into something human and that which is human into the divine.[31] Berdyaev writes: 'This deification or *theosis*, which is a fundamental characteristic of Pravoslavian mysticism, is neither a monistic identification with God, nor a humbling of the human being and the created world. Theosis renders human beings divine, while still maintaining their human nature.'[32]

Vajda's human- and self-representation related to the abstract approach and visual language of icon painting in that it conveyed the idea of the individual person dissolving into the community – *homo universalis*. The visual language of icons was, for him, a new context, a closed intellectual construct that gave forms a new kind of symbolic value.[33] For Anikó Faludy, who sees the formal characteristics and compositional structure of icons not only in the works of the artist's icon period, but also in his Paris montages, Vajda endeavoured, like medieval artists, to render tangible that which is intangible, or, to put it differently, to *represent the unpresentable*.[34] During his icon period, as Gábor Pataki points out, the artist was preoccupied with the 'representability of the divine image.'[35]

If we consider the history of research centred on Vajda, Gábor Pataki and György Petőcz have both not only emphasised Berdyaev's influence, but also make his thoughts an integral part of the interpretation of *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward*.[36] The scale of this study does not allow for extended discussion of the history of research into this work. Here, I can only refer to those interpretations that touch on – or at least bring up the possibility of – readings that stress the importance of Berdyaev, although these interpretations are based not on *The New Middle Ages*, but on other texts by the philosopher (for instance: his book on Communism titled *The Meaning of History,* which can also be found in Vajda's reading list, has served as an important source).[37] Pataki identifies the third face in the painting – born of the constellation of the 'realistic' (human) and 'iconic' (divine) figures – as the God-Man or Theanthropos, ultimately connecting it to an iconography that is closer in type to Christ Emmanuel, than to Christ

in his writing. Olga Szűcs, 'Az orosz történetem sajátosságai N. A. Bergyajev korai műveiben' [The Characteristics of Russian History in N. A. Berdyaev's Early Works], in Magdolna Ágoston, ed., *Tanulmányok Oroszország múltjából* [Studies in the Russian Past], Szombathely: NyME Savaria Egyetemi Központ, 2008, 133–134.

31) Hajnády, *Sophia és Logosz*, 209 and 230.

32) Quoted in ibid., 230.

33) Éva Körner, 'Hozzászólás a "Szentendrei művészet" fogalom kérdéséhez' [Comments on the Question of the Concept of 'Szentendre Art'], *Művészettörténeti Értesítő*, 14:2, 1965, 228.

34) Anikó Faludy, 'Vajda Lajos és az ikonok' [Lajos Vajda and the Icons], *Művészet*, 21:1, 1980, 19.

35) Gábor Pataki, 'Párduc és liliom. Vajda Lajos kiállítása' [Panther and Lilies: Exhibition of Lajos Vajda], in Nóra Veszprémi, ed., *Vajda. Vajda Lajos kiállítása* [Vajda: Exhibition of Lajos Vajda], Budapest: Hungarian National Gallery, 2008, 10.

36) Gábor Pataki, 'Vajda Lajos: *Felmutató ikonos önarckép*' [Lajos Vajda: Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward], *Ars Hungarica*, 28:1, 2000, 157–168; György Petőcz, 'A Felmutató titkai' [Secrets of Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward], *Beszélő*, 17 February 2014. http://beszelo.c3.hu/galleytext/a-felmutato-titkai-petocz-gyorgy-tanulmanya (Last accessed: 10. 11. 2019.).

37) Radák, *Vajda Lajos Pepita füzetei*, 156.

Pantocrator.[38] In Pataki's interpretation, the threefold face, with the third face emerging from the overlapping of the 'realistic' depiction containing the features of Vajda's self-portrait and an abstracted 'spherical head,' invokes Berdyaev's trichotomic understanding of the person as body, soul and spirit, and his concept of God–God-man. For Pataki it also indicates the influence on Vajda's thinking of Martin Buber's notion of I-Thou-It.[39] The ghostly face arising from the blend of the human and the divine thus becomes Vajda's 'real' self-portrait.[40] György Petőcz, who is credited with presenting the most comprehensive summary of the existing interpretive versions of Vajda's *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward,* argues that it was Berdyaev who sparked Vajda's interest in icons. Petőcz also points out that even before reading *The New Middle Ages*, Vajda 'had been thinking in a similar vein,' with Berdyaev subsequently inspiring his turn in this direction.[41] Recently, Ferenc Gosztonyi, in reference to my own attempt at re-thinking the interpretation of this piece, has suggested that the work should be regarded as a type of self-portrait. For Gosztonyi the theme of the work is the transformation of the (individual) human portrait into the (self-)portrait of the nameless (non-individualised) artist, the modern painter of icons.[42]

Katalin Kemény, in an essay titled 'Face–Mask–Icon,' had already anticipated the above critical interpretations to some extent. The reason I mention her last is because her approach stands closest to the interpretive focus of this article. Kemény regards Vajda as seeing his work as *acheiropoietos*, that is to say, in the original sense of the word in Christian theology, written 'not with his own hand,' but by a higher agency: 'The purpose of meditating before an icon is to shed the I that exists in time, and, while inhabiting an 'older' self, to identify with an accessible, ancient ancestor.'[43] The basis of icon painting is Christ's incarnation (as the ultimate theological reasoning of iconodules), the appearance of the universal human being, and God's identification with humanity through Christ. 'The object, figure, inspirer of Christian art is the *transfiguration* of the person; the manifestation of eidos through body, form, and intellect. (...) And why it would be pointing upward, when it points neither beyond itself toward the sky, nor downward to the depths, but instead (...) turns questioningly toward (...) the face.'[44]

38) Gábor Pataki, 'Vajda Lajos: *Felmutató ikonos önarckép,*' 166–167. Because, in the interest of keeping to my focus, the scope of this study is limited, it is not possible to cover the full research history and range of interpretational directions of *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward*; I only highlight a few aspects that are related to Berdyaevian thought. Furthermore, I also refrain from discussing the issues surrounding the naming of Vajda's work; for the sake of simplicity I use the title that is most often used with reference to it (*Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward*).

39) Martin Buber, *Ich und du*, Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1923.

40) Gábor Pataki, 'Párduc és liliom. Vajda Lajos kiállítása,' 11.

41) György Petőcz, 'A Felmutató titkai.'

42) Ferenc Gosztonyi, 'Vajda Lajos művészete 1936-ban: Szempontok a "konstruktív-szürrealista tematika" és a Felmutató ikonos önarckép értelmezéséhez' [The Art of Lajos Vajda in 1936: Ways of Interpreting His 'Constructive Surrealist Themes' and the Work Entitled Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward], *Ars Hungarica*, 45:1, 2019, 127–141.

43) Katalin Kemény, *Maszk és valóság* [Mask and Reality], Budapest: Ernst Museum, 2007, 41.

44) Ibid., 41–43.

## Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward

Reflecting the ideologies of Solovyov, and, later, Berdyaev, the work shows two faces, representing two different traditions of representation, as well as two distinct visual languages and conceptualisations of the human being. That the 'realistic' face constitutes a self-portrait can be confirmed by its similarity to a number of other such images; the arc of the hairline beginning at the ears and finishing at the brow ridge, the double line and shape of the nose, as well as the circular lines under the eyes, also appear in, for example, *Self-Portrait with Loose Shirt Collar* (1935) his *Self-Portrait with Skull* (1936) (Figure 4) or *Self-Portrait with Architecture* (1936–1937).[45] The frontally oriented icon figure is also a self-portrait (cf. *Icon Self-Portrait*, Figure 2). At the same time, the identification of the images as self-portraits has been disputed and it is certainly true that we can see elements on the sides of the 'realistic' face to the left that are not characteristic of these representations: the mane of hair originates from the contour line of plain hair, and then dissolves into the 'furrowed' background. The face, bearing features reminiscent of other self-portraits, is transformed into a pronounced male portrait that borders on the antique. Perhaps it is no exaggeration to say that, in Solovyov's (and, through him, Berdyaev's) idea of theurgy, which also defines the fundamental role of artists, we are witnessing not only the process of human divination, but also the development of a kind of self-portrait as Christ, as it dissolves and disappears in the duality of the figure that embodies both the principle of the individualised human being and that of sobornost. For, as Berdyaev stated, that which has been split in two can only be reunified in Christ. For these reasons, the depiction has multiple potential meanings, and the image is difficult to describe, since the boundaries of its forms are not clearly defined. This is probably why it also has been referred to as a 'narrative' work, although the narrative is itself unclear.

