MODERNITY, HISTORY, AND POLITICS IN CZECH ART

Marta Filipová

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This book traces the influence of the changing political environment on Czech art, criticism, history, and theory between 1895 and 1939, looking beyond the avant-garde to the peripheries of modern art. The period is marked by radical political changes, the formation of national and regional identities, and the rise of modernism in Central Europe – specifically, the collapse of Austria-Hungary and the creation of the new democratic state of Czechoslovakia. Marta Filipová studies the way in which the narratives of modern art were formed in constant negotiation and dialogue between the effort to be international and the desire to remain authentically local.

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Acknowledgement

This book is a result of several years of intermittent and eventually consistent work, and it would not be fair to say that it was always fun. The research and writing was mostly enjoyable, but sometimes painful too, I am not going to lie. The idea came out of my doctoral thesis which I completed at the University of Glasgow some years ago now and kept coming back to and putting off to turn into a monograph. It is, therefore, a great reward and relief to have the book finished.

Many people helped to see it through, whether they were aware of it or not. I cannot name all of them, I really can't. But the journey started in Brno, at the Masaryk University, where I did my MA at the Art History department. Jiří Kroupa, Lubomír Slavíček, and Milena Bartlová were responsible for introducing me to historiography and methodology, which like them – and unlike many others I found fascinating. The topic of writing about art in a specific national and political context and the reasons for constructing these various narratives brought me to the University of Glasgow. There I met Paul Stirton, Juliet Kinchin and Jan Čulík, whose supervision and guidance was essential for mapping out the basic issues of my topic.

Throughout the years I have participated in a number of conferences and seminars which were most of the time constructive for shaping the ideas that made it into the book. I have met a number of excellent scholars, with whom I discussed the nitty-gritty of Czech art and history. Jindřich Vybíral, Jutta Vinzent, Anna Brzyski, Chris Long, Sam Albert, Richard Woodfield, Julia Secklehner, Pieter Judson, Stefan Muthesius, Nancy Perloff, Mary Heimann, Lada Hubatová Vacková, Thomas Ort, Peter Zusi are just some of them.

The research for this book took me to many places, unsurprisingly mostly in the Czech Republic. I spent days and weeks in the libraries and archives in Prague and Brno, but also in Vienna, London, Glasgow, and the Getty Research Institute, which had generously awarded me a research grant.

I am grateful to all the institutions that allowed me to use their images here, and I am especially grateful to George Drost for his generosity in sharing his enthusiasm for Uprka with me. I also learnt a lot from the anonymous reviewers for Routledge who helped me focus the book. Some colleagues even had the patience to read various parts of the draft and give me comments and advice; these include Vendula Hnídková, Daniel J. Huppatz and David Hemsol. The editorial team at Routledge, with Isabella Vitti, Katie Armstrong, and many others were fantastic in their help at all stages of this book's production.

And, in all honesty, this book would not see the light of day without the support of my family and friends who kept me sane, and without the boys who reminded me every single day (and night) that there's life beyond writing. Most thanks go to Matthew for his patience, and his occasionally sarcastic but always insightful comments on various versions of this book.

I dedicate the book to the memory of my mum.
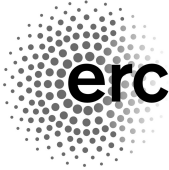
Modernity – History – Politics

How can art help a nation negotiate its identity as a modern entity? Focussing on a concrete geopolitical, social, and cultural context of the Czech lands during the period between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of WWII, this book tries to answer this question, which many nations that constructed their modern identities had to deal with at some point. During this time, Central Europe underwent radical political, geographic, and social changes that were often seen as being accelerated by the various conditions of modernity. As new nation-states emerged in and shortly after 1918, new political identities were invented or reinvented. They were institutionalised by new symbolism, rituals, histories, and the visual arts. How, then, can these identities be articulated in the way in which art is presented and represented in both written and visual accounts, such as in books, articles, essays, and exhibitions? I refer here to such formulations as the narratives that were created by art writers and artists, who situated art into a specific ideological context and pursued, sometimes unwittingly, nationalist goals. These narratives were, in many respects, formative for the understanding of art both at the time and subsequently. I further ask how it was that these narratives participated in the formulation of new identities, and to what extent they actually played an active role in this process. Having these questions in mind, I aim to show that the construction of narratives of modern art in the Czech lands was closely associated with the desire to construct a modern Czech nation – desire that, more often than not, was rooted in the surviving struggle for national emancipation.[1]

The focus on the Czech lands and Czech art has two main reasons. I argue that modernity here was experienced and expressed in a way that differed from many other geopolitical locations. First of all, as the most industrialised region of the Habsburg Monarchy, the Czech lands and especially Prague adopted the advancements of modernity and modernism relatively quickly [fig. i]. For instance, this was felt in the development of newer, faster modes of communication and transportation that enabled better movement of people, as well as easier exchanges between groups and individuals on a local, national, and international level; resulting in the creation of new networks. Even though compared to the metropolises of so-called Western Europe, Prague had a later start in adopting some of these symptoms of modernity, it built up its position of a cultural and economic capital in Austria-Hungary with speed.

An important role in this process was played by a radical transformation of Prague's city centre, which, at the end of the 19th century, saw the eradication of many of its historic buildings, including its old Jewish quarter, and their replacement with new structures which were deemed more suitable for modern life and society.[2] These were more often than not linked to the transformation of society as a whole; hence the
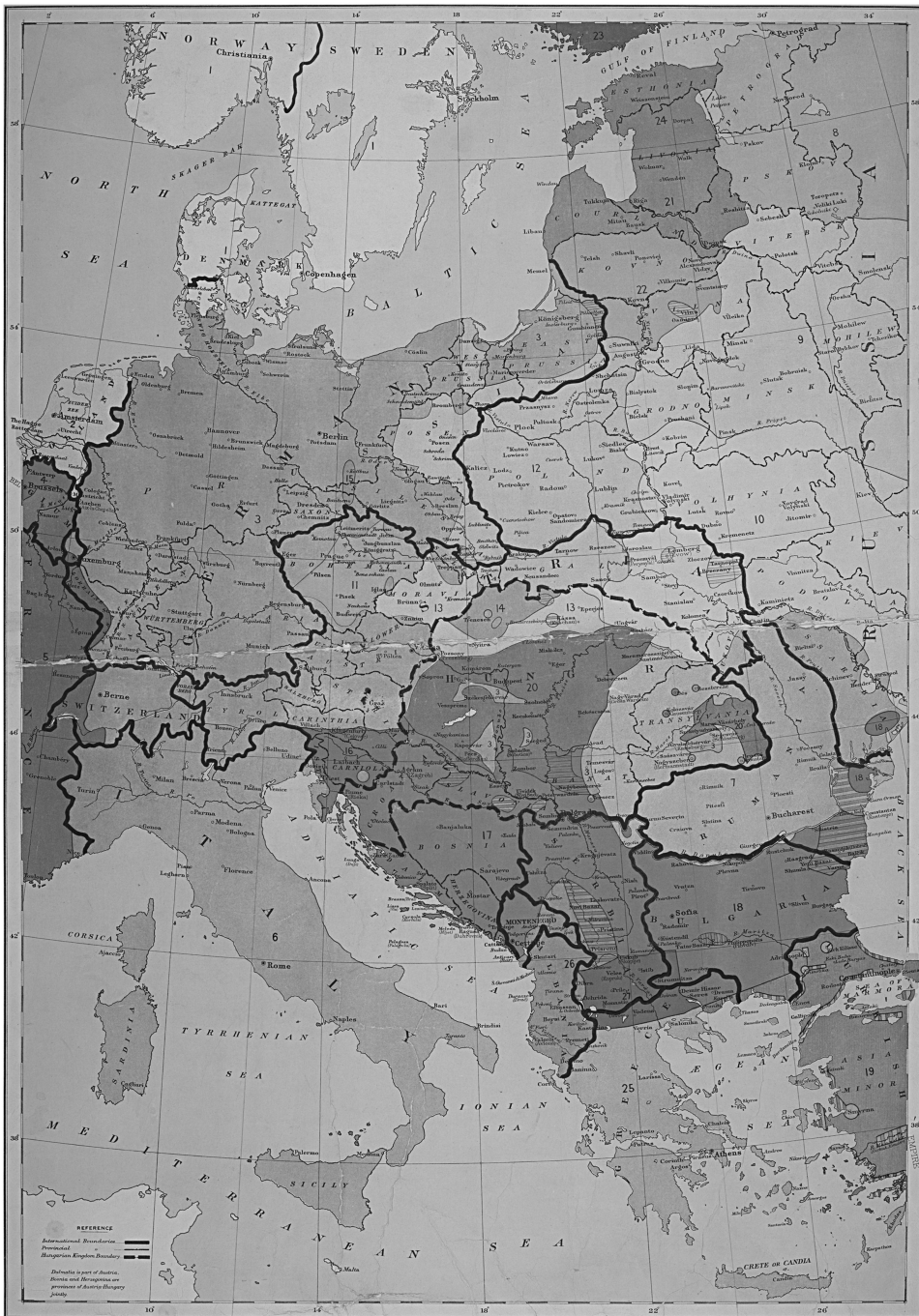
Figure i Ethnographical Map of Central and South Eastern Europe, 1916. © The British Library Board, GSGS 2824.

second reason why I consider the formation of modern art in the Czech lands and Prague as unique in a sense. The transformation of Czech society from the end of the 19th century onwards is closely associated with the increasingly strong position of the Czech national movement in Austria-Hungary, and their political-cultural competition with local Germans. The representative buildings of new central Prague were mostly built for the Czech middle classes, a stratum that was significantly gaining influence throughout the 19th century on a political, cultural, and ethnic level. While the Jewish population was moved away from the inner city as part of the redevelopment project, ethnic Germans who for a long time were in a position of major influence in the Czech lands (an issue I will return to shortly), found themselves facing ever-growing national-ist social, cultural, and political competition from the Czechs.

The second reason is therefore related to the specific historical and national devel-opment which saw the formation of the Czech national revival; its struggle for the recognition of the Czech nation, and the creation of the Czechoslovak nation-state in 1918 that the national movement had claimed as its success. Indeed, many aspects of modernity, including the continued industrialisation, continuing secularisation, grow-ing awareness of class divides, and the creation of a nation-state were all shared with other geographical, political, and cultural locations across the world and in the regions of Central Europe – for instance, in Austria and Hungary.[3]

By comparison, though, interwar Hungary, for instance, experienced a loss of large territories in the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, and radical changes in governments which installed right-wing and undemocratic regimes in the late 1920s. Similarly, Vienna and Austria, struggling economically, faced strong conservative and reactionary tenden-cies that eventually led to an adoption of nationalism and fascism in the early 1930s.[4] Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, which had coined a temporary, artificial identity of the Czechoslovak nation, managed to construct a relatively stable democracy in Central Europe despite various internal and external problems which will be discussed throughout the book [fig. ii]. The Czech lands and Prague became an example of the particular responses to modernity, understood as an international, global phenom-enon, in a nationally, historically, and politically specific locale. I therefore propose that the interplay of these two circumstances – the adoption of modernity combined with a successful national movement – created an original culture of modernism and played a crucial role in constructing, formulating, and understanding local visual arts.[5]

At the same time, this book aims to challenge assumptions about modern art which have often been replicated in the literature on modernism in Central Europe. The Czech lands have often been portrayed as a location which quickly adopted the inter-nationalism and universal ideas of modernism in the visual arts and turned away from the emphasis on the existence of national cultures and art.[6] While I agree with the former assumption, the latter is put to question here by focussing on what I see as the underlying persistence of nationalistic concerns in formulating narratives of Czech modern art. In this respect, my goals may look similar to the recent rise of interest in examining modern art in relation to national identity, especially within Central Europe.[7] These accounts are, however, often isolated and limited to local languages. In order to help rectify that, this study becomes the first examination in English which shows how Czech authors during the period in question constructed modern art and why. I argue that they actively *nationalised modernism* by trying to identify what was original and "authentic" in Czech art (in national terms) that they could bring into modernism. At the same time, local nationalistic agendas were often incorporated
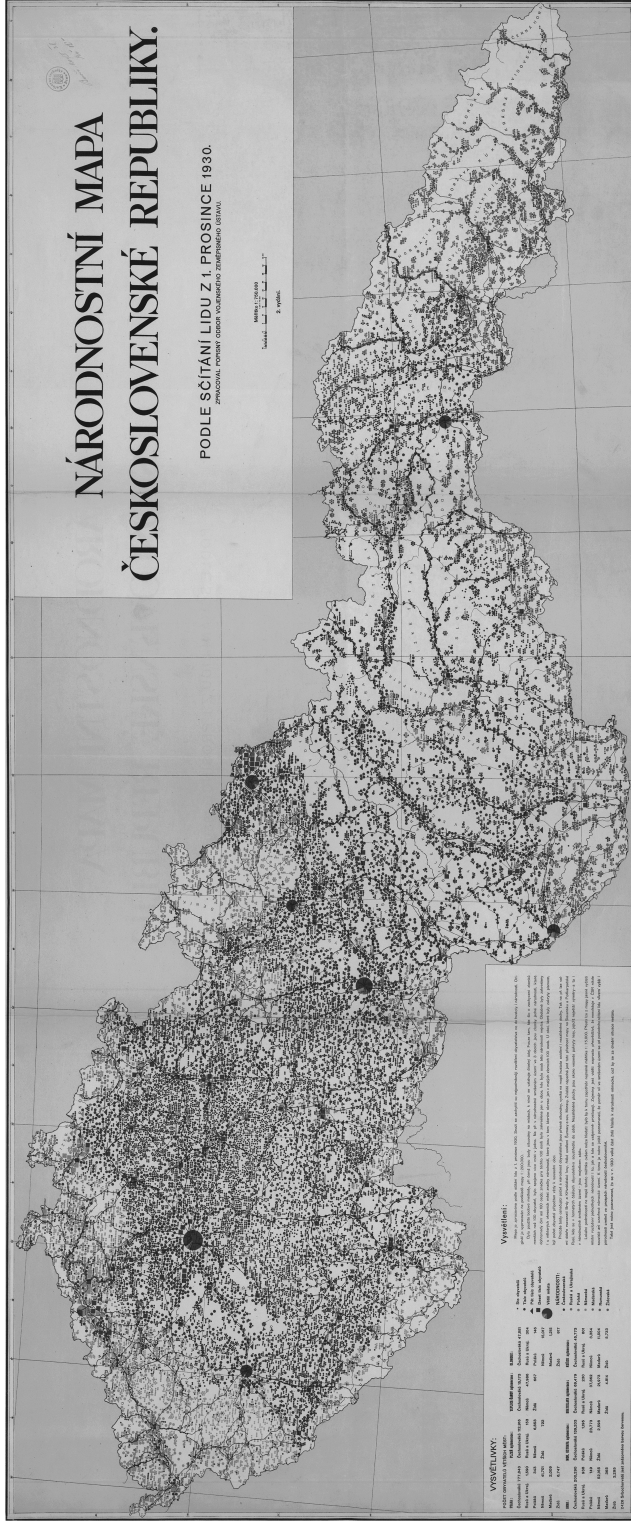
Figure ii Map of Nationalities in the Czechoslovak Republic Based on a Census of 1 December, 1930. The Moravian Library in Brno. Mpa-1269.050 Mpa-0298.831.

