

Sedlář, Jaroslav

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In: *Moderna - avantgarda - postmoderna*. Kšicová, Danuše (editor); Pospíšil, Ivo (editor). 1. vyd. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2003, pp. 371-381

ISBN 8021031182

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/132634>

Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

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POST-MODERNISM IN CREATIVE ARTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND IN THE WORLD

JAROSLAV SEDLÁŘ (BRNO)

The word post-modernism was first coined as early as 1870 by the English salon artist John Watkins Chapman and was first put into print in 1917 in *Die Krisis der europäische Kultur* by Rudolf Pannwitz and then in 1934 by the literary theorist Federico Oniz in his work *Antología de la Poesia española e Hispanoamericana*. In the Year 1947 the English historian and philosopher Arnold Toynbee published *A Study of History* in which he claimed that post-modern western culture started as early as 1875, and by 1949 Josef Hudnut's study of architecture *The Post-Modern house* had developed the discussion into other fields. Although it was from Toynbee that the Americans borrowed the notion of post-modernism and gave it even further meaning. Irwing Howe in the article *Mass society and Postmodern Fiction* (1959), H. Levin and H. Kramer noted the decline of literature after Yeats, Eliot, Pound and Joyce. On the contrary post-modernism was defended by the literary critics Leslie A. Fielder and Susan Sontag, who appraised the union of elite and mass culture in the works of Boris Vian, John Barth, Leonard Cohen and Norman Mailer. The new literature was supposed to have quit the ivory tower according to Leslie A. Fielding in the study *Cross the Border – Close the Gap* published in *Playboy Magazine* in 1969. Post-modern literature was supposed to have joined the experiences of the elite and popular tastes in fiction. Besides, in 1971 Ihab Hassan's *A Paracritical Bibliography* was published, and in 1977 in Germany M. Kohler's *Postmodernismus: Ein begriffsgeschichtlicher Überblick*, an uncritical overview of contemporary literature.

From 1972, the discussion about postmodern literature in the USA developed, the most important development of this era was the academic conference on postmodern art in 1981 at the University of Washington. In 1979 Francois Lyotard clarified his position with the publication of his book *La condition postmoderne*, which came about as a chance writing at the request of the University Board of the Government of Quebec, who wanted J.F. Lyotard to interpret the state of science in the most advanced societies. J.F. Lyotard introduced the notion of post-modernism, but it was in his work *Le différend* that he truly set out his philosophical position. In which he an-

nounced that the central moment of Post-modernism was the dissolution of the unity of contemporary science, which had been progressing since the Enlightenment. The unity of modern thought relied upon the three metanarratives (grand recite, metanarration, great narrative). This was the emancipation of humanity – from the Enlightenment, from theologies of the soul – from idealism, from the hermeticism of thought – from history.

Postmodern thought originates from unbelief in the metanarrative and how it is consequent upon the progress of science which it presupposes. Reality now adheres to millions of tiny narrations, often in the form of tiny language games. This tiny narrative caused the dissolution of the totality of thought, which replaced the consensus, but even this is only possible with the limits of individual languages games and no metalanguage exists, which would contain everything.

F. Lyotard was at one and the same time a determined follower of the aesthetic modern and valued by the artist avant garde of the twentieth century, which prepared the groundwork for plurality and post-modernism understood as a continuation of modernism, “Postmodernism is decidedly a part of the modern, postmodernism is not an adolescent modernism grown up, rather modernism in the condition of genesis.” (*Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, 1986).

In contrast to Lyotard, Jürgen Habermas speaks of the failure of the modern project (*Die Moderne, ein unvollendetes Projekt*, 1981). It was called the project because, the ideals of the modern were oriented on the future, a future in which these ideals should be realised. By the failure of the modern project, Habermas means the definitive abandonment of faith in progress, whose horizons and legitimisations should have been the guarantee of freedom. Mankind held Progress in science, technology and art as the key to emancipation from poverty, unconsciousness and despotism. This idea, from modernday, shielding and justifying the aggrandizement of western societies, is today in the western world, in a state of disintegration and development continues under the shameful name of progress. The demise of the modern project is not some simple decay, on the contrary, it is led almost exponentially by “Science and Technology“, which it is now no longer able to justify by the empty promises of freedom, and that is the main aspect of the destruction of the modern project, which was supposed to be valid for all of humanity. The modern project was not abandoned, it was destroyed.