The Christological significance of the middle face, created through the unification of the other two, is also supported by a number of analogies with icon painting, reproductions of which Vajda most likely come across; his reading list certainly included books on Byzantine, Bulgarian and Russian icon painting. His interest was undoubtedly also shaped by the character of Szentendre, where Vajda lived. For it was a small multicultural town that had preserved Serbian orthodox traditions due to the Serbian population that had historically lived there with. Amongst the volumes Vajda mentioned in his reading list, several contain reproductions that may have offered models for *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward*, images that have thus far remained unmentioned in Vajda-related literature. In Oskar Wulff's book *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, for example, published in 1914 and to be found in Vajda's list, there is a reproduction of an icon, most resembling a memorial or death portrait, depicting the Syrian martyrs *Saints Sergius and Bacchus* (Figure 5); the outerwear thrown over their shoulders (even the creases of its drapery, formed from fine lines) is comparable to the fabric thrown over the shoulder of Vajda's spherical figure.[46] In this icon Christ is the giver of eternal life; his face framed in coin-like fashion is enveloped in a halo, which does not fuse with the martyrs' glory, just barely touches them. The three figures are, however, unified by a darker contour. The

45) It should be noted that this reading has been questioned. See Petőcz, 'A Felmutató titkai.'

46) The volume is included in Vajda's reading list. The list is published in Radák, *Vajda Lajos Pepita füzetei*, 139. Oskar Wulff, *Altchristliche und Byzantinische Kunst I. Die Altchristliche Kunst*, Berlin – Neubabelsberg: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion, 1914, figures 286 and 308.

**Figure 4:** Lajos Vajda: *Self-Portrait with Skull*, 1936. Pencil and collage on paper, 32 x 25,5 cm.
Szentendre: Ferenczy Museum Centre.

**Figure 5:** Reproduction of Icon Saint Sergius and Bacchus.
From Oskar Wulff, *Altchristliche und Byzantinische Kunst*, Berlin-Neubabelsberg: Athenaion, 1914.

triadic nature of the portrait is even more significant here (although drawing a formal analogy form would be less appropriate): the dual portrait is complemented by the nimbus-framed face of Christ, whose presence alludes to the martyrdom of the saints.

There is also a formal similarity with a further work reproduced in the volume by Wulff, namely, an ivory miniature of three Latin Church Fathers (Figure 6), in terms of both the gesture of the right hand of the middle figure imparting a blessing, as well as its place in the composition. The hand, which is parallel to the image plane, is intersected by the lower edge of the image surface, as if it belonged not to this figure, but to some other person. In Vajda's work, too, it seems apparent that the hand belongs not to the self-portrait-like or icon-like figure, but to someone else. The 1925 edition of Wulff and Alpatoff's *Monuments of Icon Painting in the History of the Church* is repeatedly listed in Vajda's reading list.[47] In a Deésis-type icon featured in this book, which depicts full-length portraits of both Saints Peter and Paul (Figure 7), the hand pointing to Christ and Christ's halo-enveloped face is placed at the ideological centre, the central axis, of the image field. The triple nature of these representations, along with the Christ-image attached to the portrait and attesting to Christ's incarnation, alludes to the relationship between human and God, and the divine essence inherent in all that is human.

The icons featured in the book by Wulff and Alpatoff show the face and the hand conveying theological content: the dogma of God's incarnation. In this way, the hand pointing upward

47) Oskar Wulff and Michael Alpatoff, *Denkmäler der Ikonenmalerei in Kunstgeschichtlicher Folge,* Hellerau bei Dresden: Avalun-Verlag, 1925, figures 25 and 71.


**Figure 6:** Reproduction of miniature of Three Latin Church Fathers.
From Oskar Wulff, *Altchristliche und Byzantinische Kunst*, Berlin-Neubabelsberg: Athenaion, 1914.

alludes to the divine. Vajda essentially reduces the image to these elements: the face and the hand. The body is absent, the clothes are only tentatively present, evoking a sense of uncertainty, the contours of the hair are shifting. It is, in fact, the idea of 'incarnation' that is absent from the image, and it can be compared with Vajda's *Icon Self-Portrait* from 1936 (Figure 2), where the white dots of the clothing against dark blue indicate a transcendent character for the figure. In these examples of icon painting, the external figure of Christ is always positioned higher in relation to the other figures, while, in Vajda's case, the face that takes shape and disappears in the middle is not elevated. That is to say, a vertical hierarchy does not manifest itself here, and no distinction is made between aspects belonging to the heavenly and earthly spheres. Consequently, the hand, too, becomes larger and cannot be pointing upward, as there is nothing in the heavenly realm to point to. In examples of icon painting where the figure is portrayed in full, the emphatic bareness of the feet symbolises one's connection to the human sphere. In accordance with this type, in the full-length depictions of Deesis, the book in Christ's left hand is positioned lower down than his shoulder, while his upward pointing right hand is held higher than the volume.

Vajda uses a half-figure: like the historic examples mentioned above, the hand with the ring finger and thumb touching is positioned higher; it is comparable to the seventeenth-century icon of Christ Pantocrator in the Serbian Ecclesiastical Art Collection of Szentendre. In *Icon Self-Portrait* from 1936 (Figure 2), the body 'begins' around the waist, while the figure – or figures – in *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward* (Figure 1) is cut off by the bottom edge of the image field higher up the torso. In Vajda's painting Christ's hand gesture also differs from that we customarily see in the icons. Where, in icon paintings, Christ, by touching together his thumb and his ring finger, forms a circle as the symbol of the heavenly domain, signifying unity and the universe (alpha and omega), in Vajda's work, the two fingers do not actually touch: the unique hand gesture not only contradicts the icon, it also brings its being into

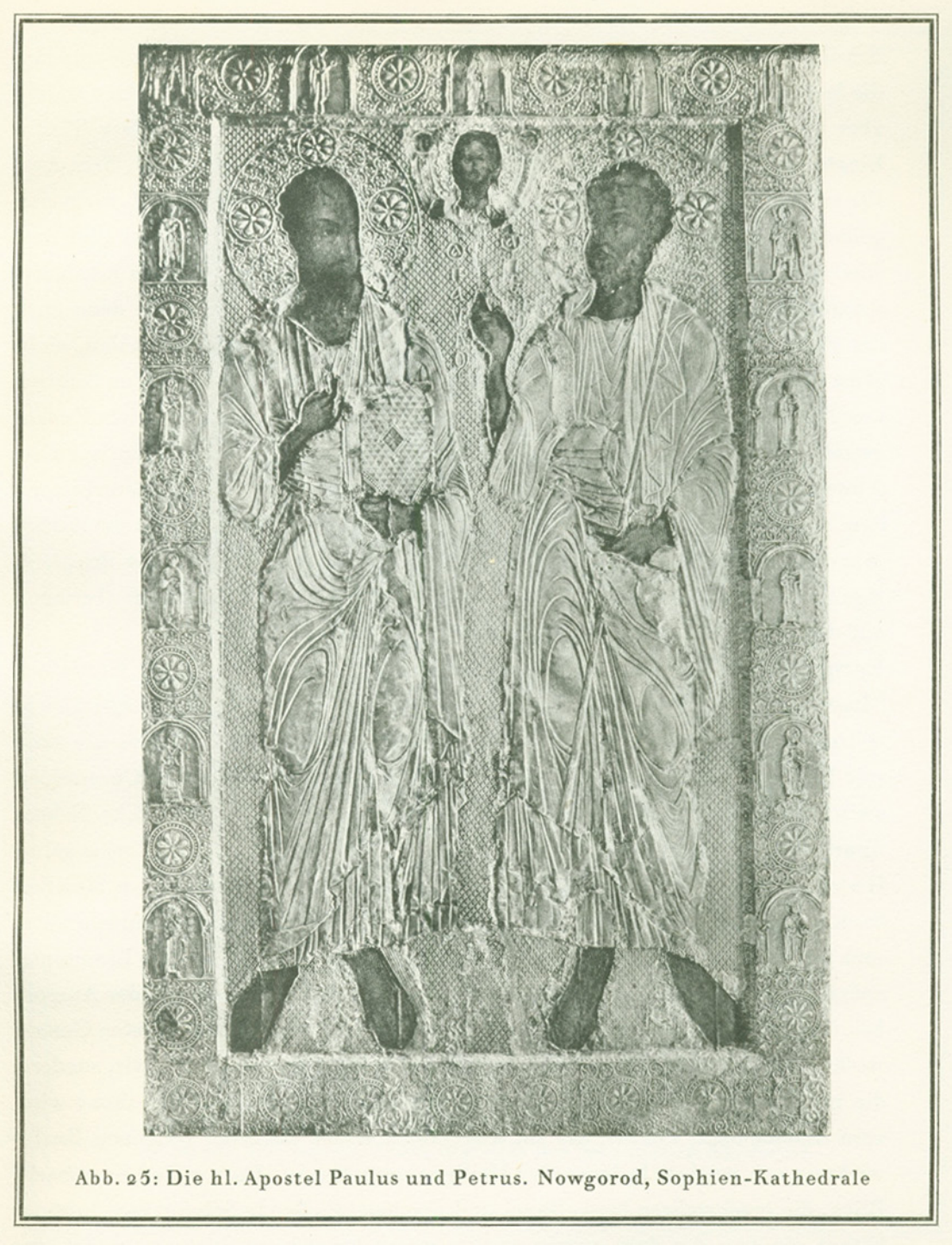


**Figure 7:** Icon of Peter and Paul.
From Oskar Wulff and Michael Alpatoff, *Denkmäler der Ikonenmalerei in Kunstgeschichtlicher Folge, Hellerau bei Dresden*: Avalun Verlag, 1925.

question; instead of pointing *upward*, it points *to* the portrait and emphasizes the determining character of the representation.