into the modernism project as something I call *modernised nationalism*. Both modernism and nationalism thus provided a useful and unifying framework which could be shared as a collective identity by an entity of the nation, the people, and the state.[8]

There are also larger questions that such a focus raises, particularly about how recent literature understands modernism and its scope. A brief surge of interest in Central Europe took place in the 1990s and early 2000s, prompted by the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism; this introduced some important topics and themes related to the study of modernism.[9] Yet in the last decade or so, modernism in Central Europe has once again almost disappeared from the landscape of modernist research.[10] This coincided with the recent revision of modernism being considered as a mostly European, in other words, Western European, phenomenon. The research of non-European art and design history, often termed global history, started to incorporate a non-Eurocentric view of the visual arts, as well as a more comprehensive understanding of the arts outside of "the old West."[11] Such refocussing onto non-Western (meaning non-West European and non-North American) art and design, however, has often marginalised – or simply left out – many European locations which did not fit the idea of both Western and non-Western art. This practice, somewhat ironically, has included Central and Eastern Europe.[12] Art from these locations may share the same cultural frame of reference, yet it often creates significantly different forms of artistic expression.

By concentrating on the issues of Czech art, I therefore do not follow so much the fashionable embrace of a global or planetary outlook of modernism, but rather examine how modernism is constructed on a smaller level in the interplay of locally specific concerns and agendas. Such micro-study, however, is most suitable to demonstrate my argument about the ongoing concerns about the notions of a nation and its national art during a period which is often presented as driven by the urge to be universal and international.[13] And as these concerns have shaped the cultural and political landscape in Central Europe until the present day, such study inevitably contributes to understanding why the topic of identity politics continues to animate debates about the visual arts in this region.

Modernities and Modernisms

The book is ultimately concerned with the notions of modernity and modernism which I hold as key for the comprehension of the role of art during this period. Modernity is understood here as a historical period marked by industrialisation; the rise of capitalism and nation-states, and an increasing diversification in societies. When the Czech lands emerged out of Austria-Hungary in 1918 as part of the new state of Czechoslovakia, they had already enjoyed a high level of industrialisation and urbanisation. At the same time, society was transformed along the lines of class and gender before WWI, and continued to do so in the interwar period.

There are also some major distinctions that differentiate the experience of modernity in Central Europe from countries with more established capitalist cultures, for instance, France and Germany, on the one hand and those outside of these customary locations that are not necessarily linked with capitalism on the other.[14] Modernity in Central Europe was indeed driven by the markers of modernity outlined above, but to a large extent, it was also driven by national movements. In the Czech lands, the national movement, which I will discuss in more detail shortly, was motivated by the

emancipation of the Czechs – first within the Habsburg empire and then towards the end of WWI by a vision of creating an independent nation-state. It was partly driven by an effort to emphasise the authenticity of the culture, history, and language of Czechs, who had shared the same geographical space with the Germans for centuries. This group had been invited to settle in Bohemia in the 13th century, and predominantly lived in the border areas of Bohemia and Moravia and in large cities and towns. With their own cultural, political, and educational institutions, they grew into a significant and influential minority – or, in local terms: they became the majority. Until the mid-19th century, conflicts between the two groups of Czechs and Germans were mainly based on religious, dynastic, and territorial demands, yet these quickly turned into ethnic and nationalist conflicts over civic and language rights in the second half of the century.

As a consequence, nationalism, which was habitually associated with modernity's liberal concepts of democracy and capitalism by writers such as Hans Kohn, had been in the Czech environment combined with the romanticised belief in the exclusivity of the Czech nation, where the nation was commonly defined by an appeal to historic rights and a shared language and culture at the expense of other ethnicities.[15] For many Czech authors of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this exclusivity could also be detected in the way they imagined art and architecture as being Czech.[16] Following Benedict Anderson's proposal of imagined communities, they were imagined to an extent that the visual arts were constructed as sharing specific features that constituted their Czechness. I consider this desire to frame local modernism as specifically Czech to be an important feature which defined the experience of modernity in the Czech lands.

The political and social preconditions of modernity are therefore for me crucial for the grasping of modernism and modern art during this period. This book builds on the view derived from Anthony Giddens and developed by Maria Todorova that understands modernism in the arts as being an awareness of and a response to the conditions of modernity.[17] However, it accepts that these were mainly Western (meaning West European and North American) cultural, social, and institutional practices that had parallels, variations, and alternatives elsewhere, even within the so-called West. Do we therefore talk about various modernities and modernisms across the globe, or was modernism a singular occurrence with diverse trajectories at different points in time and place?[18]

This question is also at the heart of this book, which leans towards the latter proposition. I argue that modernism in Central Europe, and more specifically in the Czech lands, manifested itself in a specific way that cannot be reduced to a passive adoption of Western modernism.[19] Instead, the local and national expressions shaped a particular version of modernism alongside its shared, global concerns. Moreover, for a long time the development of modern art, architecture, and design in Central Europe had been linked to the region's embrace of internationalist and cosmopolitan ideas.[20] Such interpretations commonly overlooked the role of other art forms, such as folk art or academic art in the development of modern art. One of the reasons for such a reductionist view is that the interwar Central European avant-gardes labelled such art as being "conservative" and habitually associated it with the forces of anti-modernism. It was only recently that art historians have started to pay attention to the significant part that folk art and its associated traditions played in the formulation of modernism in Central Europe.[21]

Here, modernism is therefore not viewed in terms of the simple opposition to traditionalism and reactionism on the one hand, and the embrace of experimentation, innovation, and often abstraction on the other.[22] Instead, as Bruno Latour pointed out, "one chooses to become traditional by constant innovation," I emphasise that Czech artists and theorists who embraced the idea of the modern were able to successfully incorporate various notions of the past into their concept of modernism.[23] This transpires from the attempts by contemporary artists, art critics, and art historians to define Czech modern art within this interchange, and designate its role in society. While some called for Czech art to be rid of anything related to the past, many welcomed the inclusion of the traditional as a sign of what they considered to be true the Czechness of modern art and its original contribution to the international movement. As a consequence, I present modernism in the Czech lands with emphasis on its complexity – as a single, yet multi-directional phenomenon, containing a multitude of exchanges and influences that took place across regional as well as national borders.

Questions of 1928

In 1928, the Czech art journal *Volné směry* (Free Directions) invited a number of authors, including art historians, art critics, and artists to contemplate the last ten years of cultural achievements of the Czech nation. The editors made a close link between the independence of the nation and the existence of the state of Czechoslovakia, founded on 28 October 1918, after the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy. They recognised that for such a new entity, there were other priorities than culture, yet they asked their respondents what they thought should have already been achieved and what, in their view, still needed to be done within the spheres of art and culture.

The publication of this survey in 1928 was particularly significant. Commemorative events were held across most of the country – take the city of Brno, for instance, the second largest in Czechoslovakia, holding an impressive exhibition of contemporary culture for which an entirely new exhibition ground was built. It showcased what was thought to be the greatest achievements in manufacturing, sciences, education, and arts in Czechoslovakia so far. These were juxtaposed with visions of the future of the young state and its people. Many politicians, historians, art critics, and others marked the anniversary by publishing articles on this topic in newspapers and magazines, while for instance the painter Alfons Mucha donated his expansive homage to the Slavs and Czechs: the Slav Epic, to the state in this year.

The survey in *Volné směry* was therefore one of the many instances of how the first decade of Czechoslovakia's life was reflected upon. Yet it was indicative of the many issues and topics that the relatively new society faced in relation to art and culture. These issues entertained Czech writers and artists throughout the period of my interest, but also came to prominence in the reflections published in 1928. First of all, art and culture were ascribed important roles in the formulation of the new political identity. Some, like the painter and writer Josef Čapek, did acknowledge that shortly after the birth of the republic, "social, economic and political questions which [had] emerged from the circumstances of national independence" had priority over cultural concerns.[24] However, he also stressed that, a decade later, art and culture were regaining national importance and should become a national concern. Josef's brother, the writer Karel Čapek, noted that the political indifference about culture should stop and highlighted the need to engage the public in the arts.[25] Stanislav Kostka Neumann, a poet

and critic, added that a "cultural elevation of the broad mass of common people" was necessary alongside the fight against the bourgeoisie, which had destroyed moral and cultural values.[26] Neumann, who will feature prominently together with the Čapek brothers in this book, was coming from a position of the radical left. On the other side of the political spectrum, the conservative and nationalist politician Karel Kramář also commented with criticism on the dumbing down of "all that is original and authentic in people." He, however, saw the main culprit in the entire modern culture.[27]

Ten years after the birth of Czechoslovakia, the nation was still in the making – both internally and externally. This unfinished process can be seen in what many commentators also picked up on, most importantly the lack of national institutions that are commonly seen as playing the role of codifying and institutionalising national culture. Such criticism was voiced by two art historians, Vojtěch Birnbaum and Václav Vilém Štech. During this time in interwar Czechoslovakia, apart from no state office for the protection of monuments, there was no topographic institute and no national gallery or state financial support for large museums and collections.

In the absence of these national institutions that would consciously and consistently construct an official national art, it is, in my view, important to turn our attention to the alternative ways which helped to promote such a goal. This relates to the second point contained in many of the responses, namely the emphasis of the important role of art criticism and literature on art in general towards the construction of a narrative of Czech modern art. Jiří Mahen, a Czech dramatist and writer, also made this point in his response. He emphasised how important art writing was, and complained that "literature indeed lost […] contact with the visual arts which is a dangerous thing for the culture of the entire nation."[28] As I will show in this book, it was art writing – a variety of texts about artists, works of art and architecture, exhibitions, and so on – that became especially important in the search for the place of art within a historical context of the respective nation-state, as well as in the broader international landscape.

I therefore emphasise that it is not only artists and art objects that help to create the notion of Czech art in its interplay with political circumstances. Art historians and art critics, as well as many others who wrote about art, played an important role in constructing a sense of what the role of Czech art was. Indeed, it was the period at the turn of the century that saw the rise of the art critic in the Czech-speaking environment. The notions and narratives they created had political aims, and located art in an intricate web of relations to the (predominantly Western) centre, to its traditions and histories, to the contemporary political and social conditions, and to modernity itself.[29] The purposes of such affiliations of Czech art with a specific ideological stance relate to the efforts of the authors to formulate the way in which art had actively participated in creating the nation's identity – and on what bases.

At this point, it is worth pointing out that the main voices that created the notions of Czech modern art in this period were predominantly male. The *Volné směry* questionnaire did not include a single response from a female artist or author, which is symptomatic for the general situation in the Czech artistic scene of the time. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapters 1 and 5, the female art world for a long time coexisted separately from the male one. Before 1918, women could study mainly decorative arts subjects, and publish in titles like *Ženské listy* (Women's Gazette), *Ženský svět* (Women's World), and *Ženská revue* (Women's Review) which focused on what was deemed to be typical female subjects. Emancipation, however, featured as a topic for discussion, yet the persistent view of female artists as inclined towards decorativism

and handicraft – together with the limited number of female art critics and art histori-ans – meant that women were often marginalised in debates about modern art.

The last important issue that the responses in the *Volné směry* questionnaire raised is the belief that art and culture are somehow attached to local traditions. This is partly caused by the selection of respondents, like Karel Kramář and Arne Novák, who frequently promoted the affiliation of Czech culture with the elusive concepts of Czech spirit, soil, or more tangible folk culture. The literary critic Novák, for instance, stressed the role of tradition in contemporary Czech culture, which, in his view, "grew out of the Czech spirit" and "the Czech soil."[30] These were indeed abstract, yet very important concepts that had survived in the writing on art and culture since the 19th century and were equivalent to the German *Volksgeist*.[31]

The concept of national character derived from Hegel's writing was indeed influen-tial for the 19th century nationalist revivals that were happening across Europe, and their efforts to distinguish nations on the basis of cultural differences and similarities. The idea of shared national characteristics had been furthered by Johann Gottfried Herder, whose accounts on the unique sets of traits of Slavs and Germans were crucial for Czech nation-building. For that reason, they will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.[32]

This ongoing insistence on the historicist language of nationalism raises another important question in relation to the questionnaire responses. Modern culture, includ-ing the avant-garde movements and modern artistic tendencies, did not feature with any prominence in them. And while *Volné směry* were far from conservative, their wide choice of questionnaire respondents, which went beyond the so-called modernists, shows that not everyone who readily embraced modernism understood it as a rejection of the past and traditions. I therefore stress here that discussions about modernity of local art were only a part of a larger debate about the place of Czech art within the changing political landscape. For example, even the responses of the Čapek broth-ers and Neumann – who have been associated in literature with progressive thinking about art – do not overtly dwell on the attempts for internationalism to which Czech modern art of this period is often related. Instead, they also focus on internal, national circumstances of modern culture. It seems that they all recognise the existence of a national culture which shows the historicity, independence, and self-sufficiency of the nation. Such a primordialist view takes the existence of both the nation and its art for granted, while art is considered to be inevitably enrooted in the nation from which it originated.[33]

The belief in the primordial roots of nations and their art was a hotly debated topic at the time, contested by those who claimed that nations and their culture were formed as a result of modernisation and the conditions of modernity.[34] In the light of these seeming discrepancies and disagreements, I ask what it is that makes art modern, and/or national and under what circumstances it could be both.