Wolfgang Iser (*Unsere postmoderne moderne*, 1987) applied the expression of postmodernism to all culture and politics. The modern was char-

acterised by plurality, and dominant in postmodernism is the fact that it is the fulfilment of modernism, not therefore an anti-modernism nor a transmodernism. Completely at odds with the philosophy conjectured by the postmodernist and American Historian, Francis Fukuyama (who was the representative of the director of the planning personnel of the ministry of Foreign Affairs of the United States). His books *The End of History* (1989) and *The End of History and the Postmodern Man* (1992) celebrate postmodern history as a new reality brought about by the fall of the communist system in Eastern Europe and the victory of liberal democratic capitalism, according to Fukuyama this wasn't the end of the Cold War but the end of history. At the same time appealing against Marx and Hegel.

Differences exist even between postmodern philosophy and postmodern art theory, as demonstrated by Achille Bonito Oliva in his rebuttal of J.F. Lyotard's programmed limitations of Italian Creative Art by theoretical arts.

The problems of postmodernism was, of course, also a concern for G. Vattimo in the treatise *La fine della modernità* (Milano 1985) and for writer Umberto Eco, for whom postmodernism is a spiritual category and post-structuralists, like M. Foucault, G. Deleuze, J. Derrida, theoretical deconstructivism. For the creative arts the concept of Jean Baudrillard was very important. His theory, which originated in the area of postmodern architecture, is often defined as the opposite of functionalism.

Charles Jencks in the Book, *Post-Modernism. The New Classicism in Art and Architecture* (London 1987) posited that postmodern architecture as the lyrical epoch. Jencks original concept is structured within the limits of postmodern architecture as compared with the architecture of modernism, when for positive identification and detailed description it doesn't stand up to the strict criteria of modernism, eclecticism, hybridism, unclear style. It's clear that Jencks borrowed the literary positions from the theories of Leslie A. Fiedler, just as from the second theoretician of postmodern architecture, Heinrich Klotz, director of the German Museum of Architecture in Frankfurt am Main. His concept wasn't in principle in opposition to Jencks'. According to whom, fiction and imagination, should once again be represented in architecture. Throwing architectural modernism (and most of all functionalism) out "... under the rule of functionalism the role of the fictive was totally expelled from architecture so that what we are left with is only building technology. Today we want to free architecture from the abstraction of pure service and return to the potential, once again to free up the possibility of fabulous places." Nevertheless, Klotz didn't spurn completely modern architecture, as he explained in this work entitled *Revision der Moderne. Postmoderne Architektur 1960-1980, München 1984*. He discusses the revision of the

modern, how the reintrospection and valuation of its division of architecture into many different directions. He distinguished architectural types such as neo-classicism and deconstructivism. From the standpoint of postmodernism he considered a new classicism, which divides classicism into the metaphysical, the narrative, the alegorical and the realistic and postmodernist sensibilities.

Architects also created theories to describe this phenomenon, such as R. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, according to several manifestos, even though he didn't actually propagate the ideas of postmodernism. His second book, *Learning from Las Vegas*, argues that from architecture we get visual communication and inferences of metaphors of architecture and their social functions. In the streets of Las Vegas maturing towards the needs of electricity, disaster and various architectures, which grew organically and unplanned. Venturi's realisations of postmodern architecture are critical and decisive. Even at the end of the 70's the first real criticisms of postmodern architecture originated in R. Koolhaas' book *Delirious New York* in which he talks of the death of postmodernism. And immediately in 1975, the magazine, *The New Yorker*, is saying that postmodernism is unreturnably gone, it's out and like the newest program is probably the introduction to postpostmodernism. In Europe in these years, postmodernism is truly defined. Architectural postmodernism is easier to understand than fine art or sculpture, perhaps because modernism was already working with the ideas of pluralism. In other fields of the creative arts and culture the prime examples of the form, were Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Joseph Beuys and Francis Bacon. Andy Warhol prepared postmodernism in every conceivable medium, just as Josef Beuys in his work united all forms of artistic endeavour. Even more important was the Beuys founded the Cult of Personality which allowed the new entrance of individualism, in contradiction, to the intellectual non-personality of modernism, which is out of line with the basic characteristic of the postmodern which is pluralism, typical for the new arts.