The icon, as an expression of transfiguration and metamorphosis, signifies the incarnation that has been accomplished, rather than focusing on the process. In contrast, in Vajda's work, it is transformation; the bidirectional process – the here and now – and the *process* of incarnation that is being depicted. This also comes through in the complex, enigmatic and reality-defying relationships between the different layers of the head and the upper body.

In Vajda's oeuvre, we can find several other examples where the head (portrait) is represented together with the hand. Yet the hand motif used in *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward* does not appear anywhere else in the surviving material of his oeuvre. In a charcoal drawing from 1934 entitled *Head Study*, four fingers of the left hand with pointed ends are visible; the index finger is separate from the others and follows the jaw line.[48] *Friends* (1937), *Double Self-Portrait with House* (1937) and *Head in Palm with Saw Pattern* (1937) all repeat the motif of the hand and face touching. In *Unshaven Self-Portrait* from 1937 (Figure 8), four fingers on the figure's right hand point downward, or his hand is supported by a flat surface, with only two fingernails visible.[49] In interpreting the hand motif of *Self-Portrait Pointing Upward,* however, Vajda's interest in icons may hold the key; namely the fact that icons are traditionally 'not created by hand.' Vajda did not sign or give a title to any of his works. In this particular piece, however, it is precisely by drawing a distinction between this and icons that the emphatic and exaggerated appearance of the hand (both in terms of its forms and proportions) gains meaning: with its three open fingers, in referring to the trinity of the heads, it repeats the darkness of the figure disappearing in the middle.

## Conclusion

Given these formal analogies and disparities, as well as Berdyaev's dualistic conceptualisation of culture that shaped Vajda's 'Szentendre Programme,' we can state that in *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward,* the 'head' that is represented from the front while also seen turning to the side, signifies diverging modes of conceptualising and representing human being. Since the painting and the Szentendre Program occupy key positions in Vajda's oeuvre, as well as in Hungarian art history, it is important to determine their possible sources. This analysis, which highlights the significance of Berdyaev's ideas along with a closer reading of the Russian philosopher's texts, offers new points for consideration, potentially enriching existing interpretations of this painting. In fact, Berdyaev's influence on Vajda was limited to a specific period in his career; the hopes he expressed in the 'Szentendre Programme' seem to have dissipated – although the reasons have never become clear – and we don't find clear continuance in the artist's oeuvre. Nevertheless, Berdyaev and Russian existentialist philosophy remained an often-referenced popular source of ideas in Hungary, although this was mostly limited to philosophical circles, including figure such as Lajos Szabó and Béla Tábor.

48) Petőcz and Szabó, eds, *Vajda Lajos. Világok között*, 85, figure 87.

49) Ibid., 18, figure 8.

**Figure 8:** Lajos Vajda, *Unshaven Self-Portrait,* 1937. Pencil on paper, 30 x 22,2 cm.
Szentendre: Ferenczy Museum Centre.

Finally, one might argue that Vajda's *Icon Self-Portrait Pointing Upward* is not about (to once again reference Bakhtin) sounding a single voice. Instead, on account of its universal nature, seeking synthesis, and thus experiments with new possibilities of pictorial representation, it has the capacity of articulating multiple philosophical and theological thoughts. The figure disappears and reappears; it could be the right hand, or the left. With his lines that form and transform into one another, Vajda, by continuously opening closed forms, represents a multi-directional process. This article has not been an attempt to cut the Gordian knot of interpretation by offering this reading alone. It leaves the door to further interpretations open, even if, drawing on the biographical data, preserved sources, and the dichotomous and synthesising principle espoused by the 'Szentendre Program,' the Berdyaevian reading seems most obvious. Had the artist left his work untitled we might regard it quite differently today. Vajda, however, was never interested in 'illustrating' some thesis or idea; starting with his Paris montages, his focus was always on juxtaposition, on piecing together – and, thus, on modification – in both a formal and conceptual sense. For this reason, and in spite of the fact that the painting was created at a time when the Hungarian government espoused a nationalist-Christian state, for Vajda, thinking renewed through Berdyaev's Eastern Christianity was meaningful not as a political programme, but rather as a cultural and artistic vision.

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# Understanding Greek Art History.

A Review of: Evgenios Matthiopoulos, ed. *Art History in Greece: Selected Essays* (Athens: Melissa, 2018). Paperback. 150 pp. ISBN 978-960-204-379

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**Matthew Rampley**

For many art history students of a certain generation, courses on art historical method were likely to have included a book titled *Art History and Class Struggle*.[1] An extensive discussion of Marxist art history, it was part of the transformation of art history in the 1970s and early 1980s that saw the appearance of a number of pioneering works of social art history by scholars such as T. J. Clark, Horst Bredekamp and Albert Boime.[2] Yet its author, Nicos Hadjinicolaou, remained a largely unknown figure. His book was first published in French in 1973, and by the time it gained wider prominence in English translation, he had already returned to the University of Crete, where he made a reputation as a scholar of El Greco.[3]

*Art History and Class Struggle* may have ended up becoming eclipsed by later authors as an exemplar of the social history of art, yet it was testimony to a practice of art history writing in Greece that was, and remains, barely known outside of the country. The reasons for this are numerous, but there are three main factors. The first and most obvious is linguistic; the limited international knowledge of modern Greek guarantees that it could only reach a limited readership. The second is institutional and disciplinary; state resources in Greece (and Cyprus) were almost exclusively devoted to archaeology, and wider public interest in Greek culture has also focused on its archaeological heritage. The numerous international archaeological institutes in Athens provide palpable evidence of this. Art history, in contrast, has always been a minority pursuit. The third, and final, reason lay in the fact that post-classical Greek art has occupied a marginal position in the landscape of art history. Byzantine art has often been poorly integrated into larger art historical narratives, its main function being to act as a precursor to the Venetian Renaissance, and it has often comprised a sub-discipline of its own. The most famous Greek artist, Domenikos Theotokopoulos, only became a subject of interest internationally once he left Crete and moved to Spain to become El Greco. Other major figures in more recent Greek art, such as Nikolaos Gyzis (1842–1901), Constantinos Parthenis (1878–1967) and Yiannis Tsarouchis (1910–1989), remain completely unknown. As a result, studies of Greek art, no matter how sophisticated and original, have usually languished in international obscurity.

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1) Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Art History and Class Struggle*, trans. Louise Asmal, London: Pluto Press, 1978.

2) See for example, Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, London: Phaidon Press, 1971; T. J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848–1851,* London: Thames & Hudson, 1973; Horst Bredekamp, *Kunst als Medium sozialer Konflikte: Bilderkämpfe von der Spätantike bis zur Hussitenrevolution*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975; Albert Boime,

3) Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *La lutte des classes en France dans la production d'images de l'année 1830*, Paris: Maspero, 1973.

An additional reason for such marginalisation is undoubtedly, too, the fact that a question-mark hangs over where modern Greek culture may even be located. A review of art history in Greece may be unexpected in a journal focused on East Central Europe, but this also illustrates the problem in hand. For while the independent Greek state and its institutions have, for political, economic and social reasons, always promoted its classical heritage, the latter is in many respects a distant memory, and has little to do with the vibrant culture of modern Greece. Given its legacy of Byzantine and Ottoman rule, and with Orthodox Christianity being so central to the formation of national identity (Catholic Greek and Islamic minorities have always played a marginal role), Greece has more in common with its neighbours Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia than with that other home of classical art: Italy.

*Art History in Greece* touches on a range of issues that are of wider pertinence and repay examination. Its appearance was prompted by the invitation to Greece to be the partner country for the 2018 Festival of Art History staged by the Institut national de l'histoire de l'art (INHA) in Paris. As the editor, Evgenios Matthiopoulos, states in the Preface, upon being invited it was decided 'to produce a book that would give the international academic community as broad a picture as possible of the historical development of and main trends in the history of art in Greece, along with the level of educational achievements in that field.'[4] The volume certainly fulfils that aim, with a collection of excellent essays that cast an often unflinching critical gaze on the current and past practices of Greek art historians.

In fact, while it is archaeology that has enjoyed the most attention, there has been a continuous tradition of writing on Greek art since the early nineteenth century. It was often conflated with archaeology or Enlightenment encyclopaedism, but this tradition nevertheless tried to define the place of Greek art in the history of European civilisation. Thus, as early as 1811, the politician and scholar Anthimos Gazis (1758–1828) authored an article on 'The Universal History of the Arts and Sciences' in *Hermes o Logios* (Hermes the Scholar) the most important pre-independence Greek-language periodical, published in Vienna.[5] The points of reference for authors of this era included figures such as Winckelmann and the French art historian Séroux d'Agincourt. Greek art historians were thus working with a similar intellectual genealogy to their peers in Austria, France, Italy, Germany and Britain. The major difference between post-independence Greece and other European states in the nineteenth century was that art history was not institutionally formalised until much later in Greece. Classes were taught in art schools, but degrees in art history did not exist, nor did departments of art history. There was also no major gallery of art before the early twentieth century. The jurist Alexandros Soutzos (1839–1895) bequeathed his art collection to the Greek state, but it was not until 1915 that the 'Athens Picture Gallery' opened its doors to the public. It was housed in spare rooms in the Technical University, a situation that persisted until 1953 when it moved to the Zappeion Exhibition Hall in the centre of Athens. In 1959 the Zappeion was closed down, and the collection had to wait a further 10 years for the first section of the new purpose-built National Gallery to open. This situation was in contrast to archaeology, to which considerable resources were dedicated. The National Archaeological Service was founded as early as 1833, while the National Archaeological Museum was set up in 1888.