Political, Historical, and Time Frame

The nationalistic rhetoric contained in many of the answers that referred to the exist-ence of a specific Czech spirit and Czech soil were part of a long tradition of attempts to emphasise a Czechness of the culture in the Czech lands. Such attempts were to a large extent motivated by the need to set Czech culture apart from German culture. With the intensifying Czech national revival, Czech gained equality with German in

schools, Czech journalism expanded, theatrical performances in Czech became common practice, and cultural activities aimed at the mobilisation of national consciousness rose in general. This focussed in particular on sites memorable for their historical and contemporary connections – for example the establishment of the Czech national museum, national theatre, and the cemetery of national heroes at Vyšehrad; the equipping of specific sights with monuments of nationalistic significance, the renaming of places, and so on [fig. iii].[35]

The national revival of the 19th century was primarily based on the status of Czech as the mother tongue which was both mythicized and sanctified through its resurrection and codification, and through emphasis on its historical pedigree.[36] As a specific marker of the Czech nation, which defined itself against other cultures and nations, the key role of language in the formation of national identity was stressed. This was also a period in which hostility against minorities (especially the ethnic Germans, but also Jews) in Bohemia and Moravia increased, given that language became the grounds for diversification in national identities. At the same time, the links with other Slavic nations were promoted by the "awakeners" and particularly the proximity with Slovaks and their dialects became a widely discussed issue. These alliances, competitions, and tensions informed the construction of not only the modern Czech nation, but also its art.

The proximity with Slovak language and culture played a significant role in the construction of both Czech and Slovak identities during the respective national revivals. Slovak language, however, was in an even weaker position than Czech. The Slovak revival was first directed against the Hungarian rule which had lasted since the 11th century and against Magyarisation, which had intensified especially after the compromise of 1867. In terms of the language spoken here, Latin, Hungarian, German, and even

Figure iii National Museum, Prague. Postcard. Author's collection.

Czech were more common than the vernacular among the educated classes in Slovakia. As a consequence, the representatives of the Slovak national revival in the 19th century used these other languages for ease of communication. Later, however, Slovak nationalists, like the Czechs, began constructing their identity on the basis of their linguistic specificity, and in opposition to other language communities, primarily the Magyars and, later, the Czechs. The linguistic and cultural proximity of Slovak and Czech peoples eventually gave rise to attempts to establish a closer alliance, which would follow the demands of a Pan-Slavic or Austro-Slavic programme, or lead to the creation of an entirely independent unity. All of these alternatives, as well as the relationship with Slovak culture, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, also informed the way narratives of Czech art were constructed during this period.

In terms of time scale, this book takes the year 1895 as its starting point, and it does so for a number of reasons. It was the year when *Manifest české moderny* (the Manifesto of Czech Modernism) was published, and when the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition, a celebration of Czech and Slavic folk culture and traditions, was held in Prague. The two events represented two radically different sides of Czech culture: the former was an attempt to open up to the world and adopt influences from the outside, the latter an effort to remain faithful to the idea that the modern Czech nation is enrooted in its folk traditions. Crucially too, 1895 was the year in which Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk first published *Česká otázka* (The Czech Question).[37] In this short treatise, Masaryk (1850–1937), who later became the first president of interwar Czechoslovakia, laid out his views of the history of the Czechs, their place in historical development, and their national religious bases [fig. iv]. He was critical of the idealisation of Czech history by Czech national revivalists.

Česká otázka was published at the time of a restructuring of the political environment in Bohemia, and intensifying of the Czech-German antagonism of the late

Figure iv T. G. Masaryk visiting Brno in 1928. Postcard. Author's collection.

19th century.[38] Masaryk's text could be seen as one of his critiques of the national myths sustained by Czech revivalists at the time. A few years earlier, Masaryk partook in a controversy over the origins of mediaeval manuscripts "discovered" in 1817. The Rukopis královédvorský and Rukopis zelenohorský (the Dvůr Králové and Zelená Hora manuscripts) were poems in Old Czech recalling and recording ancient and mythical events from Czech history in a way that was not dissimilar to the Scottish Ossian. The historian František Palacký (1798–1876) and many other Czech national revivalists considered these documents as crucial foundation stones of Czech national literature and hence of national consciousness.

Palacký was one of the leading figures of the Czech national revival who had published the first history of the Czech nation, outlining it as a continuous struggle against the so-called German element. With this, he set out a clear direction for the Czech national movement understood as emancipation from the Germans. In the manuscripts dispute, Masaryk posited himself on the side of the scholars who claimed and later proved the manuscripts to be forgeries, thus disrupting a freshly established image of Czech national history and literature as having documented mediaeval origins.

In *Česká otázka* and other texts, Masaryk described Czech history as a continuous development of humanist ideals which started with the Hussites in the 15th century, continued with the Protestant Unity of the Brethren in the 16th and 17th centuries until the 19th century national revival. In *Česká otázka*, Masaryk also highlighted the growing division between the old and young generations of contemporary, primarily literary critics. While he saw the older generation as being defensive of the nationalist cause, the younger one was, in his view, waging a progressive offensive.[39] Masaryk's contribution to the discussion of identity politics at the time, as well as the situation in contemporary criticism, was indicative of the growing division in the intellectual landscape in the Czech-speaking lands.

Clashes between the generations and their respective views of the position of Czech art, culture, and society within Europe were commonplace in the period I am focussing on. The 1895 Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition, which showcased rural life and culture, can seemingly look like an effort of a generation different from the one behind the Manifesto of Czech Modernism. Yet its inclusion of village houses *inspired* by vernacular architecture, and in many cases modernised for contemporary consumption of the urban visitor, were accompanied by the involvement of architects like Dušan Jurkovič, who came to incorporate the vernacular into the language of modern architecture.

The diversity of opinions could not therefore be simply explained by a generational split which would cut a clear line between nationalist and progressive tendencies in one generation or the other. Instead, I emphasise that the views on Czech art that individual writers had in this period were often polarised and flexible in a way that was related more to political rather than generational affiliations.

How, then, did the understanding and role of modern art develop in the face of the political restructuring of Czech society? During the late 19th century, the provinces of Bohemia and Moravia were governed by the Austrian Reichsrat and their respective land diets. The most powerful party in Bohemia, the Young Czechs that came out of the split of the National Party into Young and Old Czechs, struggled to retain its position as the representative of Czech national interests within Austria. The leader of the Young Czechs, Karel Kramář (1860–1937), who was one of the questionnaire respondents, was a pro-Slavic enthusiast and nationalist who became the first Czechoslovak

prime minister in 1918; he will be discussed several times in this book. Kramář was a lifelong believer in the idea of a Slavic unity, both in political and cultural terms.

Slavonic sentiments and the idea that Czechs belong to the Slavonic linguistic and cultural sphere were important aspects of the Czech national movement. This idea, nevertheless, underwent a substantial development in the period discussed here.[40] Pan-Slavism was both a political and cultural programme of the 19th century in which its Czech advocates envisioned the nation under the protection of Russia in the future.[41] Calls for Austro-Slavic unity, which crystallised around the mid-19th century, did not seek political independence but instead emphasised closer cooperation of Slavic groups *within* the Habsburg monarchy.

Karel Kramář brought the idea of cooperation between the Slavs into the 20th century as neo-Slavism and a more equal federation of Slavic states and without Russian dominance. This promotion of "a rapprochement between Russia and Austria-Hungary against German expansion" also aimed to meet the threat posed by the potential creation of Pan-Germanic or Pan-Latin unities in Europe.[42] These issues were discussed at a number of Slavic congresses held across Slavic Europe, including one organised in Prague in 1908. Yet, neither this nor any of the subsequent congresses brought any concrete political resolutions, apart from a somewhat ambiguous agreement on a joint effort to fight German and Magyar dominance.[43] After 1918, and the end of the Great War, they also took the form of a number of joint events, including exhibitions with other Slavic groups and, most prominently, the congresses of Sokol, the Czech movement; and organisations promoting sports, health, and Czech national identity. Already Sokol's 1912 large-scale gathering (the so-called *slet*) had a distinctive All-Slavic theme with gymnasts emphasising Slavic strength, unity, and a common goal.[44]

Yet even before 1914, the attempts at closer cooperation between the various Slavic groups were overshadowed by the growing recognition of the importance of Western Europe (and mainly France) for Czech nationalist objectives of gaining more autonomy within the Habsburg monarchy, creating an independent state, or forming a federation with another Slavic group. Masaryk and his colleagues had promoted a closer cooperation with the West long before Czechoslovakia was formed in 1918, as they were wary of Russian expansionism.[45] The different allegiances between East and West cut across not only the political life; they were also visible in the arts. As I will show throughout the book, the attachment to other Slavs, the so-called Westerners, or any other geographically specific group was important for a number of writers who helped to construct the idea of Czech modern art.

The increasing fragmentation of the Czech national movement was also visible in politics. The Young Czechs with their conservative and nationalist visions lost in the 1907 elections to the Social Democrats, and the Agrarians who turned from the nationalist rhetoric towards issues of social class and economy, while still remaining patriotic.[46] It is also around the turn of the century that artists and art writers start noticing class divisions, especially in the increasingly industrialised cities and towns, which is a topic that will be explored in more detail later.

As I mentioned earlier, it was important for many Czech national revivalists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries to prove the historical existence of the Czech nation on the basis of linguistic, cultural, and artistic traditions. Especially before WWI, one of the main challenges to – as well as reasons for – the attention to the notion of *Czech* art and its links to a Czech national identity was the presence of Germans in Bohemia and Moravia. Conflicts between the two ethnic groups had been discussed by many

authors who focused on language demands, effects of the tensions on local administration, schools, street signs, cultural institutions, architectural projects, and many other examples.[47] A number of these struggles had a political as well as a popular dimension, and sometimes took the form of street fights or stalemates in the Parliament. One example of both could be the Badeni crisis that took place in 1897 over language ordinances that would extend the use of Czech language throughout the public domain in the Czech lands. Proposed by Count Badeni, the Austrian Prime Minister, these concessions led to German obstruction of the Reichsrat and demonstrations across Austrian part of the monarchy and the eventual repeal of the decrees.[48] In response, Czechs took to streets in Prague, vandalising German property.

Similar ethnic tensions took place in many other locations across the Czech lands. They often translated into the work of many artists, and those who tried to prove the existence of a specific Czech national art. Yet the situation was not identical across the whole territory of the Czech lands – while language battles continued in Bohemia until 1918, a compromise was reached in Moravia in 1905. Power was divided here between the Czechs, Germans, and aristocracy in the provincial diet, making the languages of the two ethnic groups more or less equal.[49] Similarly, as Jeremy King pointed out, local inhabitants in many places in Bohemian provinces, for instance in České Budějovice/Budweis, were often immune to the political machinations of Czech and German politicians and were happy to remain nationally indifferent.[50] Even in Prague, Czechs and Germans often interacted and were not limited to their ethnically defined circles. Many participated in each other's events like exhibitions, concerts or theatre performances and were members of the same organisations.[51]

Such interaction was the result of the changing political and social circumstances and had a direct influence on the understanding of what role art played in this process. As Czech society was going through an important transformation from being a part of a multinational empire to a self-governing state after WWI, Czech art was seen as an important element in the new national identity that was recreated after the collapse of Austria-Hungary. The Republic of Czechoslovakia, declared in 1918, had its borders confirmed by the Treaty of Versailles in June 1919 and its Constitution adopted in February 1920. The new union of the two dominant national groups, the Czechs and Slovaks, came out of relatively short negotiations between predominantly Czech representatives and the Entente powers held in the United States and in Paris during 1918. Czechoslovakia developed what Rogers Brubaker would call "nationalising nationalism" which treated the newly reconfigured and to a large extent imagined Czechoslovak nation as the core nation and legitimate owner of the state.[52] The state, however, inherited a large proportion of ethnic minorities, including the substantial existing groups of Germans, Jews, Hungarians, Poles, and Rusyns, who had to be incorporated into the project of the Czechoslovak state. This was an important factor that influenced the direction of interwar Czechoslovak politics, and, as I will claim, the framing of modern art.

Czechs and Germans

Much of the cultural and intellectual life before WWII was therefore susceptible to changes in the contemporary political climate in which it originated. During the 19th century, Bohemia became an important economic force in Austria-Hungary and Central Europe, yet its political success of national self-determination was limited.

After the revolutions and unrests of 1848 and the recognition of Hungarians in the compromise of 1867, Czech national movement intensified especially in the cultural sphere, turning Prague into a Slavonic capital and extending these links across the Czech lands. After the Czech language gained equality with German in schools, Czech journalism expanded, theatrical performances in Czech became common practice, and other cultural activities aimed at the mobilisation of national consciousness rose in general. An important event in this regard was the split of the Prague university into German and Czech sections in 1882. This created the need to increase the number of staff in most of the subject areas, and subsequently led to the independent development of the respective disciplines. Yet, there were many negative sides too. Some subjects, including art history, suffered from insufficient resources, such as libraries and art collections, which were retained by the German University.[53]

Czech national revivalists also created or revived various sites with historical and mythical connections and gave them national significance. This was the case of, for instance, the establishment of the Vlastenecké museum (Patriotic Museum), the National Theatre, and the cemetery of national heroes at the Vyšehrad hill in Prague in the 19th century, as well as various similar institutions and monuments in smaller cities and towns.[54] The National Theatre, built between 1867 and 1883 as the "embodiment of the will of the Czech nation to gain national independence and self-sufficiency," became one of the most symbolic places of the struggle for Czech national and cultural independence.[55] It was also a site of many works of art by Czech painters, architects, and sculptors, such as the architect Josef Zítek; the painter of historic scenes Václav Brožík, and the sculptor Bohuslav Schnirch, author of the statues on the theatre roof. The building and its national significance quickly entered the popular consciousness of the people.