In Europe during the 1970's and the 1980's several key exhibitions were held, in Milan the exhibition of *Nuovo Immagine* created by Flavio Caroli, in Bologne by Renato Barilli and the exhibition of *I nuovi nuovi* by Achile Bonito Oliva who in the 39th Venetian Biennial chose for his exhibition *Aperto 80* the works by Cucci, Clement, Paladino and Chie. Oliva then published *La transavanguardia italiana (Milano, 1980)*, using the same name as the artistic group. It was a artistic line-up which exhibited together in 1978 in Cologne, and in 1979 at the exhibition *Europa 79* and in Stuttgart in 1980. In 1981 there was the total European exhibition of postmodernism in Berlin.

In Germany was the important, although not the first, exhibition Mülheimer Freiheit in Cologne in 1980, which was put on by Paul Maenz, further in 1981 a series of Exhibitions, put on by Wolfgang Becker under the name Neue Wilden. At these exhibitions the works of the Germans, M. Lüpertz, S. Anzinger, J. Immendorff, M. Disler, the English, B. McLean, K. Kif and the Americans, were shown. Immediate were the reactions of the Dutch, the Poles and the Hungarians. In France an exhibition was put on, The new parisien biennial in the postmodern park La Vilette, foreign artists were invited and the works of French artists F. Boisrond, R. Blanchard, J. Ch. Blaise were exhibited. The exhibitions found a larger and larger response and postmodernism was received by a lay as well as an academic audience. Europe was covered by waves of enthusiasm for the new artistic movement. As if there was a change of atmosphere all over Europe at roughly the same time. Eco's Zeitgeist postmodernism owed a large debt to the new creative spontaneity, probably best demonstrated in the rebirth in attitudes towards painting, drawing, creating sculptures and plastics, in contrast to conceptualisation and minimalisation.

The second group to cause changes outside of Italian awareness was *Scuola Nuova Romana*. Into public awareness this group also introduces A.B. Oliva, when in 1984 at the home at Via degli Ausoni - Galleria L'Attico in Rome there was a exhibition and catalogue prepared. Members of the group included Nunzio di Stefano, Bruno Ceccobelli, Domenico Bianchi, Gianni Dessi, Giuseppe Gallo, Marco Tirelli, Piero Pizzi Cannella. These were sculptors and painters, creators of objects. They work with the basic archetypical shapes, with crosses, spirals and points and they utilized primitive materials wood, soot and bees wax. They paint mainly in sombre dusky colours, in blacks, whites and if need be reds. Their art is forever searching out archetypes and original forms. The attempt to define or discover the primeval shapes and forms through which to find universal and ordinarily acceptable values, founded upon an anthropological experience of existence. Their position is really a resignation to the philosophical and aesthetic problems of the twentieth century.

The tradition of expression had enriched cultural life in Germany ever since the second world war. In 1961 Georg Baselitz and Eugen Schonberk spoke out against informal, similar to the original Berlin group *Vision* founded in 1963. It was called Pathetic Realism, whose original idea has been followed by Markus Lüpertz since 1963. Of course, neo-expressionist painting, a component of post-modernism was explored by Berlin artists Peter Chevalier, Rainer Fetting, Dieter Hacker, K. H. Hödicke, Bernd Koberling,

Helmut Middendorf and Salomé and at the start of the 80's by the the artists A. R. Penck, Georg Baselitz, Markus Lüperz, Jörg Immendorf and in Carlsruhe, Dan Petr Kirkeby. These artists also returned to sculpture, which also had a strong link with the wooden sculpture of the expressionists, but also with Art Brut, and the plastics of Jean Fautrier, Jean Dubuffet and Asger Jorn. A similar neo-expressionist sculpture also existed in Italy, with the painters Mimmo Paladino and Sandro Chie.