4) Evgenios Matthoipoulos, ed., 'Preface,' in *Art History in Greece*, 7.

5) Anthimos Gazis, 'Katholiki istoria ton technon kai epistemon,' *Hermes o Logios*, 15 August 1811, 266–75.

The discipline of art history consequently lacked the infrastructure that was built up in other countries during the nineteenth century, yet the study of art was nevertheless seen as important and became a potent political and ideological instrument. Matthiopoulos lays out with admirable clarity in his chapter in this volume, 'Art History with National Borders,' how, as soon as the Greek state was founded in 1829, the visual arts and art historical scholarship were drawn into the ideological work of cultural and political legitimation. Nationalism was, Matthiopoulos acknowledges, a fundamental element in art history in most countries, but in Greece it was particularly important, since the architectural and sculptural ruins of the past played such a defining role in the creation of Greek identity, both locally and in the eyes of international onlookers. Art historians thus became entangled in various, often competing, national myths and debates. These included, for example, the question as to whether post-independence Greek art constituted a moment of rebirth, or whether it was just the latest chapter in a narrative of deep continuity with the ancient past. Continuity was a particularly contested topic in the twentieth century, too. In the 1930s the assumption of continuity, based on a tripartite historical division of classical, Byzantine and modern, was a matter of official state orthodoxy. Yet the idea was attacked in certain quarters. In 1942, for example, the conservative politician Panayiotis Kanellopoulos (best known, perhaps, as the prime minister deposed by the military junta in 1967) authored a study that laid perhaps predictable emphasis on the 'Europeanness' of Greek culture and explicitly excluded Byzantine as being 'Asiatic.'[6] He thereby introduced notions of rupture and discontinuity into the history of Greece. On the other hand, the idea of continuity took on importance after the Civil War of 1946 to 1949 as an instrument of anti-Communism. In 1946 the Greek government staged a large exhibition at the Royal Academy in London, *Greek Art 3000 BC – AD 1945* meant to show Greece's place in the western European mainstream. Mounted at a time of national crisis, it was a clear sign of the role art and its history could play in furthering diplomatic and political goals. In the late 1960s and 1970s the idea of continuity gained renewed life, as part of a reactionary vision of Greek culture held by the generals of the junta. The book nowhere states this openly, but one presumes, too, that the sojourn of Hadjinicolaou in France was due to political exile, given the oppressive cultural politics of the junta of the late 1960s and early 1970s and its persecution of its opponents.

The attitude of Panayiotis Kanellopoulos towards Byzantine art raised the broader question of its place in European art. It had a particular significance for Greeks, but art historians elsewhere struggled equally with its meaning, since it highlighted the difficulty of describing the nature of the classical tradition. Most notably, of course, turn-of-the-century art historians of the Vienna School such as Alois Riegl, Franz Wickhoff and Josef Strzygowski, as well as their pupils in other central European states, debated endlessly the nature of Byzantine culture and its legacy. For Greeks, too, its status was not unambiguous. On the one hand, it could be read as a stage in the Hellenocentric narrative of continuity; on the other, its transnational character, the fact that the Balkan peninsula and Russia comprised a common Byzantine space, put that narrative into doubt. Even if Byzantine art was deemed unequivocally 'Greek' there was the question as to how its Greek character could be demonstrated. It was insufficient merely

6) Panayiotis Kanellopoulos, *Istoria tou europaikou pneymatos: Apo ton Voltairo os tin Tzein Osten* [History of the European spirit: From Voltaire to Jane Austen], Athens: Aetos, 1942. The book is still in print.

to point to the putative ethnic identity of artists, or of the institutions and individuals that commissioned works. For many art historians 'Greekness' had to be visible, Matthiopoulos notes, as a specific aesthetic quality. This culminated in the influential notion of the 'Greek line' and 'Greek colour' formulated at the turn of the twentieth century by the poet and critic Pericles Giannopoulos.[7] Such ideas proved remarkably tenacious, and they were bound up with a deep emotional investment in ideas of national identity that, even now, resurface.

In his study of the National Gallery in this volume, Lefteris Spyrou demonstrates how much this institution, although a relative latecomer, shaped art historical discourse.[8] The Gallery is known for its collection of art by Greek artists since the early 19th century, but the original bequest by Soutzos, as well as subsequent donations, was dominated by Italian and French paintings. In other words, the Gallery was initially a museum of western European art. In 1949, with the appointment of the Byzantine art historian Marinos Kalligas (1906–1985) as director, it took a marked shift in orientation, and became a museum of modern Greek art. Kalligas was a graduate of Munich and, informed by Wölfflinian formalism, sought to identify the essential formal characteristics of 'Greekness' in art. When the collections were put on display in the Zappeion hall, he devoted almost all the space to Greek painters and sculptors. Care was taken to display works by artists who had either trained elsewhere in Europe or who had pursued a career in Germany or France, since this was evidence of parity of esteem that underpinned arguments as to the place of post-independence Greece in European culture. Arguably, Spyrou claims, little has changed since; Kalligas may have left the Gallery several decades ago but the Hellenocentric orientation he laid down in the 1950s continue to shape its policies.

In the contribution on 'Art History in Greece Today' Aris Sarafianos moves away from the issue of nationalism to that of methodology. This slightly polemical essay is less a survey of models than an attempt to lay out future possibilities. It also criticises, *en passant*, archaeologists, who traditionally monopolised the study of Greek art using connoisseurial and other outmoded methods of analysis. This may be an accurate description of classical archaeology 30 years ago, but few would recognise the contemporary state of the discipline in this image, although Sarafianos does acknowledge that it has changed considerably since the 1980s. He also points towards a number of possibilities that still need to be explored by art historians in Greece: post-colonial theory, visual studies and, in particular, renewed attention to the materiality of works of art. Understanding of their specific pertinence and meaning in Greek art history would have benefitted from a slightly less sketchy account, but the chapter clearly demonstrates how far contemporary Greek art history has distanced itself from its recent past.

Both this chapter and Areti Adamopoulou's thoughtful discussion 'Born of a "Peripheral" Modernism: Art History in Greece and Cyprus,' demonstrate some of the anxieties that persist amongst the profession in Greece. Responding to the ideological demands of the state, art history in Greece was, for a long time, an introverted enterprise. In 2000, when the first conference of the Association of Greek Art Historians' took place, almost all the papers were on Greek art. The observation of the apparently greater success and recognition enjoyed by Greek art historians working or publishing abroad – in addition to Hadjinicolaou one

7) A French edition of the relevant essays has been published as Périklis Yannopoulos, *La ligne greque*, trans. and ed. Marc Terrades, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2006.

8) Lefteris Spyrou, 'The National Gallery's Display in the 1950s and its Contribution towards the Formation of the History of Art in Greece and the Canon of Modern Greek Art' (73–96).

might think of the architectural historians Alexander Tzonis or Panayiotis Tournikiotis – reveals a notable degree of self-doubt. Indeed, Adamopoulou's self-description of Greece as 'peripheral' betrays a comparable hesitancy. Even though the discipline is now anything but introverted, Sarafianos's hope that, at some point in the future, modern Greek art will have its due place in leading international journals betrays the lingering worries over the place of Greece and the need for international recognition that have been characteristic of writing on art in Greece since 1829.

*Art History in Greece* presents an informative, insightful and critically detached account of Greek art history. It is also particularly welcome that it is available as an openly accessible ebook.[9] For all its many qualities, however, it does raise certain questions and in certain respects it allows itself to be framed by the very phenomenon it is describing. This is particularly so when it comes to the dominance of the preoccupation in the essays with the art historical debates about national identity. For in this respect the concerns of Greek art historians were not so particular to Greece. The debate about continuity and discontinuity in Greece, for instance, parallels the longstanding preoccupation of Romanian art historians with the classical inheritance of Dacia. Were latter-day Romanians the inheritors of an unbroken tradition stretching back to classical times – hence the Latin roots of the vernacular language – or was modern Romanian culture the result of a post-classical incursion by Wallachians? The answer to this question was ideologically loaded and shaped the character of much art historical scholarship in the country.[10] The preoccupation with the place of the national culture in 'European civilisation' was a central feature of art history across much of Europe, most especially as it was enmeshed in politically charged debates about the meaning of the term. The effort, in the later nineteenth century, to define specifically Greek aesthetic qualities would not have looked out of place in contemporary Prague or Budapest. But by focusing exclusively on Greece, the essays in this volume exhibit, ironically, the 'introversion' of which they speak so eloquently. The authors occasionally refer to prevailing methods of analysis – Wölfflin was influential for some authors – but the book might have benefitted from a more detailed analysis of this theme. Throughout, reference is made to leftist currents of thinking, of which Hadjinicolaou is the best-known representative, but to what extent did this underpin a broader distinctive Marxist or social history of art in Greece?