No less significant was the subsequent reinterpretation and reception of the works of art and their authors, grouped under the umbrella term, "The Generation of the National Theatre." Their importance for the national "awakening" and Czech history in general was stressed during the actual construction of the Theatre, in interwar Czechoslovakia, as well as in the Communist ideology after WWII.[56] Emphasis was put on the fact that the construction of the theatre with performances solely in the Czech language was funded entirely from public subscription collected in towns and villages across Bohemia and Moravia, thus mobilising most of the Czech nation.

Many other Czech institutions founded in the 19th century aimed at boosting the national sentiments of the general public. The Patriotic Museum, the Obrazárna (The Picture Gallery), and the Czech Academy of Arts and Sciences not only aimed at collecting and preserving the artefacts and knowledge of the past, they also tried to educate a general audience about the past and present of the Czech nation. Their initial concerns were thus with stimulating the interest of the wider public in Czech national identity, which they achieved through various activities, such as exhibitions, historical research, and publication of articles.

Within this national programme, Czech art, and the narratives that were constructed about it, had played a similarly important role, as they were turned into symbols of national or other identities. These symbols helped to contribute to the construction of a sense that the Czech nation, despite being locked in Austria-Hungary and challenged by German inhabitants of the Czech lands, enjoyed a long existence of a nation with all the appropriate artistic and linguistic attributes.

Exchanges between Czech and German writers who tried to construct the history of the particular national art which would suit the nationalist goals of the respective

group.[57] Both tried to claim the origins of art and architecture in Bohemia and Moravia for their ethnic group in order to prove their historicity. The Czech historians Jan Erazim Vocel (1803–1871), Karel Vladislav Zap (1812–1871), and the art historian Ferdinand Lehner (1837–1914), tried to define a Czech national school with features that would contain what they believed to be the Czechness in colour, subject, or quality. Their German counterparts, most prominently the historians of art and architecture Alfred Woltmann (1841–1880) and Bernhard Grueber (1806–1882), emphasised the presence of the German element in the Czech lands that, in their view, translated into the arts. Many of these debates had a very personal flavour with personal attacks on authors of opposite views and on their academic abilities.

These disputes, which took place in the 1870s and 1880s, were mostly carried out about mediaeval art and architecture. Czech scholars emphasised the connection between the modern Czech nation and the mediaeval Bohemian kingdom, and aimed to establish a link between the nation's present and its alleged artistic independence in the Middle Ages. It was only in the late 1880s and especially in the 1890s that more serious attention was turned to contemporary art. Such development was related to a change in the understanding of what position modern art held in the nation and its consciousness. This growing focus on modern art is clear from the attention that contemporary exhibitions, art publications, and debates received in daily and weekly press. Already at the end of the 19th century, many major newspapers in Bohemia brought commentaries and reports on current artistic events written by journalists, artists, or scholars. In the interwar period art and culture more generally continued to be the primary focus of numerous journals that kept on appearing (and disappearing) around various individuals and artistic groups. Even though the political situation radically changed with the end of the war, many topics continued to preoccupy those responsible for constructing the narratives of Czech art.

Book Structure

The book is divided into five chapters that, in a more or less historical sequence, focus on five topics which I see as key in the attempts to construct a notion of Czech modern art in this period. These areas do not often feature in accounts of Central European modernism and therefore provide the basis for a fresh approach to the subject. The individual chapters focus on the interaction between the modern and the national, rural modernism, on society and class divisions, a temporary Czechoslovak identity, and the persistence of tradition. I consider them as particularly important aspects of broader political, national, and social life. I examine how they featured in the writing of local commentators and in exhibitions in this period; and in reverse, how art writers contributed to the formulation of the changing political, national and social identities by their narratives. What I am also trying to emphasise by looking at these particular topics is the rising awareness of the differentiation of art, society, and politics which created dichotomies, dialogues, and interchanges in the discussions about modern art.

The first chapter examines the attempts of art writers and artists to define what new art, the local name for modern art, was. Understanding of, and at times inventing, modern Czech culture was tightly linked to the project of national revival, and its ideas about what constituted the nation's past and heritage. At the same time, art criticism and art writing in general adopted an active role in constructing modern character of both the nation and its art. Their desired modernism was emphasised by confrontation

with international art on the one hand, and an incorporation of the references to what was seen as authentically Czech on the other. In the context of more frequent and intensive exchanges between Czech and foreign artists, what did it mean to be modern and Czech?

Part of the project of crafting a modern Czech nation was the reconsideration of its attitude to local vernacular culture, and to the peasants who were often placed into the romanticised position of those who preserved authentic Czechness. The second chapter is concerned with the questions of regionality within the framework of both national and international art as they were interpreted by Czech art critics and artists. Many of them often treated the vernacular as an exotic reference or as a link to the national tradition in their practice and theory, while managing to incorporate it in their notion of modern art. Given the common association of the vernacular with outlived and backward culture, how did the art writers and artists "modernise" this phenomenon?

The alleged primitive, unspoilt character of rural culture was indeed threatened by the modernisation and advancement of technology. The rise of the city, however, also meant the rise of the working class and its own – seemingly "primitive" – culture. The increasing awareness of class differences made artists and art critics reconsider the role of contemporary art in modern society and its relation with the experience of not only the countryside but also the city. The third chapter looks closely at the shift in the understanding of people's art, which gave birth to the concept of proletarian art, or art of the people. Artists and art critics, who had predominantly leftist political views, started paying to the urban working classes and saw them as crucial for the renewal of modern art. They became the subject matter of a number of works of art, as well as the recipients of a modern art that would educate them and its authors with fresh, unspoilt artistic ideas. While the topic of proletarian art has often been discussed in relation to the avant-garde, I claim here that awareness of class had much wider appeal; I examine in detail the importance of social class for the construction of modern artistic narratives. The chapter therefore unpicks the experience of modernity as a suburban phenomenon in which the proletariat became a passive agent.

The creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 is often portrayed as a significant success for the nation-building project. Within the restructured Central Europe, the Czechoslovak state and nation were created as a political union between Czechs and Slovaks, with substantial minorities of Germans, Hungarians, and Ruthenians. In the fourth chapter I explore how art historians and art critics handled the new interwar identity and how the new political and cultural geography affected the understanding and the place of local modern art. I focus on the active role of art writers in the formulation and promotion of the new identity through their texts and exhibitions. To what extent were they active participants in the state's efforts to present the new republic as progressive, democratic, and modern?

In the national revival movements of the 19th century, national traditions were often mobilised to create a sense of unity and historic connectedness for a certain group of people with what was considered a common, ancient past. In the Czech lands, such an approach survived well into the 20th century as an important point of reference on which the new nation and its art could be built. This emphasis may, however, seem like a contradiction to modernist ideology and the avant-garde – topics which dominate most art historical accounts of this period. The fifth chapter uncovers how, rather than being rejected or dissolved, traditions were reconstituted in Czech

modern art of the interwar period. Focussing on the 1920s and 1930s, I ask how Czech art writers in interwar Czechoslovakia approached tradition in their formulations of the notion of Czech modern art.

Conclusion

Traditions can be seen as a complex set of collective values, either persisting from the past or recreated in the modern present with a particular significance.[58] And, while they can often be identified with conservatism, and hence with things that resist innovation and change, traditions may also be seen as carriers of residual past knowledge, necessary for the formation of the present and future of a nation through the process of constant innovation. In this book, I also view traditions as creative and as having the potential to mobilise social change, enhance national awareness, and help to construct a notion of modern art in the Czech lands.

In order to analyse these constructions, I do not only examine written or exhibitionary efforts to formulate modern Czech art, but also, where appropriate, I will briefly outline the artistic histories and phenomena in the centre of the most important discussions. Doing so, however, does not constitute a comprehensive history of art in the Czech lands of this period. My focus is rather on a *selection* of artistic events, or tendencies, which I consider significant to the development of ideas about modern Czech art that I discuss.

In relation to the opening question, how art can help a nation negotiate its identity as a modern entity, modern art is, for me, an active force and participant in nation-formation and identity formulation. I claim that, for reasons that will be discussed throughout the book, Czech authors nationalised modern art in the form of a *nationalised modernism*, and, at the same time, local nationalism was often subjected to a modernist reinterpretation in what I call *modernised nationalism*. This approach hereby expands both the concepts of nationalism and modernism that do not often appear side by side, and contributes to a more nuanced reading of modern art as a key constituent in identity formation.

Notes

1   I use the term Czech lands as an umbrella term to reflect the changing cultural and political landscape of the geographical area, which comprises territories where narratives of Czech art were formed. This covers Bohemia and Moravia under the Habsburg Empire, incorporates Slovakia and Ruthenia once Czechoslovakia was created. On top of that, where it is relevant, I occasionally extend my interest to external locations of for instance Paris and Vienna where key debates about Czech art also took place.

2   Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold: The History of a City* (London: Penguin, 1998), 314–315.

3   Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, California and London: Stanford University Press, 1996); Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk, eds. *Region, State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2002); Paul Robert Magosci, *Historical Atlas of Central Europe: Third Revised and Exapnded Edition* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press and Thames and Hudsoan, 2002).

4   Janek Wassermann, *Black Vienna: The Radical Right in the Red City 1918–1938* (Cornell University Press, 2014).

5   David Crowley, *National Style and Nation-State: Design in Poland from the Vernacular Revival to the International Style* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992);

Gyöngyi Éri and Zsuzsa Jobbágyi, *A Golden Age: Art and Society in Hungary 1896–1914* (Budapest: Corvina, 1997); Jan Cavanagh, *Out Looking In: Early Modern Polish Art, 1890–1918* (Berkeley, CA and London: Univeristy of California Press, 2000).

6 Jaroslav Anděl et al., *Czech Modernism, 1900–1945* (Houston, TX: Museum of Fine Arts, 1989); Rostislav Švácha, ed., *Devětsil: Czech Avant-Garde of the 1920s and 1930s* (Oxford and London: Museum of Modern Art and Design Museum, 1990); Wojciech Leśnikowski, ed., *East European Modernism. Architecture in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland between the Wars* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996).

7 Milena Bartlová and Jindřich Vybíral, eds., *Budování státu: Reprezentace v umění, architekuře a designu/ Building a State: The Representation of Czechoslovakia in Art, Architecture and Design* (Prague: UMPRUM, 2015); Vendula Hnídková, *Národní styl: kultura a politika - National Style, Arts and Politics* (Prague: UMPRUM, 2013); Jindřich Vybíral, "National Style as a Construction of Art History," in *The Plurality of Europe: Identities and Spaces*, eds. Winfried Eberhard and Christian Lübke (Leipzig: Universitätsverlag, 2010), 465–474.

8 Cf. Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991); Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism. A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

9 Timothy O. Benson, *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT, 2002); Elizabeth Clegg, *Art, Design and Architecture in Central Europe, 1890–1920* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Stephen A. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: from the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); a section "The Other Modernisms: Culture and Politics in East Central Europe," *The Austrian History Yearbook* (2002): 141–237; Matthew Witkowsky, *Foto: Modernity in Central Europe, 1918–1945* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art; London: Thames and Hudson, 2007); Jeremy Howard, *Eastern European Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

10 Christopher Wilk, ed., *Modernism. Designing a New World, 1914–1939* (London: V&A Publishing, 2006) contains a chapter on National Modernisms by David Crowley which – out of Central European countries – mentions only Germany and Poland; Hal Foster et al., *Art since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism and Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004); Hugh Honour and John Fleming, *A World History of Art* (London: Laurence King, 1991); Hugh Aldersey-Williams, *World Design: Nationalism and Globalism in Design* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992); Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Circulations in the Global History of Art* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015); Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough, *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) contains twenty eight essays of studies from across the world. While it expands the field of modernism studies by its comparative approach, it still operates with concepts such as periphery, edges of the field etc. Cf. also Vincent Sherry, ed., *The Cambridge History of Modernism* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

11 For more critical revisions of the global turn in art and design history, see for example James Elkins, *Is Art History Global?* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007); Kjetil Fallan and Grace Lees-Maffei, "Real Imagined Communities: National Narratives and the Globalization of Design History," *Design Issues* 32, no. 1 (2016): 5–19; Daniel J. Huppatz, "Globalizing Design History and Global Design History," *Journal of Design History* 28, no. 2 (2015): 182–202; Barry K. Gills and William Thompson, eds., *Globalization and Global History* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor & Francis, 2012).

12 Piotr Piotrowski, "Towards a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde," in *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, eds. Sasha Bru et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 52.

13 Cf. "To the Centre via the Periphery. An Interview with Maria Todorova," *EuropeNow,* June 5, 2018. Accessed December 1, 2018. https://www.europenowjournal.org/201ujá.l8/06/24/to-the-center-via-the-periphery-an-interview-with-maria-todorova/.

14 Herman Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into the Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983).

15 Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1958); Alan Dingsdale, *Mapping Modernities: Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe, 1920–2000* (London:

Routledge, 2002). On the links between language and nation-formation, see for example Tomasz Kamusella, *The Politics of Language and Nationalism in Modern Central Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); cf. also Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

16 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

17 For example Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Maria Todorova, "The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism," *Slavic Review* 64, no. 1 (2005): 141–164.

18 Mike Featherstone, ed., *Global Modernities* (London: Thousand Oaks, CA and Sage Publishing, 1995); Timothy Mitchell, ed., *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis, MN: Minneapolis University Press, 2000); Gilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2001); Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, *Patterns of Modernity II. Beyond the West* (London: Pinter, 1987).

19 Similar, localised, revisions have been carried out in regards to different parts of the world – see for instance essays in *The Oxford Handbook of Global* Modernism, Elaine O'Brien et al,, *Modern Art in Africa, Asia and Latin America: An Introduction to Global Modernisms* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); Grace Lees-Maffei and Kjetil Fallan, eds., *Designing Worlds: National Design Histories in an Age of Globalisation* (New York: Berghahn, 2016); Kjetil Fallan, *Designing Modern Norway: A History of Design Discourse* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017); Daniel J. Huppatz, *Modern Asian Design* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018) and the exhibitions and events project "Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA" in Southern California (2017–2018).