The German summary labelling for painting characterized by strongly expressive colours and very individual signs from the year 1978 onwards is the Neue Wilden (New Wild). The assignation reminds one of the French fauvism and German expressionism from the turn of the century. Counted among them are the Berlin artistic leaders, Helmut Middendorf, Rainer Fetting, Peter Chevalier, Dieter Hakker and Salomé, from the pathetic realists, Markus Lüperz, Georg Baselitz and K. H. Hödicke and in particular from the Cologne group of artists Muhlheimer Freiheit Hans Peter Adamski, Walther Dahn, Naschberger, N. N. Kever, Peter Bömmels and among them first and foremost Walter Dahn and Jiri Georg Dokoupil. Also belonging to this group, of course, is Anselm Kiefer, who makes use of historical subject matter and a group of painters from Hamburg, Albert Oehlen, Markus Oehlen, Werner Büttner a Martin Kippenberger, who use ultimately sub-culture and parody of derivative motifs from any age, from politics, language and art. All of these can be counted as postmodernists, all who choose as the idyll and inspiration expressionist paths. Their painting at first demonstrates a relationship with the sub-culture music of the new wave. Nevertheless, everything these painters did is far removed from simplified commonplace neo-expressionism, because instead of concrete utopia of societal renewal, which was central to the expressionist project, today's artists are aware of loneliness and invincible isolation.

The third most important centre of postmodernism were the United States of America. On both coasts of America, we find centres of postmodernism, on the west coast in California, where the postmodernist Jonathan Borofsky created and in the east, in New York where Pattern Painting movement flourished (Joyce Kozloff, Valerie Jaudon, Robert Kuschner, Robert Zakanitsch) and Graffiti, among whom Michael Basquiat excelled, labelling Loner or King. The Pattern Painting movement, later called Pattern and Decoration was founded on the decorative repetition of ornamental images, using the most widely various of human motifs (Indian patterns, oriental carpets, textiles) and commercial reproductions of technical things. Going about it, in the

whole, from non-pictured abstract paintings, and postmodern feelings of distance.

Conversely, David Sale, Julian Schnabel, Jeff Koons, Eric Fischl and Robert Longo, were reflecting the European postmodernist productions and simulating with the effects of transavantgardism and neoexpressionism. Their works characterised the figurarisation, expressionism, and also the new naturalism of human body with it's raw and sometimes brutal eroticism.

In France, painting stuck to it's two-dimensional spaces, abstract and figural motifs. Even there of course, we find a return to the past, for example Matisse. Jean Michel Alberola worked with myths, but also classical themes (Susan and Antheon). Jean Gérard Garouste with his grotesque tuned works that remind one of the Baroque or Tinoretti's Mannerisms.

In the 1980's when defining postmodernist art, similar to the rest of Europe, was also in Hungary. In these times the deflection from the intellectual rationalisation of the avant-garde and from the art of the 60's and 70's, was oriented more towards national tradition, individuality and subjective history and the sensory body. In the person of Lorand Hegyi we find the Hungarian creative art scene of interpretation which reminds us of A.B. Oliva, with whom Hegyi had a similar position on Modernism. Hungarian Postmodern artists include I. Nádler, K. Kelemen, L. Mulasics, T. Koncz, L. Fehér, J. Szirtes, A. Szabados, who also were looking for the relationship to the past, in this case to Mannerism and the Baroque, but also to Cubism and pop-culture. Their is often full of nostalgia, irony, and absurdity. They used emotive subject matter as their vehicle to the world.

Czech Culture also made its entrance on to the World postmodern scene in the 1980's, opening the entrance with theoretical literature and was well conversant with the current state of the discussion world-wide. It manifested itself in carefully worked academic journal studies, wherein the problems of explaining and expressing the theories, J. Ševčík and J. Ševčíkova for example, in the technical studies of *Farewells to modernism. Four evaluations of new paintings* (the samizdat Sborník památce Jiřího Padrtý 1986), Vlasta Čiháková-Noshiro, V. Jirousová, Jaroslav Sedlár who first introduced the Czechs to the second Italian group called La scuola nuova romana. In the study about this group, just as fro example in the work *Poetics of the postavantgarde*, he characterized postmodernism in the fine arts as a return to archetypes of the early renaissance, mannerism or expressionism. Petr Nedoma delimited postmodernism negatively, while M. Slavická examined consciousness and it's different forms in the components of thought and engaged herself with questions of the sacreligious in art: Overviews of the current the-