The book prompts the asking of other questions, too. We learn that since 2000, Greek art historians have ceased to be so Hellenocentric, but if this is so, what have been the more notable topics of interest since then? Moreover, if Byzantine art has presented a complex legacy, how has the *Ottoman* heritage been addressed by art historians? Or has this been delegated to archaeologists and scholars of Islamic studies? And if that is the case, what does this tell us about how art historians perceive the boundaries of their own discipline? Indeed, while the problem of tradition and continuity is addressed with considerable intelligence, the unstated assumption is of 'Greek' as a single homogeneous culture. How are minorities, such as Catholics, Roma, Jews and others integrated into the narrative of Greek art? And in what ways have questions of gender and sexuality entered into art historical discourse?

9) The volume can be accessed here: https://www.academia.edu/36716665/Art_History_in_Greece_pdf

10) The classic discussion of this issue is Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001. For a useful outline of this issue in relation to Romanian art history writing see Vlad Ţoca, *Art Historical Discourse in Romania, 1919–1947*, Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2011.

Finally, what of Greek modernism? Painters such as Parthenis and Nikos Ghika (1906–1994), or the architect Dimitris Pikionis (1887–1968), provided Greece with a very distinctive set of modernist practices. Mindful of Hans Belting's claim that modernism spelled the end of art history as a unified narrative, how have art historians in Greece interpreted it and the ruptures it enacted?[11] How did that relate to the broader theme of continuity and rupture in the national culture? Moreover, should Greek modernism be seen as a response to one of what Eisenstadt has described as the multiple modernities of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries?[12] Or has it been understood in terms of its relation to modernism in Paris or somewhere else? This latter question, endlessly debated in relation to East Central Europe. is pertinent to Greece, too.

As Matthiopoulos acknowledges, this book was put together rapidly in response to the INHA invitation, so it is perhaps unfair to pile on these questions; to answer them (and others) a much more extensive publication would have been necessary. Indeed, it should be noted that some of them are addressed in a much more extensive Greek-language volume, edited by Matthiopoulos and Hadjinicolaou, that was the outcome of the 2000 conference and to which some of the authors of this book also contributed.[13] This volume should therefore be recognised for what it is: an outline for international readers of some of the key preoccupations of Greek art historians together with an analysis of their genealogy and an indication of the political and ideological stakes. Despite the omissions, its appearance is a most welcome event, especially as the issues it discusses point towards further possibilities of research. Indeed, while the ostensible theme is Greek art historiography, it will be of value to anyone with a broader interest in modern Greek culture and politics as well as in Greece as an emblem of the wider problems with which scholars in East Central Europe have had to deal with. Its authors have provided us with an engaging and astute set of essays.

11) Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?* trans. Christopher Wood, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987.

12) Shmuel Eisenstadt, 'Multiple Modernities,' in Eisenstadt, ed. *Multiple Modernities*, London: Routledge, 2017, 1–30.

13) Evgenios Matthiopoulos and Nicos Hadjinicolaou, eds, *I Istoria tis Tekhnis stin Ellada*, Athens: University of Crete 2003.

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# A World of its Own? Art History in Prague.

A Review of: Richard Biegl, Roman Prahl and Jakub Bachtík, eds, *Století ústavu pro dějiny umění na Filozofické fakultě Univerzity Karlovy* [A Century of the Institute for Art History at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University]. Prague: Charles University, 2020. 942 pp. ISBN: 9788073089627.

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Charles University; Karel Chytil; Alfred Woltmann; Antonín Matějček; nationalism; Vienna School of Art History; historiography;

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**Marta Filipová**

When the Czech film *Pupendo* (2003), set in the 1980s, depicted an art historian as a dishevelled, middle-aged man, it captured a common stereotypical view of the profession held by the majority of society in Communist Czechoslovakia. Although homeless, the fictional art historian Alois Fábera in the film always wears a suit, a tie and obligatory glasses, showing his middle-class (possibly bourgeois) background. He is portrayed as someone very knowledgeable and empathic, yet also one who is misunderstood by society and stands outside of the Communist system. The comic effect of the figure is emphasised by his unorthodox relationship to the world around and by the wheelie bag he drags around. In the Communist 1980s, art history had an aura of a subject that had no real relevance in the target-driven state and perhaps more than ever it had connotations with the allegedly bourgeois climate of interwar Czechoslovakia.

In the Czechoslovakia of the decade before the Velvet Revolution, in which the film takes place, art history as a university subject stagnated. At the Charles University in Prague, it suffered from limits on the student numbers and a lack of teaching staff. The Communist regime imposed a screening process for both students and staff and those with unacceptable political profiles were unwanted. The seemingly caricatured figure of the film art historian thus rings true in many respects and confirms a view that penetrated the general understanding of the discipline and its representatives as elitist, eccentric and detached from the needs of the real world. Such a view may not be held internationally but in the Czech Republic and many other post-Communist countries, art historians still often need to explain, defend and justify their choice of occupation because of this legacy.

Yet art history as a subject has a long history in Central Europe, which is intertwined with political and cultural events. Art historians have played a key role in for instance forming canons of national art, building up national collections of art, and informing debates about public monuments and architecture. Reflecting on the nature of art history as a subject and its historic and contemporary role in society is therefore an interesting and much need task that the volume *Století ústavu pro dějiny umění* promises to achieve. The book examines the history of the Institute of Art History at the Charles University in Prague, which recently commemorated its centenary. The main focus of the extensive book may seem rather limited because the history of a single department at a single university may not be too attractive for wider audiences. Yet as the dustjacket states, this book sets out not only to inform about

one particular subject 'but simultaneously to contribute to the knowledge of modern Czech history and the role of universities and scholars in their development.' This, indeed, could be a useful approach which chooses a small element of history, a microhistory, on which it draws conclusions about the wider historic context, the macrohistory. Has the book achieved this goal? And could it appeal to readers outside of art history to create an informed view of art history not based on a caricature?

## One hundred years of what?

Nearly 950 pages long, the book was edited by Richard Biegl, Roman Prahl and Jakub Bachtík and the individual contributions were written by a variety of academics at various levels of their careers who are active at the current department now or have been linked with it in the past. The entire volume is divided into two parts. The main, narrative, part deals with the history of the department and spreads over nearly seven hundred pages. It covers not only the hundred years of the institution but also the prehistory of art history education at the university. Each chapter covers a specific period and also includes biographies of the main scholarly protagonists. The second part comprises several lists: names of the lecturers, professors and occasional staff active here, topics of theses and dissertations submitted between 1918 and 2018, and an extensive bibliography.

First of all, what is the one hundred years in the title? Already here, the complicated history of the department is suggested because a specific, single foundation date cannot be pinpointed. The introduction mentions several years as the possible starting point, including 1919 when an important art history library was acquired for the art history chair, and 1922 when the ministry of education officially approved the institute. Yet the statutes of the art history department had already been accepted in 1911, when the university also received its first permanent Czech-language chair in art history, in the figure of Karel Chytil. The history could go back even further to 1850, when Josef Erazim Vocel (whose name sometimes was spelled Wocel) became the first professor of art history. With no concrete date to hold on to, the book starts with a chapter on the emancipation of art history as a discipline in the second half of the 19th century and carries on until the present day. Roman Prahl and Jaroslav Horáček trace the early days in the work of Vocel (1803–1871), whose texts on the history of mediaeval art and architecture in the Czech lands emphasised their Czech origin.

Most art history written and taught in the second half of the 19th century was under the direct influence of national tensions between Czechs and Germans at the university as well as outside of it. The authors recall the now notorious lecture of the German art historian Alfred Woltmann, Vocel's successor, about the prominence of German art in Prague which led to student protests. At the time when the Czechness of Czech art was an important element in the national revival, claims about the possible German origin of artworks outraged the Czechs. Nationalism was one of the key foundation stones on which art history was built in the nineteenth century, yet this feature is slightly underplayed in the book.

The book nevertheless acknowledges that the early institutional history in Prague was marked by the Czech – German relationship. The university itself was split into separate Czech

and German parts in 1882 and the two art histories co-existed alongside each other without much real interaction. Even though the German department ceased to exist at the end of the Second World War, the book devotes a chapter to it, in which Jiří Koukal outlines its fate. Just as the authors in the other chapters, he focuses mostly on individuals who taught here, overviewing their main research interests and teaching. Koukal nevertheless explains how *German* art history contributed to history in general, using Karl Maria Swoboda's response to fascism and expansion of Germany as an example. Swoboda considered the contested border region of Sudetenland as a sovereign cultural province in eastern Germany and his volume *Zum deutschen Anteil an der Kunst der Sudetenländer* (one of seven published between 1938–43) tried to present a range of examples to prove that argument.