20 In English Rostislav Švácha, *The Czech Avant-Garde of the 1920s and 1930s* (London and Oxford: Museum of Modern Art and Design Museum, 1990); Rostislav Švácha, *The Architecture of New Prague, 1895–1945* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1995).

21 Vendula Hnídková, "Rondocubism versus National Style," *RIHA Journal* 0011, November 8, 2010, https://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2010/hnidkova-rondocubism-versus-national-style, Pavla Michalíková and Tomáš Winter, eds. *Umění a tradice* (Prague: Artefactum, 2017); Marta Filipová, "National Treasure or a Redundant Relic: The Roles of the Vernacular in Czech Art," *RIHA Journal* 0066, February 26, 2013, http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2013/2013-jan-mar/filipova-national-treasure-or-a-redundant-relic.

22 Maria Todorova, "Modernism," in *Modernism: The Creation of Nation States*, ed. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Gorny and Vangelis Kechriotis (Budapest: Central European University, 2010).

23 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (London: Harverster Wheatsheaf, 1993), 76.

24 Josef Čapek, "K anketě," *Volné směry* 26 (1928): 183.

25 Karel Čapek, "K anketě," *Volné směry* 26 (1928): 184.

26 Stanislav Kostka Neumann, "K anketě," *Volné směry* 26 (1928): 63.

27 Karel Kramář, "K anketě," *Volné směry* 26 (1928): 188.

28 Jiří Mahen, "K anketě," *Volné směry* 26 (1928): 192.

29 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Gabi Dolff-Bonerkamper, "National-Regional-Global? Old and new Models of Societal Heritage Constructions," *Art in Translation* 4, no. 3 (2012): 275–286, and introduction by Ian Boyd Whyte, 276.

30 Arne Novák, "K anketě," *Volné směry* 26 (1928): 190.

31 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* (Berlin: Verlag von Duncker & Humblot, 1840).

32 Johann G. von Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 4 vol. (Riga and Leipzig: J.F. Hartknoch, 1784–1791).

33 Umut Özkırımlı, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 49–70; Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

34 Ernst Gellner, *Nationalism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997); Clifford Geertz, ed., *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Africa and Asia* (New York: The Free Press, 1967).

35 For instance, Cynthia Paces, *Prague Panoramas: National Memory and Sacred Space in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2008); Nancy Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007); Derek Sayer, *Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

36 Sayer, *Coasts*, 107.

37 Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Česká otázka* (Prague: Čas, 1895). Here Masaryk, *Česká otázka* (Prague: Státní nakladatelství, 1924).

38 Michal Kopeček, "Introduction to The Czech Question," in *Modernism: The Creation of Nation States*, eds. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Gorny and Vangelis Kechriotis (Budapest: Central European University, 2010); 199–209; cf. also Holly Case, *The Age of Questions: Or, A First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions over the Nineteenth Century and Beyond* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

39 Masaryk, *Česká otázka*, 182.

40 Cf. Hugo Hantsch, "Pan-Slavism, Austro-Slavism, Neo-Slavism: The All-Slav Congresses and the Nationality. Problems of Austria-Hungary," *Austrian History Yearbook* 1 (1965): 22–37.

41 Karel Havlíček Borovský, "Slovan a Čech," *Pražské noviny*, 15 February–12 March 1846. Reprinted in *Karel Havlíček Borovský, Dílo II. Pražské noviny, Národní noviny, Slovan*, ed. Alexandr Stich (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1986), 55–81. Jan Kollár, "Dobré vlastnosti národu slovanského," in *Obrození národa, Svědectví a dokumenty*, ed. Jan Novotný (Prague: Melantrich, 1979), 191–205; Jan Kollár, *Slávy dcera. Lyricko-epická báseň v pěti zpěvích* (Prague: I. L. Kober, 1862).

42 Kohn, *Pan-Slavism*, 194. Paul Vyšný, *Neo-Slavism and the Czechs 1898–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

43 Kohn, *Pan-Slavism*, 192.

44 Claire E. Nolte, "Celebrating Slavic Prague: Festivals and the Urban Environment, 1891–1912," *Bohemia* 52 (2012): 49.

45 Kohn, *Pan-Slavism*, 215.

46 Sayer, *Coasts*, 160.

47 Gary Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); Peter Demetz, *Prague in Black and Gold: The History of a City* (London: Penguin, 1998); Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); Claire Nolte, "Choosing Czech Identity in Nineteenth–Century Prague: The Case of Jindřich Fügner," *Nationalities Papers* 24, no. 1 (1996): 51–62, Pieter Judson and Marsha L. Rozenblit, *Constructing Nationalities in East Central Europe* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005); Jindřich Vybíral, "What Is 'Czech' in Art in Bohemia? Alfred Woltmann and Defensive Mechanisms of Czech Artistic Historiography," *Kunstchronik* 59, no. 1 (January 2006): 1–7.

48 Hugh Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), 149, Nancy Wingfield, "The Battle Joined: Protesting the Badeni Language Ordinances," *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 48–78.

49 Cf. T. Mills Kelly, "Last Best Chance or Last Gasp? The Compromise of 1905 and Czech Politics in Moravia," *Austrian History Yearbook* 34 (2003): 279–301.

50 Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

51 Gary Cohen, "Cultural Crossings in Prague," *Austrian History Yearbook* 45 (2014): 1–30.

52 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

53 The first Czechs appointed as professors of art history at the University were Jan Erazim Vocel in 1850 (who died in 1871) and, after a gap, Karel Chytil and Bohumil Matějka in 1897.

54 Wingfield, *Flag Wars*.

55 "Národní divadlo – historická budova." *Národní divadlo*. Accessed March 3, 2009. http://www.narodnidivadlo.cz/default.aspx?jz=cs&dk=9862783b7e774e19bf38d46835fd1d44.htm&pn=254affcc-cb43-4078-86fe-c5544619cf7b.

56 The central place of the Theatre in the national imagination was rooted in several factors. The original idea came from the main representatives of the Czech patriotic movement, including Palacký, the Sokol founder and art historian Miroslav Tyrš and the writer Jan Neruda. F. X. Harlas, *Výstava výtvarné generace Národního divadla v Praze* (Prague: Myslbek, 1932); Vladimír Novotný, *Národní galerie 3. České malířství 19. století: Generace Národního divadla* (Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění, 1946); Olga Macková, *České malířství 19. století, vol. 3: Generace Národního divadla* (Prague: ČTK – Pressfoto, 1954).

57 On this, see Milena Bartlová, *Naše, národní umění* (Brno: Společnost pro odbornou literaturu - Barrister & Principal: Masarykova univerzita, Filozofická fakulta, Seminář dějin umění, 2009) Marta Filipová, "The Construction of National Identity in the Historiography of Czech Art" (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2008).

58 Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

1 Modernism

Miloš Jiránek (1875–1911), a Czech painter and art critic, clearly outlined his and his generation's views of modern art in Bohemia in a lecture he presented in Prague in 1909:

> We didn't think we would be good Czechs if we were not good Europeans, we didn't think that authenticity and originality needed to be protected [...]. We are obliged to find an appropriate expression for the feelings of our Czech people […].[1]

For him, art did not lose its national character or significance even if it interacted with external influences. "Czech art will continue to exist; this is one of the duties of our national existence and a direct commitment of our race," he concluded after he summarized the last few decades of Czech artistic development and focussed on the artists he thought were most influential in the recent history.[2] These were primarily the painter Josef Mánes (1820–1871), who "wasn't an artist of any grand style, [but] a lyricist to the core, […] of whose international importance we have no illusions," as well as the "ambitious, intelligent, responsible, and authentic" artist Jaroslav Čermák (1831–1878), the creator of "national legends and fairy tales who taught us to love the little Czech history," whose work also frequently depicted the native inhabitants of Montenegro.[3] Jiránek also emphasised the key role of the illustrator and painter Mikoláš Aleš (1852–1913), and a number of other artists of the so-called "Generation of the National Theatre," discussed in the introduction. This name was given to a group of architects, painters, and sculptors who participated in the construction and decorations of the National Theatre in Prague in the 1880s. Their depictions of mythical, historic, and landscape scenes in the theatre applied romanticised and historicist visual language.

As a writer, Jiránek was associated with the journal *Volné směry*, founded in 1896, and his artistic work ranged from portraits to rural scenes.[4] In the lecture, he attacked the uncritical reliance of local artists on foreign models of Impressionism, on what he described as the detrimental and reactionary influences of Munich and the separatist tendencies of the last fifty years.[5] He praised the youngest artists of the nineties, who were more attuned to what was going on at the international stage and he was complimentary of the new artistic groups forming in Moravia. Local artistic expression did not need to lose its distinctiveness or Czech character if it opened up to influences of international art, he claimed. Being national and international (that is, European) were not two mutually exclusive things. At the same time, it was important to be reminded of the colour schemes and ornamentation of local vernacular art even though it was surpassed by contemporary modernity. In his discourse, race was identical with

ethnicity, and as such, it was an important factor in art practice. "I am convinced that every truly artistic work by a person of Czech race will be thereby Czech simply because it will be the work of the utmost honesty and sincerity of its author."[6]

Jiránek's lecture therefore presented a number of issues that other Czech artists, art critics, and art historians were concerned with at the turn of the century. Foremost, it was the question of a "Czech character" of art and its relationship to the wider, international context. The local art scene was diversifying – young artists were forming new groups while regions were developing distinctive cultures. Folk art, habitually related to local traditions, was redefined for the purposes of modern art. Was it, therefore, possible to create new art that would at the same time retain this Czech character and still be international? This chapter asks what tools Czech artists and art writers used to achieve creating a sense of new Czech art. How did they negotiate the modernity of Czech art and in what way did they nationalise international impulses?

New Platforms for Modern Art

Similar discussions about what constituted Czech art in relation to the Czech nation had appeared frequently in Czech journals, newspapers, and in lectures since the late 19th century. Fin de siècle in the Czech lands was also marked by an increasing diversification of the Czech art scene. Clubs uniting artists, art critics, journalists, and patriots had existed in Bohemia and Moravia from the beginning of the 19th century, but it was at the end of the century that more progressive and internationally oriented associations were founded. Especially from the late 19th century onwards, more outward-looking artists' clubs were established with different lifespans. These included Spolek výtvarných umělců Mánes (The Association of Fine Artists Mánes, 1887), Skupina výtvarných umělců (The Group of Visual Artists, 1911), which was founded by renegades from Mánes, Osma (The Eight, 1907), and the symbolist group Sursum (1910–12), many of which will be mentioned in more detail later.[7] The often cosmopolitan and international orientation of these clubs and publications was significant for providing Czech art world with reflections on the international artistic context through notes on exhibitions, translations, and reviews of current books and events.

The Mánes Association has been one of the most influential organisations in the Czech context, and therefore merits a more detailed overview. It was founded in 1887, and inherited its name from one of the best-received Czech painters, the above-mentioned Josef Mánes. The initial members of this association were Czech art students from Prague, and they were later joined by Prague-based art historians, including Antonín Matějček (1889–1950), Vincenc Kramář (1877–1960), Zdeněk Wirth (1878–1961), as well as some foreign artists, such as Edvard Munch, Auguste Rodin, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, and Le Corbusier.

Many art students from the Prague academies were informed by their journeys to and temporary studies at art institutes and studios in Germany and France, where they encountered the latest achievements of contemporary art in Western Europe. This contributed to the strong international orientation of Mánes. From the second half of the 1880s onwards, Czech artists frequently travelled and studied, mainly in Paris and less and less in Munich and Vienna.[8] Despite this reorientation, Mánes also retained close links with Hagenbund, the Viennese artistic organisation. They either held joint exhibitions or featured individual artists from the other group as guests.[9]

The Mánes Association exerted its influence through the exhibitions it held and the various texts on art it published. Its exhibition activities started in 1898 with a display of young Czech artists, which included the work of the Mikoláš Aleš, the impression-ist Antonín Slavíček (1870–1910), the female landscapist and graphic artist Zdenka Braunerová (1858–1934), and the painter of village life Joža Uprka (1861–1940), who will all be covered later in more detail. The exhibition took place in a hall of the so-called Topičův salon (Topič's Salon), a private gallery in Prague owned by the pub-lisher František Topič. Regular exhibitions of Mánes members followed in this venue.

Mánes also established its own journal, the above mentioned *Volné směry*, in which it aimed to systematically promote awareness of the visual arts, poetry, and fiction among the inhabitants of Bohemia and Moravia. Founded in 1896, the journal wished to acquaint the public with the modern visual arts and literature with active advocacy of contemporary artistic achievements.[10] Its contributors were not only art historians but also journalists and artists, and the journal soon became a platform for lively discus-sion on modern art, although it did not avoid referring to the older generation of artists and more historical artistic periods.

These new clubs and associations, which often united younger artists, appeared next to the more established and often more conservative societies. One example is the Společnost vlasteneckých přátel umění v Čechách (or, in German: Gesellschaft patriotischer Kunstfreunde in Böhmen; the Society of Patriotic Friends of Arts in Bohemia), founded in Prague in 1796. This organisation of aristocrats and burghers from Bohemia (i.e. both Czechs and Germans) established its own Picture Gallery in the same year, which eventually turned into the National Gallery in 1949 and opened Akademie výtvarných umění (the Academy of Fine Arts) in 1799. Their aim was to promote the art of Bohemia and cultivate the artistic taste of the public.