ory of postmodernism were prepared by Jiří Kroupa, Josef Hlaváček, philosopher and sociologist Stanislav Hubík, Miroslav Petříček who is an expert in the works of Derrida. In the year 1996 Květoslav Chvatík printed in the journal TVAR 7 an article on postmodernism as a self-criticism of modernism, in which he leaned on Habermas's incomplete project. Postmodern art was greeted by the academic journals *Studio (Atelier)*, *Creative Art (Výtvarné umění)*, *Art and Craft (Umění a řemesla)*, and in Slovakia *Creative life (Výtvarný život)*. In Prague the publication *Somebody Something (Někdo Něco)* (1985-1988) and its Brno incarnation *Choice (Výběr)*, which from 1987-1989 was produced by Karel Tutsch, a summary of several of which, but by no means all these discussions about postmodernism can be found in the symposium *Under one roof (Pod jednou střechou)*.

Czech postmodern sculptors and fine artist were discovered to be something completely new in the years 1984-1987 at the informal exhibitions called Confrontation. Here we are introduced to an informal younger generation of artists from Prague's AVU and Artistic and productive schools. Excepting several other older artists who had been introduced to the public earlier. The first four Confrontations were crucial, however with the following increased number of exhibits there was a noticeable drop in quality. The decisive works of this period were created by Jiří David and Stanislav Diviš and their classmates, Mainer, Bačkovský, Vaněček. Students from the class 83/84 took part in the first Confrontation and Jiří David, Stanislav Diviš, Jiří Gabriel who made up the artist group Tvrdohlaví (the name, a reminder of the Tvrdošíjný group from 1918). This group was then joined by Otto Placht, Jan Antoš, Magdalena Rajnišová, Jiří Kornatovský, Josef Pluhař, who acquired Petr Nikl, a student of the year above and a group from the third year: Martin Mainer, Jana Bačkovsky a Petra Vaněček. The exhibition took place at the David Studio in Smichov, with 19 students in attendance and 4 representatives of VŠUP (Michal Cihlář, Aleš Najbrt, Pavel Beneš, Kryštof Trubáček). The artistic expression invokes the neoexpressionist and is at first glance fairly similar to the concurrent German painting.

Even at the Second Confrontation (1984), at which 28 artist were exhibited, like the new Jan Merta and Michal Rajniš, and was held in the privacy of tenement house and the third one out of Prague in Kladno, at the home of Magdalena Rajnišová, where 36 artists took part. At this exhibition the artists as previously were exhibited and also some new ones such as Jiří Načeradský. At Confrontation 4 (in 1986), back in Prague, in the Studio of the students of the Art and production school *Bohuslav Metelka*, among the exhibitors were Čísařovský, Titlová, Střížek, Skrepl, Kovanda, Róna, Skála, Suška and in attendance was Vaclav Havel, Egon Bondy and in the non-

-periodical magazine *Somebody Something (Někdo Něco)* the whole exhibition was reported.

The fifth and sixth Confrontations were realised in 1986 and 1987 in Kladno and in the courtyard of a home block in Vysočany. Confrontation 6 had a completely official face and therefore had the exceptionally number of 79 exhibitors amongst whom were also international artists as well as artists from outside Prague. For example Kokolia and Olešová from Brno and Brunovský a Teren from Slovakia. They found the continuation in the Community Centre in Vysočany, where the Tvrdohlaví group regularly exhibited. It was this group, whose membership and followers from the mass base of Confrontation, who made it possible to unite practically all the needs of artists in the 1980's and allow the public access to them.

In the Slovácký Saloon of the Community Centre in Prague, on the 3rd of June 1987, Jiří David, Stanislav Diviš, Michal Gabriel, Zdeněk Lhotský, Stefan Milkov, Václav Marhoul, Petr Nikl, Jaroslav Róna, František Skála a Čestmír Suška counter signed a document. That originated from the ten-member group Tvrdohlaví, which founded the famous Society of Czech Creative Artists, because they wished to exhibit their works legitimately.