## Extensive yet exclusive

In general, extreme historic situations, including both world wars, the fall of the Habsburg Monarchy or the period of the Nazi Protectorate, are treated in a sketchy way, compared to the extensive and detailed attention given to other periods. Instead, emphasis is placed on the path of the department through history seen via the scholars active at the department. The period between 1894 and 1939 is covered in two chapters by Tomáš Murár who does consider the artistic and cultural environment in Prague as well as the intellectual stimuli that the Vienna School of Art history represented for many Czech art historians. However, his focus remains limited to the discipline without much attention to historical and political events outside of the art (history) world. For example, when one illustrative photograph shows a professor at the department, Antonín Matějček, with then-President Masaryk, the question arises what kind of relationship they had? What was the role of art historians in the political structure of Czechoslovakia? Who had access to decision making in the political matters concerning art?

In this regard, the photographs included in the book represent a great resource that could complement the extensive textual information. They depict the individual professors in both standard and non-standard situations of work and leisure which suggest how and where they spent their time and how they interacted with students. Unfortunately, the photographs only play an auxiliary role in the book and are not reflected on in the text.

Most of the chapters also do not deal with the topic of studentship very well. It is only in the treatment of more recent history that we learn who was allowed to study under Communism and what the national and gender composition of the students was. To get a better sense about the discipline and its role in society, it would be good to know who studied art history in the periods before 1948 and why; where the students came from in terms of geography and social class; how many women studied the subject and what their occupation was, if any, upon completion of their studies.

The questions of social as well as political context in which the department of art history operated is given more attention in the period during WWII and after. When the Czech university closed down during the war, many Czech art historians left Prague or kept their second jobs at various cultural institutions in the capital. The wartime fate of the Czech art history is examined by Tereza Johanidisová who points out that despite the closure of the

university, a lot of other activities, including publishing and exhibiting, remained unaffected when considered politically safe. Matějček left Prague but kept writing, while Jan Květ, who specialised in mediaeval art, taught art history at secondary schools. There were also a few who retained their careers, such as the historian of Christian art and archaeology, Josef Cibulka, who replaced Vincenc Kramář to become director of the Czech-Moravian Land Gallery, the wartime incarnation of the future National Gallery. For his services he received an award from the Protectorate, which together with the high-ranking position, became problematic in post-war Czechoslovakia.

The closure of universities during the Second World War also highlights another significant issue that is not dealt with very well here. Art history teaching could continue at a limited number of institutions, including the School of Art and Design in Prague, which did not have a university status. Some art historians from the university, including Jaromír Pečírka and František Kovárna who both focused on modern art, found refuge here and carried on their teaching and research. This topic opens up not only the question of survival under extreme historic conditions but also one of the relationships between the department and other institutions where art history was practised. As a whole the book does not engage much with any other locations, making the department at the Charles University seem both unique and isolated. Most of the time, the impression is that Prague was the only place for art history in Czechoslovakia. This is confirmed in the brief discussion of the foundation of the Academy of Sciences with its Institute of Art History in 1953, which Johanidisová describes as a loss of the supreme position and 'monopoly' of the department in art historical research. While the department may have had a supreme position, without knowing how the discipline was practised not only at the School of Art and Design, but also at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague (let alone outside of Prague, for instance in Brno and Bratislava and increasingly in other cities) we can only take the author's word for it. Indeed, the department at the Charles University is the central subject of the volume and is treated as such, but in order to recognize its position within the broader field of art history nationally, let alone internationally, it would be necessary to place it within a network of other institutions.

## Recent histories

One of the contributions of the volume is its attempt to examine the more recent history of the department. Where the only other book to examine the development of Czech art history in depth, Rudolf Chadraba's *Kapitoly z českého dějepisu umění* [Chapters of Czech art history], devoted only twenty pages to the situation after World War Two, in *Století ústavu* it occupies more than half of the volume.[1] The ups and downs the department experienced in the new political system after 1948 demonstrate the vulnerability of any field of human activity to regime change. During the embrace of Marxist-Leninist ideology in the 1940s and 1950s, for instance, art history was entrusted with the vital role of explaining and justifying socialist realism. At the same time, the loss of autonomy of universities due to the post-1948 reforms meant that decision-making about the department's content and orientation became politicised with

1) Rudolf Chadraba, ed., *Kapitoly z českého dějepisu umění*, Prague, Odeon, 1986–87, 2 volumes.

suitability checks and clearances performed on staff and students. In extreme cases, lecturers were expelled for social, political or religious inadequacy and often replaced by those who could navigate the political demands. Those, such as Miroslav Míčko or Jaromír Neumann specialising in modern and Baroque art respectively, could re-establish relations with abroad and travel. The brief thaw of the 1960s that allowed such loosening of conditions on a larger scale came to a halt in 1968, with the new repressions of the normalisation period leading to the stagnation of the 1980s mentioned at the beginning.

Finally, in the difficult task of covering the recent history of the department, Richard Biegel tries to summarise the last three decades in the ultimate chapter. He describes them as the return to Europe which took place after the revolution of 1989. The department had to reinvent and rebuild itself into what is described as a multi-thematic and multi-generational organism with its own tradition in the historic continuity.[2]

## Conclusion

Writing a history of a specific department is a challenging endeavour, which could have its benefits as long as such history places the object of investigation in a broader context. The history that is presented here remains mostly that of individuals, often men, their publications and teaching. Sometimes the authors of this volume go into such detail that explaining any external events or relations is forgotten. With students often missing from the accounts, we thus get a limited picture of art history as well as of art historians. Even though the picture is not that of the free-lance caricature art historian of *Pupendo*, the account still does not fully explain the relevance of art history within a broader system of social, economic, and political networks.

Paying attention to what was happening outside of the department at Charles university would require a different approach that summarises rather than dwells on the details of each period and individuals, their teaching and publications. One might imagine such a history written not as an exhaustive description, with biographies of everyone active in the department, but rather as a series of essays reflecting on the institution in relation to its political involvement, social structure, nationalism, gender composition and networks. The task of writing such a history would, obviously, be big and need a lot of effort, yet it could more effectively contribute to better understanding of the discipline by the more general public. Ultimately, although impressive in the level of research that went into it, the volume does little to contribute to knowledge of modern Czech history and the role of universities and scholars in the historical development it set for itself.

2) Richard Biegl, Roman Prahl and Jakub Bachtík, eds, *Století ústavu pro dějiny umění na Filozofické fakultě Univerzity Karlovy*, Prague: Charles University, 2020, 610–611.

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# Women and the Wiener Werkstätte

A Review of: *Die Frauen der Wiener Werkstätte / Women Artists of the Wiener Werkstätte,* edited by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, Anne-Katrin Rossberg, and Elisabeth Schmuttermeier, Basel: Birkhäuser: 2020. 288 pp. ISBN: 978–3035622119.

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**Keywords**

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**Julia Secklehner**

In Autumn 2020, the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna (MAK) was due to open an exhibition that shed new light on women's contributions to the Wiener Werkstätte (Viennese Workshops) design brand. Due to the current pandemic, the exhibition has had to be postponed to next year (21 April – 3 October 2021), but the accompanying bi-lingual catalogue was published to coincide with the original planned dates. With lavishly illustrated essays by experts at the MAK and scholars from elsewhere, and over one hundred short biographies of women artists, the catalogue is a rich resource that credits women artists' contributions to the Wiener Werkstätte from multiple perspectives.

In line with other publications from recent years, such as *Textile Modernism* (2019) or *Bauhaus Women* (2019), the essays seek to restore the role of women in one of the major modernist art and design institutions, whose significance has often been tied to the work of a handful of male artists and designers.[1] In the case of the Wiener Werkstätte, these male figures are Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser, who built a network between the Museum for Art and Industry, the School of Applied Arts and the Wiener Werkstätte as pillars of Viennese modern design. While these men obviously take a back seat in the present publication, Hoffmann's influence still emerges as central to the professional careers of many Wiener Werkstätte women artists: between 1915/16 and 1930 no other design school in the region boasted more female students, and over a third of them began to work for the Wiener Werkstätte. Presented in a contextualising chapter by Elisabeth Kreuzhuber, such statistics frame the catalogue's narrative. Beyond the meticulous archival work that this research is based on, these 'hard facts' also imply that the catalogue does more than to simply to reinsert forgotten artists and designers into the Wiener Werkstätte narrative: the sheer number of women artists included in the catalogue indicates that only with their inclusion can we gain a more complete image of the Wiener Werkstätte.

Indeed, the essays that focus on individual workshops / departments within the Wiener Werkstätte, such as toy design and ceramics (both by Megan Brandow-Faller), fashion and textiles (Angela Völker/ Lara Steinhäußer), and postcard design (Elisabeth Schmuttermeier), show that, overall, women represented a significant part of the creative workforce behind the Wiener Werkstätte as a commercial venture. The rich illustrations accompanying the essays also attest to this. A particularly well-chosen example to introduce women's design as part of

1) *Textile Moderne / Textile Modernism,* ed., Burcu Dogramaci, Vienna: Böhlau, 2019; Elizabeth Otto and Patrick Rössler, *Bauhaus Women: A Global Perspective*, London: Bloomsbury, 2019.