Yet while many organisations, established at the turn of the century, proclaimed cos-mopolitanism in their programme, they had a nationalistic orientation behind them. This was the case of, for example, Umělecká beseda (The Artistic Society), founded in 1862, or the more theoretically oriented Kruh pro pěstování dějin umění (The Circle for Cultivation of Art History) from 1913. Umělecká beseda was founded in 1863 and comprised of literary, music, and visual arts sections. The visual arts division was responsible for a number of activities connected with the visual arts. The members organised educational lectures in towns and villages, and actively participated in the major artistic projects of the period, such as the competition for the National Theatre in Prague. Umělecká beseda also awarded artistic prizes, initiated several exhibitions, and, between 1921 and 1948, published an important artistic journal, *Život* (Life), which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. In its political orientation, it remained rather unadventurous, and organised exhibitions focussed on art that pro-moted Czech or Slavic history and mythology.

Many of these groups also had rapidly changing membership, with artists becom-ing disillusioned with the direction a specific group took and joining or founding new ones. For instance, the Cubist painter Emil Filla (1882–1953) and the sculptor Otto Gutfreund (1889–1927) both left the Mánes in 1911, and helped to found the Group of Visual Artists. Just under two years later, after arguments about what version of Cubism and Futurism they wanted to follow, a number of Skupina's members, includ-ing the brothers Josef and Karel Čapek, the painter Václav Špála, and the architects Vlastislav Hofman and Josef Chochol, left it and returned to Mánes at the turn of 1912 and 1913. Yet by 1914, the painter Josef Čapek was expelled from it during

disputes with the older members who, according to Karel Čapek (1890–1938), the writer and journalist, tried to marginalise the young generation.[11] As a result, two different groups formed around Josef Čapek and Filla, indicating two different understandings of Cubism in Bohemia. While the one around Čapek embraced primitivist forms in art, Filla and, for instance, the art historian Vincenc Kramář and architect Pavel Janák (1882–1956), praised above all the work of Picasso and Braque. Kramář, who will be mentioned later in more detail, became an ardent defender of the work of Picasso and Braque which reflected in Kramář's private collecting activities and theoretical writing.

The end of the nineteenth and beginning of the 20th century also saw a rise in the number of various publications where art, its nature, purpose, and relation to the nation, were discussed. Apart from *Volné směry*, the early journals included *Moderní revue* (Modern Revue, 1894–1925) of a symbolist and decadent focus centred around the literary critic Arnošt Procházka, *Rozhledy* (Outlooks, 1895–1909) around the art critic F. X. Šalda, *Dílo* (Work, 1903–1949) concentrated on design and architecture, and *Umělecký měsíčník* (Arts Monthly, 1911–1914) around the newly established the Skupina.[12] Many of the journals engaged in wider cultural and social issues and published articles and reproductions of a variety of art forms, such as theatre, literature, and photography. Newspapers, including *Lidové noviny* (The People's Gazette), *Zlatá Praha* (Golden Prague), and *Národní listy* (The National Paper), often published longer or shorter commentaries on artistic events and discussions which reached the general public. They reported extensively on exhibitions of local and foreign artists that took place in Prague, and sometimes beyond.

Exhibitions were another crucial venue which served as a medium introducing and communicating artistic ideas to local artists and general audiences. Purchasing and exhibiting policies of museums and galleries helped to construct specific canons of Czech art. In Prague, for instance, Moderní galerie (Modern Gallery) was initiated by the Young Czechs and founded in 1901–1902. In the context of formulating a narrative of Czech art, more important than such institutions, which were often subjected to conservative policies, were temporary exhibitions of the artistic associations that introduced international artists, or brought together young local ones and will be discussed shortly.

All of these platforms – the new artistic groups, their publications, and exhibitions they organised – were, in a more or less pronounced way, motivated by the search for a modern expression, however they defined "modern." Importantly, they were also shaped by larger issues that Czech society and culture faced at the turn of the century: issues like links with the international art scene, the relationship between national traditions and modernity, the divide between the urban and rural, and the split between the male or female spheres.

Manifesting Modernism

The year 1895 marked a significant milestone for Czech culture and history. It was the year of the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition in Prague, which celebrated the "original life of the Czech people" in the countryside.[13] It was also the year when the Manifesto of Czech Modernism was composed by a group of young artists and art critics and published in *Rozhledy*.[14] While the Exhibition, which will be explored in more detail in the following chapter, portrayed Czech culture as archaic and unaffected by

external, especially German, influences, the Manifesto went exactly the opposite way. It called for individualism and originality in artists' work, which would put an end, for example, to "the imitation of national songs, rhyming folkloristic trinkets, […] and realistic flat objectivity."[15]

The authors of the Manifesto included the writer Josef Svatopluk Machar (1864–1942), the art critic F. X. Šalda (1867–1937), who will shortly be mentioned in more detail, the poets Otokar Březina (1868–1929) and Antonín Sova (1864–1928), and the playwright Vilém Mrštík (1863–1912). Even though most of them were writers and poets, their views about authorship and place of art within an international network covered the visual arts as well.

The group jointly called for an end to a quick turnaround of whimsical artistic directions, of, for example, realism, naturalism, symbolism, and decadence. The Manifesto made a statement in favour of originality in artists' work and individualism in art and politics. Their call contained a large degree of disappointment with the current political situation and the failure of the Young Czech party. Critics of the party were frustrated with the compromises and failed promises that the party had made, including in its own manifesto produced in 1892. Amongst various other political demands, the party called for nationalising the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague and the opening of a second university in Bohemia.[16]

The Manifesto of Czech Modernism was addressed to a modern, progressive Czech nation that would embrace all parties and strata of society, especially women and workers, and lead to universal suffrage: "we strongly demand access for women to cultural and social life."[17] Instead of loud proclamations of narrow-minded nationalism, the authors suggested a search for understanding with the German countrymen not through discussions or political alliances, but "in the field of humanity and – stomach," suggesting that there had been a long, shared political, cultural, and culinary history.[18] And in reference to current political clashes between the Czechs and Germans, as well as between the various Czech parties, the signatories of the manifesto claimed that "parties perish, but the nation prevails."[19] The artists therefore expressed their confidence in national self-sufficiency and the ability of Czech culture to survive: "we have no fear for our tongue. We are nationally so far advanced, that no power in the world can tear it away from us."[20]

The frequent references to nation and national art indicated that these topics were quite important even in the time of increasing attention to international events and art. The end of "the imitation of national songs, […] and realistic flat objectivity," and the end of historicism which the signatories wanted to install did not necessarily mean the end of Czechness of art. "Be true to yourself and you will be Czech," the Manifesto claimed.[21] The work of artists, such as the painter Mánes, the realist writer Jan Neruda (1834–1891), and the composer Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884), criticised at their time for too many foreign influences, nevertheless contained an inherent Czech quality, the Manifesto admitted. The proclamation can therefore be seen as an attempt to update the national discourse, which kept references to the authenticity of Czech art, while trying to embrace a more open-minded view.

The Manifesto, however, did not represent a unified voice of Czech modern art and the artistic scene was much more complex than it tried to portray. The literary and artistic scene consisted of many other groups and individuals who embraced modernism that did not necessarily comply with the Manifesto of Czech Modernism. As such, the proclamation was criticised by a range of voices from representatives of modern

Catholic artists to the conservative wing of the Young Czechs. The group Katolická moderna (The Catholic Modernists), which was formed in the 1890s and consisted of Catholic writers and poets, is an important example of such criticism.[22] Its members, grouped around the journal *Nový život* (New Life), which between 1896 and 1907 published original literary and scientific texts and translations, as well as illustrations of mainly symbolist authors.

Nový život took issue with the idea of individualism, which – as it claimed – was nothing original, as individuals had always been at the core of any art of great artists.[23] Author of this assertion, the writer and literary critic František Holeček (1879–1947) also disagreed with the calls of the Czech modernists for disposal of traditions and the past. For him, the present days and art were a necessary result of things past.[24] Author of the introductory text to the first volume of *Nový život*, who remained anonymous, was even more emphatic, claiming that the Manifesto "bloats with the expression of a bulldog, thinking what most scornful gesture to use to communicate its eternal and unspeakable condemnation of the older generation on the shoulders of which it had climbed."[25] Instead, the Catholic modernists believed that the past cannot be removed from contemporary consciousness, let alone art: "[…]present day is the daughter of the past[…] progress is impossible without tradition, otherwise we would only be building sandcastles."[26]

In this way, the Catholic modernists can be seen as an antipode to Machar's and Šalda's proclamation. Yet they also aimed to *modernise* Catholic literature, art, and architecture, in order to "create modern and truly Catholic literature" and culture, a call expressed frequently in their journal.[27] And even though the group did not share a uniform vision of modern Catholic art, the members argued against what they saw as liberal unscrupulousness, modern dilettantism, grumpy pessimism, and dry moralising, which they associated with the Czech Modernist manifesto.[28] Instead, they put emphasis on religious iconography, folk art, and national traditions in art represented by, for example, Mánes and Aleš.[29] Their work, in their view, shared a spirituality which made their art authentic.

Critical voices came from other quarters, too. Far from representing the more conservative and traditional values, Arnošt Procházka (1869–1925), an editor of *Moderní revue*, also disagreed with a number of features of the Manifesto. He emphatically started his critique with a proclamation that "we hate collective manifestos," and pointed out several paradoxes in the document. For instance, the calls for individualism were pronounced by a collective mass, or the authors demanded art to be devoid of national boundaries and yet remain Czech at the same time.[30] Procházka thought such manifestos were too short-lived, too binding, and too restrictive. "We [the artists around *Moderní revue*] do not sign any manifestos because the desire for unlimited freedom and individuality and truthfulness of work without manifestos and signatures is what unites young artists today."[31]

Moderní revue, as I mentioned above, was also established in 1895 by Procházka and the poet, art critic, and Symbolist and Decadent artist Karel Hlaváček (1874–1898). The journal focussed on symbolist and decadent art and generally disregarded the need to discuss nationality in art.[32] Procházka expressed this clearly when he claimed, "beauty and freedom had no relation to any national unit."[33] *Moderní revue* was also one of the few platforms that was clearly anti-nationalistic; it gave space to German literature and arts. It often published reviews, book announcements, articles, and poetry in German or by Germans, acknowledging the place of the German

minority in the cultural life of Prague. It therefore became one of the first publications that did not make a distinction between authors based on language or culture, which was a common practice with many other journals at the time. The way modernism was embraced in the Czech lands at the turn of the century therefore took a number of forms. Despite their diversity, they nevertheless had one thing in common – an attempt to promote a modern orientation of Czech art.

Anna Costenoble in Prague: Gendered Modernism?

Artists and theorists in the Czech lands and elsewhere related this modern orientation of art with the freedom and independence of individual expression, as well as an awareness of international developments in art.[34] Such embrace of stimuli from abroad was encouraged by a number of high-profile exhibitions of international artists, which took place in Prague at the turn of the century, and had a profound impact on local artists and their own understanding of modern art. Three exhibitions were particularly significant for both the local artistic scene and for establishing a relationship between Czech art and the international context. Two of them are habitually acknowledged to have profoundly influenced Czech modern art: the 1902 exhibition of August Rodin, and the 1905 display of Edvard Munch's work [Fig. 1.1].[35] I shall, however, also discuss an earlier, now lesser-known exhibition: a retrospective of the German painter Anna Costenoble. It took place in 1896 and opened up a debate not only about decadent art, but also about the role of female artists in the discussion of individualism, originality, and identity and their role in the construction of a modern nation. All three exhibitions at the time also played an important role in formulating ideas about Czech art and its relationship with the outside world.

   The exhibition entitled "Tragedy of a Woman" a work by Anna Costenoble (1863–1930) was held at the Topičův salon in 1896. The work of this Berlin-based painter and illustrator, who exhibited with the Vienna and Berlin Secession; depicted women and their naked or half-naked bodies in various emotional states, often with erotic subtexts. Unfortunately, the background story of the display of her work in Prague is obscure. Most probably, she was recommended by the philosopher and critic Stanisław Przybyszewski (1868–1927) who lived in Berlin and whom she portrayed a few times in the mid–1890s. Przybyszewski, who was partly influenced by Nietzsche, became an important figure not only in Berlin but also in his native Poland and in Bohemia, for his emphasis on individualism in art, musings on the fate of geniuses and the role of "degeneration" and "illness" in creativity. He was linked with the circle of artists and art critics of *Moderní revue* in which he published; which exchanged articles with the journal *Życie* founded by Przybyszewski in 1897.

   As a rather provocative deed for Prague, Costenoble's exhibition received varied reactions which first need to be placed within the context of women's art and the narratives formed about it in the Czech lands at the time. The Manifesto of Czech Modernism was clear about what role it desired for women in modern Czech society when it called for women to have better access to cultural and social life. At the end of the century, women in the Czech lands had rather limited opportunities as opposed to men, especially in art. First of all, they had limited access to art education. Uměleckoprůmyslová škola (The School of Applied Arts), which opened in Prague in 1885, did offer a few subjects for women but only in a shortened programme.

Figure 1.1 Jan Preisler, Edvard Munch, 1905. Poster, paper, colour litograph, 112 × 77 cm. Moravian Gallery in Brno. GD 21048.

Female students were not fully incorporated into all of the programmes until 1918, when art education for women was also opened at the Academy of Fine Arts.[36]

One of the key issues that female artists in the Czech lands had to face was that women had been traditionally associated with handicrafts, especially needlework and lace making. This meant that the presence of female artists in important exhibitions and art journals was often marginal. Related to this was another obstacle that female artists encountered: a lack of appropriate recognition by contemporary art criticism. This was partly an extension of the belief in modernism's close relation to progress and technology, which were often understood as masculine and linked to notions of male genius. The conventional view of women as the lesser sex and their traditional, domestic roles persisted in Czech literature as well as art criticism.[37]

Šalda himself, who was the co-author of the Manifesto's call for women's better position in society, retained such a gendered view of modern art. In his article on what he termed "new beauty" from 1903, for instance, he searched for the traits of

new, modern, visual language and appropriate virtues of artists.[38] He was critical of what he thought were conservative tendencies in art, such as historicism, naturalism, and passive copying, and instead called for a new expression and more individualism of artists. Importantly, however, this innovative approach had its limits, as Šalda believed that the modern artistic language should have "manly, warlike virtues, virtues of heroic upbringing," that corresponded with the demands of new culture and new times.[39] The new art should be objective and devoid of decorativism, which he and many other authors related to women's art, and that will make it modern.