Czech postmodernists of the creative arts include, Petr Nikl, Jiří David, Stanislav Diviš, František Skála, Martin Mainer, Jiří Kovanda, Antonín Střížek, Tomáš Císařovský, Michal Gabriel, Jaroslav Róna, Stefan Milkov, Vladimír Skrepl, Martin John, Jan Knap, Daniel Balabán, Vladimír Kokolia, Jan Pištěk, Jan Merta. Each of them, and first and foremost, of course, with Tvrdohlaví united the multimedia of sensory activity to develop into more artistic fields. Individually the members expressed themselves through, painting, drawing, sculpting, plastics and objects, but also Film, theatre (namely, the film *Pražská pětka* and the creative theatre of V. D. Kolotoč-Suška), Róna wrote literary texts, Nikl poetry while Čestmír Suška a František Skála played in a musical ensemble. All the members of Tvrdohlaví were involved in at least tens of other groups of differing artistic and non-artistic pursuits. The connection with the theatre was, of course, extremely important, for in theatre the moment of fiction, imagination, fantasy and likewise the play is in tune with art which wishes to be seen not only as descriptive reality but also as onerous existentialism. Nikl was the guiding force behind the theatre group Mehadaha, which provided the opportunity for group performance as much as theatre performance in the true sense of the phrase. Particularly since the 1990's this theatre activity is the equivalent of creation; it co-operates, of course, with other theatre groups. Skála and Róna are also members of the obscure theatre society B.K.S.

Resumé

Autor studie Postmodernismus ve výtvarném umění ve světě a v české republice shrnuje základní vědomosti o vzniku pojmu od roku 1870, kdy ho poprvé vyslovil anglický salónní malíř John Watkins Chapman, přes dílo Arnolda Toynbeeho *A Study of History*, názory literárního kritika Leslieho A. Fiedlera a diskuse o postmoderní literatuře v USA, z nichž nejvýznamnější byla vědecká konference o postmoderním umění v roce 1981 na univerzitě ve Washingtonu. Uvádí díla hlavních filozofů postmoderny Françoise Lyotarda, Jürgena Habermase, J. Derridy, W. Welsche a F. Fukuyamy a teoretiků umění A. B. Olivy, Ch. Jenckse, H. Klotze, v Maďarsku Lóránda Hegyiho, v ČR Miroslava Petříčka, Květoslava Chvatíka, J. a J. Ševčíkových, J. Sedláře, St. Hubíka, M. Slavické aj., architekta R. Venturiho a umělce, předchůdce postmoderny, Andy Warhola, Jaspere Johnse, Josepha Beuyse a Francise Bacona.

Druhou část studie věnuje autor již sledování postmoderního malířství a sochařství v Itálii, kde uvádí výstavy *Nuovo Immagine* v Miláně, *I nuovi nuovi* v Bologni, 39. benátské Bienále, pro které vybral A. B. Oliva díla Cucchiho, Clementa, Paladina a Chii, v Německu *Europa 79*, *Přehlídka západního umění* v Kolíně nad Rýnem (1981) a *Zeitgeist* v Berlíně (1982), ve Francii výstavu *Nové pařížské bienále*. Připomíná skupinu *La transanguardia italiana*, *Scuola nuova romana*, německý neoexpresionismus, *Neue Wilden* a třetí nejdůležitější centrum postmodernismu na obou pobřežích USA. Potom zaznamenává postmoderní umění v Maďarsku a nakonec v České republice, kde se objevilo jako něco zcela nového už v letech 1984-1987 na neformálních výstavách nazvaných *Konfrontace I-VI*, na kterých se zformovala nejmladší generace tehdy ještě studentů pražské AVU a Uměleckoprůmyslové školy a ze kterých 3. června 1987 vznikla skupina *Tvrdohlaví* (zakládací listinu podepsali ve Slováckém salonku Obecního domu v Praze Jiří David, Stanislav Diviš, Michal Gabriel, Zdeněk Lhotský, Stefan Milkov, Václav Marhoul, Petr Nikl, Jaroslav Róna, František Skála a Čestmír Suška).

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