Viennese modernism is the juxtaposition of a blouse with a fabric design by Martha Alber, Gustav Klimt's portrait of Johanna Staude wearing the blouse, and a greeting card with the same pattern (p. 110). In keeping with the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk,* the catalogue thus makes clear that women's contributions to Viennese modernism are still hidden in plain sight. It offers convincing visual arguments, too, including countless design drafts and photographs, as well as dividers between each essay, reprinting diverse fabric patterns by some of the women designers discussed in the catalogue.

Even though the majority of women were trained in realms of design that were deemed 'feminine' (soft furnishings and tableware), the catalogue underlines that the Wiener Werkstätte also gave exceptional provision to women's artistic experimentation. This is most evident with the Artist's Workshop, founded in 1916 as a studio where artists could work without restrictions. An essay by Anne-Katrin Rossberg on this topic highlights the extent to which the workshop was a central feature for women's creative production, and the opportunities it gave for free experimentation strongly supported the artistic development of *Mehrfachkünstlerinnen* ('multivalent women artists,' as Brandow-Faller translates it) such as Vally Wieselthier, Maria Likarz and Martha Alber.

The crux to this relative freedom, Rossberg points out, were its ties to a competitive market: as 'an incentive to produce marketable objects,' the Wiener Werkstätte operated on the basis of a system of premiums, and even dismissed the designer Hilda Jesser for demanding a fixed salary in 1921 (p. 149). Revelations like this would offer an entry into more critical analyses about women's position in the Wiener Werkstätte, beginning with the question as to how far the demands of a commercial venture dictated women's opportunities, emancipation and position as working women. This also affects the role of women working in other areas of the Wiener Werkstätte business, which are only mentioned briefly, including its managing director Valerie Jahn (1929–1931), or the artist Margaret Bilger who worked for the company as a salesgirl (p. 21).

The catalogue essays show that the Wiener Werkstätte's support for a whole generation of women artists based on demands for a highly skilled workforce created its own 'type' of modern woman: the *Kunstgewerblerin* ('female decorative artist'). That this was not an easy position to hold is emphasised in the majority of contributions to this catalogue. Repeatedly referring to attacks by Adolf Loos and Arthur Rössler, among others, on the 'Wiener Weiberkunstgewerbe' a demeaning play on the Wiener Werkstätte brand name by the painter Julius Klinger (the term is rendered here with the Americanism 'Viennese Broad's Applied Art'), they show that the link between a female creative workforce and the applied arts as a 'dilettante minor art' produced by haute-bourgeois women faced strong opposition from central figures of Viennese modernism. Yet, with the exception of Brandow-Faller's essay on ceramic sculpture, which argues that Vally Wieselthier and her students forged their own 'feminine' strand of expression with brightly coloured ceramic sculpture, it is unclear how, or if at all, these criticisms might have impacted on women's work at the Wiener Werkstätte overall.

Throughout the catalogue, the opposition between emancipated women artists and established male critics of Viennese modernism appears to be irreconcilable. This narrative underlines the difficult circumstances in which the women of the Wiener Werkstätte

sought to forge careers for themselves. Most crucially, and with the exception of the 'female expressionism' of Wieselthier and her students, the question remains as to what bigger impact the strong female representation in the Wiener Werkstätte might have on our understanding of Viennese modernism today. By focusing on individual aspects of the Wiener Werkstätte, readers gain a closer view of what women's involvement looked like, but it is unclear how, based on this, albeit convincing evidence, we should be seeing Viennese modernism differently. Indeed, this question is complicated further by the concluding part of the catalogue, the biographies.

They number one hundred and twenty-eight in total and, focusing on basic biographical data, including what and when individual artists contributed to the Wiener Werkstätte, they offer a wealth of information that underlines the diversity of the women creating for the Wiener Werkstätte brand. Coming to Vienna from across the Empire, as well as from abroad, and hailing from different (though mostly privileged) social backgrounds, the biography section shows that there was no such 'type' as the *Kunstgewerblerin*. Rather, and Kreuzhuber suggests this in her essay, the *Kunstgewerblerin* was a profession that slowly paved women's way into a modern market economy from the late nineteenth century onwards. As a basic category overall, therefore, the 'woman artist of the Wiener Werkstätte' is rather more complex than the linear narratives of individual departments reveal. Comprising the final part of the catalogue, the biographies are well placed for precisely this reason, offering not a conclusion but, rather, an impetus for further research on a topic that is far from exhausted.

Overall, the catalogue leaves no doubt that women contributed significantly to the Wiener Werkstätte brand throughout its twenty-year existence. This alone makes *Women Artists of the Wiener Werkstätte* a publication of note, with the planned exhibition still to look forward to. At the same time, the arrangement of the new findings it offers would have benefitted from a different structure. Though visually impressive and giving new insights into a widely understudied topic, the catalogue predominantly focuses on linear narrative accounts. For example, Angela Völker's comparison between the textile departments of the Wiener Werkstätte and the Bauhaus gives a parallel, chronological account of the history and ideas of both departments and shows that there were personal contacts and exchanges between them, led by figures such as Hoffmann and Johannes Itten. However, the narrative focuses on factual information only, without providing a wider critical assessment of what the significance of such connections (or the lack thereof) might be. While such a positivistic approach may aim to engage a broader audience in line with the pressures to curate ever-more popular exhibitions, it offers little broader contextualisation of the Wiener Werkstätte overall, thereby making it of more interest for the specialist reader.

Given the substantial groundwork *Women Artists of the Wiener Werkstätte* has laid out, it bears the potential to spearhead a rethinking of Viennese modernism as a more inclusive phenomenon – all the more so as the product of a central institution such as the MAK. To advance this process, however, it is necessary to engage more closely, and more critically, in the points raised by the catalogue, asking questions such as: What potential lies in examining the role of the *Kunstgewerblerin* as a modern artistic profession? How might better understanding of women's contributions to the Wiener Werkstätte challenge existing conceptions of Viennese modernism? And how would this modify our understanding of figures that have hitherto

been central, such as Hoffmann? In light of these questions, the catalogue serves both as a sourcebook and a starting point, anticipating further studies to assess the broader impact of women's contributions to the Wiener Werkstätte within the broader field of (Viennese) modernism.

The MAK is running an open call for information on women artists involved in the Wiener Werkstätte on their website.

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# Abstraction in Hungary

A Review of:

Mária Árvai, Zsóka Leposa, Enikő Róka and Ulrich Winkler, eds, *Lajos Barta, Überlebensstrategien,* Budapest: Kiscelli Múzeum, 2019. 178 pp. ISBN: 9786155341670

Márta Branczik and Zsóka Leposa, eds, *Sonderwege, Karl-Heinz Adler und die ungarische Abstraktion,* Budapest: Kiscelli and Kassák Museums, 2017. 124 pp. ISBN: 9786155341472

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**Keywords**

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**Christian Drobe**

Two exhibitions in 2017 and 2019 are exemplary of a larger series of projects at the Kiscelli Museum, which have, in recent years, been devoted to Hungarian art after 1945, its protagonists and issues of abstraction behind the Iron Curtain.[1] Both of these catalogues document this and demonstrate the gaps that the restrictive Communist system had, so that it was still possible to create truly 'progressive,' i.e., non-figurative art. In some cases, such art projects were even supported by official authorities. This was particularly true for art connected to architecture ('Kunst am Bau'), which offered precisely these niches within society and enabled a modern display of forms in public space, away from (or later even in harmony with) Socialist Realism. This development flourished particularly strongly in Hungary, as well as in some countries of Central Europe such as Poland or Czechoslovakia. The regimes of Mátyás Rákosi and János Kádár in the 1950s were regarded as particularly repressive but, nevertheless, some amount of freedom was possible, albeit in a very limited way, in the 'undecided years' before and after the revolution of 1956. Both catalogues attempt to follow these paths of non-figurative art in times of its supposed suppression, avoiding the black-and-white depiction of simple partisanship for or against abstraction that was superficially heard in the later debates. At the same time, they both point to the close ties between Hungary and Germany. One of them does so through the example of Lajos Barta (1899–1986), who spent the last third of his life in Cologne where his work was finally able to have its full effect. The other explores the case of Karl-Heinz Adler (1927–2018), who worked with comparable strategies in East Germany and maintained contact with Hungarian artists. For him, too, art in architecture was an essential reference point for his work. The cultural exchange also highlights opportunities and possibilities in both political blocs of the Cold War.