At the same time, as more and more attention started to be paid to the status of women in the late 19th century, the Czech environment started to slowly shift too. John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* was published in 1890 in Czech translation by Charlotte Garrigue-Masaryková (1850–1923), the American wife of the future president, but it was influential amongst Czech female *and* male writers even before that.[40] Equally important were the views of the German-speaking feminists and socialists, such as Lily Braun and Rosa Mayreder, which often appeared in the Czech magazines. Around the turn of the century, Bohemia had a good number of women's organisations as well as publications that promoted the rights and achievements of women. These included the American Ladies Club (1865), founded by the collector and nationalist Vojta Náprstek (1826–1894), and women's journals.

Ženské listy (Women's Gazette), founded in 1892, *Ženský svět* (Women's World), 1896, and *Ženská revue* (Women's Review), 1905, often discussed the topics of emancipation. Some even commented on artistic production as well as the exhibitions of female artists. Yet they often appeared in isolation from those that focussed on their male counterparts, and, in many cases, remained conservative in their approach to modern art.

Czech articles that focussed on the questions of emancipation were slowly growing in number and prominence with the turn of the century. Interest in these topics even reached outside the women-focussed magazines and organisations. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was a great defender of women's rights and, contributed to the equality discussion already in 1904 by his lecture "A Modern View of the Woman," and by his subsequent studies and talks. His journal *Naše doba* (Our Era) covered the international women's movement and had a regular column on women's issues authored by the journalist Olga Stránská-Absolonová (1872–1927).[41]

Women's presence became first recognised in literature which focussed on reviving the Czech language: in the 19th century, the writers Božena Němcová, Karolína Světlá, both authors of novels from rural settings, and Teréza Nováková (1853–1912) were key participants in the national revival process. Yet the emancipation movement was slow to penetrate the writing on art and the few female authors who commented on contemporary artists and exhibitions were predominantly conservative.

This was the case of Renáta Tyršová (1854–1937) one of the few female authors who wrote about the visual arts at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the 20th century. Her scope included texts on anonymous vernacular art as well as the art of established artists and their exhibitions. She was the wife of Miroslav Tyrš (1832–1884), a prominent figure of the Czech national revival who taught art history at the Prague University and founded the popular sports organisation Sokol. Tyršová believed that art should reflect national identity and had little time for contemporary art.[42] In her view, artists should serve the nation by creating art that did not "replicate alien ideas and forms."[43] She recognised the link between the domestic, decorative arts and women, and looked for ways in which their work

could absorb Czech authentic forms and replace non-authentic Germanic elements in Czech culture. Her preoccupation with ethnic division of artistic and craft objects reflected the concerns of many with Czech and German traits in the visual arts in the second half of the 19th century.

Tyršová's conservative approach to art was rather common amongst other female commentators who, although critical of the marginalisation of women in cultural and social life, often sustained the traditional associations of women with domesticity and handicrafts. Nováková, for instance, reviewing the Women's section of the Jubilee exhibition that took place in Prague in 1908 to commemorate sixty years of Franz Joseph's reign, claimed that women's best achievements were in the domestic arts. "The Slavic woman, out of all the European nations, is the most talented, skilled and persistent in artistic handiwork."[44] Nováková did acknowledge that women also trained in drawing and landscape painting at the School of the Applied Arts and could become technically skilled, and this was evident from the Education section of the exhibition. Yet, they still were to achieve individuality in their expression. More generally, she saw woman's place as the quiet, selfless supporter of man, whether in business or art – woman, in her view, "assumed the material troubles of the everyday life, [and] allowed the man to use all his strength to concentrate on his aims," including the artistic ones.[45]

Four years later, when Nováková overviewed several art exhibitions in Prague, she retained the link between the so-called domestic arts and women. She pointed out that the practicality of applied arts was "more attractive to women than abstract […], purely artistic paintings."[46] In her view, women who came out of the School of Applied Arts and other applied arts institutions were able to improve taste in the home, eradicate lack of taste, and fight against the mindless copying of current fashion trends. While mechanical copying of ornaments and industrial reproduction of crafts were a frequent source of criticism in Bohemia and Austria-Hungary from the late 19th century (and will be discussed in the next chapter), for Nováková, it was women who were especially equipped to contribute by their skills to the renewal of handicraft.

As one of the few female reviewers, Nováková also commented on exhibitions of contemporary female artists, including the paintings by Anna Costenoble from 1892. The cycle *Tragedy of a Woman* consisted of six paintings of nude women, of which only five were displayed in Prague. As the paintings have not survived, they are only known from the descriptions of the reviewers. They were accompanied by other works by the artist, including landscapes and genre pictures. Nováková's review in *Ženský svět* pointed out that Costenoble aimed to depict a modern woman in her primeval self: "the painter probably wants to portray a modern woman, but she finds herself in situation identical to that thousands of years before. Eve loves, craves the fruit of knowledge and desire, she eats it and is expelled from the paradise, she dies – as if the thousands years of struggle to elevate the female spirit did not happen."[47] In the decadent depiction of woman's emotions, Costenoble – according to Nováková – "holds the mirror up to society, that is to men, in a fiery language." Nováková thus indirectly commented on the dominant position of men in society, which Costenoble associated with the sorrow of women.

The Tragedy of a Woman exhibition in Prague turned out to be a controversial event for its explicit rendition of nudity and decadent rendition of the subject. One of the paintings, *The Emotions of Motherhood*, was even removed from the display by censors. Unfortunately it is impossible to judge today what the main reason

was, except based on a suggestion in one of the reviews that the painting depicted a woman shortly after intercourse and her impregnation.[48] The author of the review was Karel Hlaváček, an ardent defender of decadent art. In *Moderní revue*, he praised Costenoble's bravery in the use of colour, depiction of emotions, and the fact that she painted with her soul. He drew parallels between her disavowal of academic predicaments and Edvard Munch's break with tradition.

Importantly, Hlaváček reacted to the criticism of Costenoble expressed by some young Czech artists, as not all of them had accepted her approach. In an emphatic attack on what he sees as small-mindedness and parochialism, Hlaváček inevitably acknowledges how fragmented the Czech cultural scene was.[49]

> The exhibition […] presented a pathological cut into our Czech life. Our social life was revealed in its true light, in its entire bare, rotten and shameful self. The profound Czech vulgarity and provincialism revealed themselves and the Czech noblesse oblige celebrated victory. […] not a pinch of understanding came from those who recently boast about being the *young, Czech art scene* […]. Well done, sirs, now you have revealed yourselves […]![50]

The small-minded criticism that Hlaváček mentioned included reactions to the artistic quality of the work as well as more general comments on the kind of modernism it represented. One anonymous author in *Volné směry* especially criticised what he referred to as Costenoble's unorthodox use of colour, and described the paintings as "useless banalities."[51] Another reviewer in the daily *Národní listy* regarded the paintings as "rags covered by splashes of dirt." He thanked, most probably with a good degree of sarcasm, the Salon for exhibiting this work as a "warning to all who compromise the idea of modernism, so rich in content, nice and pleasant, by sick eccentricities[…]"[52]

Critics also made a small number of hints at Costenoble's gender, such as "she is in her best years, in male terms, she even resembles a man rather than a woman," pronounced by an anonymous reviewer in *Zlatá Praha*.[53] Renáta Tyršová, writing in *Osvěta* (Edification), dismissed Costenoble's figurative painting as being untrained, and commented on her lack of feminine sensitivities: "Miss Costenoble most probably has not been affected by anatomy lessons[…] on her path to sensationalism, she completely lost her feminine sense and failed to gain a special artistic or a generally human one in replacement."[54]

Such views tended to consider male artists and their work as a standard against which the work of female artists was inevitably measured. The newspapers also often succumbed to similar personal comments. Mentioning Costenoble's appearance was unnecessary, uninformative, and had nothing to do with her artistic merits, yet the author used it to reflect on her work. In the latter case, Tyršová in *Osvěta* made a parallel between what she saw as bad art and a lack of female ability to create acceptable works of figurative painting.

Generally, though, the commentary concentrated mostly on what kind of modernism Costenoble's work stood for. In the end, the exhibition of her work did not represent any breakthrough in the acceptance of women as fine artists rather than decorators or applied arts designers in the Czech lands. However, the debate around the exhibition showed that the questions about what modern art should look like and who should author it entertained a wide spectrum of Czech critics, male or female; conservative or progressive.

Rodin, Munch and Czech Art

The debate about the nature of modern art and its influences from abroad reignited a few years later, when a group of artists, including the sculptor Stanislav Sucharda (1866–1916), the painter and art critic Miloš Jiránek and Josef Mařatka (1874–1937), Rodin's student from Paris, decided to hold an exhibition of the work of August Rodin. The Czech art world encountered Rodin's work on several occasions prior to the exhibition. First, the sculptor's own pavilion at the *exposition universelle* of 1900 attracted a group of Czech artists who were studying in Paris at the time, who visited the exhibition.[55] The group included the painters František Kupka (1871–1957), Karel Špillar (1869–1917), and the lithographer Viktor Stretti (1878–1957), who either studied or worked in Paris at the time.[56] Second, Rodin was acquainted with the graphic artist and painter Alfons Mucha (1860–1939) – whom he befriended in Paris, where Mucha worked in the 1890s, and who provided another link to the artistic world of Prague and the Czech-speaking lands. Moreover, Mucha designed a poster for the Prague exhibition.

Rodin's exhibition, organised under the auspices of the Prague City Council and the Mánes Association, opened in Prague between 10 May and 10 August 1902. It was housed in a purpose-built pavilion in the municipal Kinský park, designed by the architect Jan Kotěra (1871–1923) and was the largest exhibition – apart from Rodin's retrospective at the 1900 Exposition Universelle – during the artist's lifetime, with 157 works on display.[57] The local audience was already familiar with the sculptor's work from his participation in the salon of the Krasoumná jednota (Kunstwerein für Böhmen, The Fine Arts Union for Bohemia). This association, founded in 1835 mainly by patriotic Bohemian aristocrats, promoted artists and supported their work by collecting and exhibiting it.[58] The journal *Volné směry* also did Rodin good service, by publishing a special issue in 1901 with a translation of the introduction to Rodin's catalogue by the French art critic Arsène Alexandre; notes on Rodin's biography, and work from other art critics, for example, Gustave Geffroy and Camille Mauclair; a study of his drawings by Jiránek; an article by the Czech graphic artist, Arnošt Hofbauer, about meeting Rodin in person, and another article by Sucharda on sculpture, all focusing mainly on the international renown of the sculptor.

A written invitation that two of the initiators, Jiránek and Kotěra, addressed to Rodin, outlined the importance of the exhibition not only for the local audiences but also for what they termed the wider "Slavic" public. The authors described Bohemia as a "threshold of the Slavic orient," a formulation they used to evoke the ancient and rather mysterious origin of these realms. Yet in presenting the country to the French sculptor as oriental, they acknowledged that it was not yet struck by modern ideas and was rather belated in its artistic development.[59] Rodin's exhibition, they emphasised, would bring the much needed impetus for the Czech art world and "carry the seeds of [Rodin's] ideas into the virgin land of modern Slavic art."[60] They put Rodin in the position of someone who could bring Western art and civilisation to the Czech lands. The Czech art world – they envisaged – would therefore benefit from an impetus by the internationally renowned artist, who could help it break free from the conventional poses and forms in sculpture and contribute to installing modern art.

Around the turn of the century, many local artists and art critics of Czech origin were critical of the state of contemporary Czech art as suggested in the invitation letter. Yet Rodin's eventual acceptance of the invitation from a Czech artistic association

to exhibit in Prague was quickly interpreted as a triumph for the Czech artistic community and a blow to the German one.[61] At a reception in Rodin's honour during his visit, indicating the growing desire for the Czech-French link, the Czech politician of the Young Czechs party and member of the Reichsrat, Josef Herold pronounced, "[…] this friendship between the Czech and French nations, revived recently, has already bore beautiful fruit and is one of the most powerful tools in our political struggle."[62] He compared the Czech artists to effective fighters for national goals and argued that no art is international. Instead, "art is a mirror which reflects the national spirit, […] our nation, small in numbers, oppressed by stronger enemies, knows well how important the propagandistic power of art is and therefore art becomes a national agent."[63] This aspect of the exhibition – its promotion to a celebration of Czech national culture – was criticised by not only German papers but also by some Czech ones. *Moderní revue*, for instance, which was generally complimentary of the show, pointed out that "the only tasteless feature of the exhibition is the loud proclamation of nationalism during the opening and during Rodin's arrival to Prague."[64]

Both the exhibition and Rodin's personal visit later that year strengthened the relations between French and Czech artistic circles and laid the groundwork for subsequent artistic as well as political exchanges.[65] From the 1860s, many art students and artists from Prague came to study or work in Paris, and these included not only those of Czech origin but also Germans and Jews.[66] Facilitated by these contacts, examples of French art were often brought to Prague and exhibited. French Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism, for instance, with paintings by Paul Cézanne, Paul Gauguin, Édouard Manet, and others, were introduced in 1907 by Mánes.[67] A great role in these French-Bohemian exchanges was played by the French art critic, Camille Mauclair, a friend of Rodin's, who, even though he was no great fan of modern art, collaborated on the Mánes exhibition. Mauclair also helped to popularise Czech art, and, more generally, Czech history and culture in France through his publications.[68]

In Bohemia, the impact of Rodin's 1902 exhibition on local Czech artists and commentators was profound, with Rodin's visit attracting a lot of attention from national and local newspapers.[69] In the introductory text to the catalogue, Šalda described Rodin's artistic expression as the mother tongue of a genius. For Šalda, he was a great revivalist who could inspire and revive others, meaning – Czech artists. In a similar tone, Herold wished that "the propagandistic power [of art would] bring our artists to the heart of France, Paris, and that it [would] win French fondness of the Czech nation."[70]

The 1905 exhibition of Edvard Munch had a similar impact on the Czech artistic and general public, promoting an emphasis on the artist's individuality and original expression. It was organised by the Mánes Association in the same pavilion as the Rodin exhibition a few years earlier. Munch also came to Prague for the opening and was treated to a number of cultural events, including a performance of Smetana's opera, The Bartered Bride.[71]

The exhibition was accompanied by a catalogue, and by more or less enthusiastic articles in local newspapers and journals, indicating that the work had indeed provoked a range of reactions.[72] The 1905 issue of *Volné směry* brought Šalda's extensive and appreciative essay on Munch's work.[73] What Šalda praised in Munch was the artist's ability to depict contemporary emotions, provide social commentary, use brutal colours, and paint with his instincts. Calling Munch a violent dreamer, Šalda drew parallels between the painter's strong personality and that of Michelangelo, as they both stood outside of the artistic mainstream.