The first catalogue, *Sonderwege. Karl-Heinz Adler und die ungarische Abstraktion* accompanies the exhibition, which took place in 2017 in the Kassák Museum, the Petőfi Literature Museum and the Kiscelli Museum (the picture gallery of the Budapest History Museum). Four essays accompany the rich catalogue of illustrations. The first two are devoted to Karl-Heinz Adler's relationship to Hungarian abstraction, the last two deal with the question of art and politics in Hungary in the 1950s and 1960s. The focus is on art produced specifically

1) *Lajos Barta, Überlebensstrategien*, 6.

for buildings, which was decided on by the Hungarian state in 1954. Officials ordered the allocation of 0.2 percent of each building's budget to art.[2] The same policy became a reality in the GDR and provided lots of opportunities for artists. Most of Karl-Heinz Adler's oeuvre, who was known as an abstract painter and conceptual artist, was devoted to art and decoration on public buildings, where his otherwise contested style could succeed. To cope with this, he not only cultivated contacts with West Germany through old companions such as Gotthard Graubner (1930–2013), but also had connections with Hungarian artists, including János Fajó (1937–2018), István Nádler (1938-), Dóra Maurer (1936-) and Imre Bak (1939-).[3] There was a lively exchange with both halves of Germany. The Museum Folkwang in Essen, for example, under its director Dieter Honisch, awarded several scholarships to Hungarian artists from the 1970s onwards. Adler was well aware of the interrelationships, and there was an awareness of the possibilities offered by art in the various political systems. So it was that both in the GDR and in Hungary the much-vaunted *double speak* came about, i.e. the dual strategies of the artists who officially created state art, but in private followed progressive styles.[4] Klara Kemp-Welch has tried to capture the complicated strategies with which artists undercut state censorship with the term 'antipolitics.'[5] Adler was mostly concerned with colour field painting and serial abstract forms, unusual for East Germany and a practice that could invited possibly recrimination. He created works contrary to the official art doctrine and was unable to exhibit or get appreciation for them for a long time. Only in public spaces was he able to realise his works in the GDR, where Socialist Realism was dominant, even in comparison with other states in the Eastern bloc. A well-known example is Adler's geometric patterns on the side wall of the Pullman Hotel (formerly the Neva) in Dresden.

These and similar works, and the extensive designs for them, are assembled in the attractively designed catalogue and make it possible to follow his development. It also allows a comparison between the artists of this generation in the GDR and Hungary. This includes the design of the Savoy Restaurant in Budapest, which was supplemented in 1962 by the painter László Lakner (1936-) with a large mural showing a view of the city. The painting, which was walled up in 2003 during the construction of a branch of Burgerking, shows a completely abstract solution, an energetic view into a perspectivally arranged but abstract street line. At that time this was something completely new in a public building. Many of these projects by artists such as Imre Bak, Istvan Nádler or even Ferenc Lantos (1929-) were the subject of lively discussion in the cultural committees in Hungary. Older artists like Aurél Bernáth (1895–1982) and Pál Pátzay (1896–1979) were often ambivalent or even hostile towards the new ideas. Aurél Bernáth said to Lakner that the work in the Savoy restaurant did not endanger the viewer, but that it was not real fine art. In 1962 Pátzay, in his essay 'Korunk esztétikai zűrzavara' (Aesthetic Confusion of Our Time), attacked the addiction of artists to abstraction in the wake of architecture.[6] In the same year, Ferenc Lantos countered with a good pinch of Marxist dialectic in his essay

2) *Sonderwege, Karl-Heinz Adler und die ungarische Abstraktion*, 15.

3) Ibid., 9.

4) Edit Sasvári, Hedvig Turai, Sándor Hornyik, eds, *Art in Hungary, 1956–1980: Doublespeak and Beyond*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2018.

5) Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics in Central European Art. Reticence as Dissidence under Post-totalitarian Rule 1956–1989*, London: Bloomsbury. 2014.

6) *Sonderwege, Karl-Heinz Adler und die ungarische Abstraktion*, 17.

'Fogalomtisztázás' (Clarification of Terms) in the magazine *Jelenkor*. Abstraction is reality, he argued, as the dismantling and reconstruction of the elements of the visible world; there is no contradiction at all with state doctrine.[7] Such attempts indicate the growing self-confidence of artists. The essays in the catalogue illustrate very well these rhetorical strategies and the gradual development towards greater acceptance of abstraction among state officials.

In the course of the 1960s the dominance of Socialist Realism was increasingly challenged. More and more projects for abstract designs and art pieces in public places, parks, kindergartens or swimming pools were created. After 1945, abstraction found better opportunities in some parts of Central Europe, especially in Hungary, Poland or Czechoslovakia. It was thus only through his south-eastern neighbours, considered more open to these developments than the GDR, that Karl-Heinz Adler was inspired to create modern forms. Poland was his gateway to modernism, he once stated. What is striking about the catalogue is the many continuities it reveals with the interwar period. These include the well-known Hungarian artist Victor Vasarely (1906–1997) who was educated in the 1930s in Sándor Bortnyik's (1893–1976) art school. References are often made to Lajos Kassák (1887–1967), but also to Gyula Derkovits (1894–1934), both of them key interwar figures. In any case, the progressive European School in Hungary, which was formed shortly after 1945 and continued modernist traditions, was present in Hungary throughout the 1950s. All these influences then had an impact on the generation of Karl-Heinz Adler and Ferenc Lantos, and they allow this neo-avant-garde to flourish in Central Europe. These ideas continue to have an effect right up to contemporary artists such as Olaf Holzapfel, who has taken up many ideas from Adler. The catalogue's merit is to have drawn attention to this discourse particularly by means of examples from the field of architectural art.

The second catalogue is dedicated to the work of the Hungarian sculptor Lajos Barta and is appropriately titled *Überlebensstrategien* (Strategies of survival). The exhibition was shown at the Kiscelli Museum in 2019, in cooperation with the Martin-Lantzsch-Nötzel Foundation in Cologne. Extensive essays are dedicated to the various tactics with which Barta tried to work as an artist in Hungary's repressive environment. Barta's eventful life as an artist began before the Second World War in Paris. Like many Hungarian artists, he travelled to the metropolis early on. There were connections to the Parisian artists' group *Abstraction-Creation*, but Barta also cultivated contacts with the Surrealists and experimented with *écriture automatique*. Both influences remained decisive for his development as a sculptor, visible in the geometrization of his figurative works on the one hand, and a tendency towards Surrealism on the other, which he preserved especially in the medium of drawing. After his artistic awakening, there was a final shift to abstraction in 1943; due to the War he experienced a long odyssey before he eventually returned to Hungary. There he became a co-founder of the 'European School,' which soon disintegrated, but remained his main influence. In 1949, with the turn to Stalinism, he submitted to the artistic doctrine imposed from above. For reasons of subsistence as a sculptor, he modelled works such as *The Happy Family* (1950) and similar realistic scenes, including a design for the Stalin monument in Budapest and also a bust of Mátyás Rákosi, the Communist Hungarian leader, which corresponded to the aims of the new state and Socialist Realism. The state consequently provided him with his studio and enough working materials

7) Ibid., 19.

– as a sculptor, one was much more dependent on the favour of public authorities. His life was strongly influenced by the Hungarian National Uprising in 1956. He saw glimmers of hope for more freedom. Between 1953 and 1956 there was a process of quiet de-stalinisation, but after 1956 modern art couldn't prevail. Thus, Barta's double existence as a sculptor for the state and as a progressive artist in the private sphere – the double-speak – became established in an exemplary manner. Only in private life did he remain the progressive modernist he wanted to be after his time in Paris, above all as a draughtsman.

His aim was to participate in as many public competitions as possible, flooding everything with his progressive, abstract designs. It was a long process of eroding conservative ideas. When his sculpture *Three Children* (1959) was finished, the jury complained that he should make his work 30% more representational, i.e. more figurative. In the wake of that, the sculpture *Wave* (1959) was created, the first public abstract sculpture in Hungary.[8] All these commissions remained highly contested. Another sculpture was to be created on Gellért Hill in Budapest for the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Hungary. The abstract sculpture, planned as a surface for climbing, did not meet with the approval of the official clients.[9] Barta threatened to commit suicide, but then promised to make the *Three Little Horses* (1964) instead, for which he is still famous today. The, sometimes, grim business of negotiation determined the work of artists in Hungary, always driven between three official categories: (1) official art; (2) art accepted by the state; (3) art that was merely tolerated or forbidden. Until the mid-1960s, Barta followed the strategy of double-speak. Then he explored Western Europe and finally moved to Cologne in 1965. Today Barta is known for his organic, biomorphic figures, which are reminiscent of Henry Moore and are linked to ideas of modern abstract sculpture. They found many supporters and are widespread in the urban areas of West Germany. The catalogue makes all these aspects clear in a vivid way and with a lot of illustrative material.

Both publications must be seen in the larger context of art after 1945. In recent years, the relationship between supposedly Western abstraction and Socialist Realism in the East has been reappraised, especially regarding the individual strategies of the artists. Both catalogues succeed in presenting in a nuanced way the coping strategies that artists pursued behind the Iron Curtain. It was precisely the art on buildings and in public spaces that created niches and free spaces that made possible a progressive modern and abstract art of its own. The constant struggle for this limited freedom led to subversive and innovative solutions.

8) *Lajos Barta, Überlebensstrategien, Kiscelli Múzeum*, 35.

9) Ibid., 75.

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