Munch's exhibition, and the reactions to it in the Czech press, also prompted Šalda to take an opportunity to comment on the state of contemporary Czech art criticism in an unsigned note in the same issue of *Volné směry*.[74] His objections were not about the negative responses of some critics – as he claimed – but rather about what he saw as the pretended attempts of some commentators to appear progressive without being constructive. His targets were especially the art historians Karel Bartoloměj Mádl (1859–1932), whom he criticised for his "lack of sensitivity and critical intuition," and František Xaver Harlas (1865–1947) whom Šalda scorned for "lack of thinking and intellect."[75] Šalda argued that these critics could not efficiently interpret the work because they were not equal in intellect and character to it. He criticised their alleged progressive thinking that appeared to only be a mask. He also contrasted their approach with an article by two other critics – Jiránek and Miloš Marten (1883–1917), an art critic and a symbolist writer. For Šalda, Jiránek's review of Munch contained sensitivity of experience and understanding of intimate and dramatic events, while Marten, in his "work of critical intelligence," showed a penetrating insight and was able to appreciate the artist's drama.[76]

In his short article, Šalda did recognize that a good art critic could argue against Munch (or any other artist), but the arguments needed to be substantiated and sober, which were attributes he couldn't find in Mádl and Harlas. At the same time, however, Šalda's rather scornful dismissal of their criticism rather suggests that he felt personally offended by their negative reactions. What Šalda objected to in Mádl was his passionate rejection of Munch's work.[77] Mádl thought that the artist only seemingly called for freedom of individual expression. This discrepancy was most visible in the artist's use of colour and distortion of form, he claimed. "I am not enough of an anarchist to take full elevating pleasure from this passionate destruction of form, I am not ready to give up all the cultured knowledge[…] to be satisfied by the cave primitivism of the struggling hand of the man of culture."[78] Mádl in return criticised especially Munch's rejection of traditions and artistic conventions. "I cannot make connections and bring to the same level the pleasure from the delicate drawings by [Vojtěch] Hynais, the beautiful fluidity of tenderness of [Max] Švabinský's art and these vulgarities and bizarre creations of Munch," he argued.[79] In the end, he concluded that Czech art would easily live on without Munch.

This clash of opinions between Mádl and Šalda represented, to an extent, a generational dispute – Mádl was a rather conservative art historian who studied under the Viennese art historian Moritz Thausing (1839–84), and in 1886 started teaching at the School of Applied Arts in Prague. He had often looked for authentic Czech qualities that were based on what he considered to be a Czech or Slavic spirit; the people, and the land.[80] For example, he saw mediaeval architecture in Bohemia as being typical for its softness and tenderness. This, he claimed, was openly manifested in the work of the architect Petr Parléř (1333–1399) who, despite his German origin "became a naturalised Czech in the full sense of the word" and laid the foundations for a specifically Czech Gothic architecture.[81] Mádl therefore could be seen as a representative of the earlier nationalist generation of Czech art historians for whom it was crucial – as well as possible – to establish some typical traits of national art and architecture.

Mádl was also generally rather uncompromising when it came to new forms of expression. In 1912, for instance, he would forcefully condemn two exhibitions of contemporary art, organised by the Skupina and Sursum. While the former group embraced Cubism, the latter was linked to symbolism, mysticism, and theosophy.

Their exhibitions showed works of art inspired by primitivist forms, the use of which was, for Mádl, a sign of a lack of imagination and creativity. "Only senile and ill people turn to their childhood and childishness[…] not even the best dialectics of elaborate theories would provide them with the power, justification and ability to persuade," he argued strongly against the displays of Expressionism and Cubism, calling them a "complete departure from all reality."[82]

Despite the diversity of views of Munch, he was seen as a painter who influenced many Czech artists. The need to pay better attention to art from abroad more generally, expressed by the younger generation of art critics, indicates that they were indeed aware of a certain belatedness of Czech modern art. One of the groups that openly embraced international stimuli was Osma, and especially its member, Emil Filla.[83] Osma consisted of eight artists of Czech, Jewish, and German origin, who first exhibited together in 1907. They were students at the Academy of Fine Arts who embraced what was, at the time being referred to as "expressionism," informed by the members' awareness of developments in Berlin, the Netherlands and, indeed, Paris.[84] They often met in the Café Union in central Prague, which was frequently visited by many artists and writers who "discussed the problems of national art."[85] Karel Čapek noted that,

> it was here that at one table, Wirth edited [the journal] *Styl* and [his series] *Umělecké památky Čech* [The Artistic Monuments of Bohemia], […], at another table Janák and Gočár, Filla, Gutfreund, Franta Langer, Špála and Beneš and others were arranging *Umělecký měsíčník* […] and in all the rooms, V. V. Štech was gradually formed and here Antonín Matějček was born. […It was] here that the late Matějka lived and chivalrous Kubišta used to sit […] and here I suppose was the origin of the historic exhibition of the Osma group.[86]

This particular café was also renowned for its provision of reading material, including Czech, German, English, and French journals on the arts and literature, by means of which customers could learn about the latest events abroad.[87] This was a common practice of a number of other establishments, including the Slavia, Tůmovka, or Arco cafés in Prague, as well as the Slávie, Bellevue, and Avion cafés in Brno. Osma formed in the Union café from artists who, as Filla would later put it, stood out "against following templates, dullness, academicism which penetrated all artistic life in Bohemia."[88]

The exhibition of Munch's work, especially his display of feelings, daring use of colour, and general denial of traditional expression, had an immediate and lasting influence on the young Czech artists before the war.[89] In hindsight, Emil Filla acknowledged this years later: "Munch stood at the start of our journey," and his exhibition prompted them to be critical, authentic, and daring.[90] What caught the young artists' attention was Munch's creative qualities and his new ways of expression: the coarse reduction of form; distorted, flat perspective, dramatic gestures and surprising groupings of colours, as well as the subjects of his paintings themselves.[91] In this way, Filla – probably unexpectedly – compared him to the Czech 19th century artist Mikoláš Aleš. Filla explained Aleš's current popularity with young artists who saw beyond his best-known folk-inspired illustration. They admired his ability to abstract his "deep faithfulness of Czech expression in the form and content, [and … his] unnaturalistic linearity."[92] And it was this tendency to abstract the depicted object with a graphic line that was common to both Aleš and Munch.

Filla also pointed out that Munch's work became more influential for Czech artists than, for instance, French Impressionism. Despite being "the son of the 'Nordic race' without a specific artistic tradition," Munch shared the same vernacular with Czech artists, in Filla's view.[93] The landscape that so often featured in the work of the Norwegian artist also bore similarity with the hilly profile of Bohemia, "which had been forming the national soul for centuries."[94] Munch taught Czech painters to look for the often severe and unfriendly beauty of the local landscape and appreciate it. Czech artists, Filla argued, discovered him without any recommendation from France or elsewhere, "we discovered Munch and learnt to love him only due to our independent critical thinking and maturity of judgement."[95]

Between Internationalism and Nationalism

Despite Filla's later downplaying of the influences of French art, especially Impressionism, France continued to be the main point of reference for many artists and art critics in the Czech lands. French art was shown by the Mánes in Prague in 1907 in an exhibition that included Impressionism, Gauguin, Cézanne, and Van Gogh, while the exhibition of The Independents held in 1910 featured Braque, Matisse, and Redon.[96] The Group's own annual exhibitions also featured guest artists from abroad, often showing the work of Picasso and Braque, among others.

The attention to contemporary French art was accompanied by the publication of certain translations of French and other foreign authors' work in art journals, including Paul Gauguin, John Ruskin, Richard Muther, William Ritter, Stanisław Przybyszewski, and Friedrich Nietzsche.[97] Ruskin, for instance, became influential for artists in the Mánes group with his preference of primitivist early Christian forms and rejection of Oriental ornament.[98] Przybyszewski, mentioned earlier in connection with Anna Costenoble's exhibition in Prague, provided an important link between progressive artistic circles in Bohemia and those in Germany, Scandinavia, and later, Poland. He also helped to popularise the work of Munch in Bohemia – his extensive study of Munch had already appeared in *Moderní revue* in 1897.[99]

Yet possibly the most influential international author in relation to the formulation of the idea of modern art in Bohemia was the German art critic and art historian, Julius Meier-Graefe (1867–1935), who was well known to the members of Mánes after their exhibition of Edvard Munch in 1905. By that year, the Mánes association as well as other artists and associations in Bohemia, had turned its interest towards the more open-minded art world of Berlin, with which Meier-Graefe was connected.[100] The motivation behind this change of affiliation was that the modern, internationally oriented views of Berlin's artists, theoreticians, and journals, such as *Kunst und Künstler*, were more acceptable and closer to *Volné směry* in their intentions than what was seen as the conservative attitudes of Munich and Vienna.[101]

Meier-Graefe authored the first history of modern art, *Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* (The Development of Modern Art), which set out a genealogical reading of modern art and its formal analysis.[102] However, rather than in these methodological questions, Czech authors were interested in Meier-Graefe's opposition to the division of art according to national boundaries. He stood aloof from the praise of modern German art by his contemporaries. In the 1905–1906 volume of *Volné směry*, his article entitled "Nacionalismus" (Nationalism), originally written for a book on the German realist painter Adolph Menzel, was published in Šalda's translation.[103]

Here, Meier-Graefe contested the appropriation of artists for national interests and held that nationality in art had been generally overemphasised. Referring not only to German artists but artists in general, he emphasised that they did not become automatically national and that their work could not be national by choice.[104]

With a degree of criticism towards the attempts to create national art, Meier-Graefe saw the main requirements for producing national art in the past in following local traditions and local models. This was, in his view, particularly the case for German art of the first half of the 19th century, and such practices were the reason why "German art stagnated […]. Painting that lives only from local sources does not possess even the slightest bases of artistic decency."[105] In Meier-Graefe's opinion, the artists who wanted to achieve something new had to leave Germany and seek inspiration abroad, and "what they achieved […] represents the only German art of the last fifty years that is worth mentioning."[106] Meier-Graefe nevertheless noted that at the beginning of the 20th century, German art again fortified itself by national walls.

Many thoughts expressed about national art in this extract from Meier-Graefe's book met with the position of Mánes and *Volné směry*. It was especially the recognition that artists needed to draw inspiration from the best achievements abroad that found a response in the writing of Czech critics around *Volné směry*, especially Šalda. He was a literary critic in the first place, but he was also an author of many art criticism essays and reviews of various artistic events. These made him an important representative of the newly emerging and developing field of art criticism in Bohemia, in which *Volné směry* played a crucial role. Šalda was one of the contributors to the journal who promoted – at least at the turn of the century – a supranational attitude to art in general. In The Manifesto of Czech Modernism with which he was involved, as well as in his articles, Šalda looked for a new direction in art. Opening windows to international influences, tearing down national walls, as Meier-Graefe also asked, were common demands of many modern artists and art critics.

Arguments for the need to open up the Czech cultural scene to the outside world were not limited to discussions about art. They were pronounced within the broader context of issues that were pertinent to Czech society and culture at the time. In 1895, Masaryk published his crucial essay, "Česká otázka" (The Czech Question), discussed in the introduction of this book, in which he warned against "historicism." He understood it as an idealisation and ideologisation of the past and excessive dwelling on the history as it had been constructed by the 19th century national revivalists. He also suggested a comparison of "our culture with the progress and work of other nations."[107] Czechs should adopt, though not uncritically, those achievements that were made abroad earlier, regardless of the country of origin. Masaryk thus argued against the traditional Czech animosity towards German authors and everything German: "Very often we declare un-Czech what the Germans have and we do not mind things French, even though they do not often fit in[…]"[108] He therefore called for the abandonment of a past that was burdened with nationalistic prejudices and disputes, and demanded an openness to international cultural and scientific exchange; he called for an acceptance of the ideas from abroad.

Such views reflected in a number of texts about the place of Czech art, including the modernist manifesto and Šalda's essay "Nová krása" (New Beauty) from 1903, in which he outlined his view of the situation in fin-de-siècle Czech art and the direction art should take. Yet such attempts at internationalisation did not necessary exclude the belief in the concept of national traditions and national art. Another

text by Šalda entitled, "Problém národnosti v umění" (The Question of Nationality in Art), published in 1904, in many respects echoed Meier-Graefe's views.[109] Šalda raised the question of what constituted a national art, and claimed that it was not the subject, "artistic method or style" that its authors used.[110] National art was not based in anything "analytical or descriptive, in neither a logical nor a psychological formula."[111] The individual features of national art could, in fact, be common to more than one nation, and thus national artists should be critical of the nation's past; they should be national through their heroism, and the positive and moral qualities of their work.[112] These abstract qualities of moral character made, for example, Rembrandt and Dürer into German visual artists, or Aleš a Czech painter, as Šalda pointed out.[113] Often, these national artists, he claimed, were dismissed during their lives and did not comply with the standards of their time or with conventional methods, which made them exceptional.[114] In Šalda's opinion, this fact that they did not comply with the common taste and that they challenged it courageously made them national artists. What comes across in Šalda's text is not only his call for being open to international stimuli, but also his underlying belief that there was indeed a national art that artists should build on to produce successful new art. This was a view shared more broadly by other Czech art writers, although they did not always express it openly.

Attention to the place of what could be identified as Czech art in the broader cultural, national, and international development, became a preoccupation of a number of Czech art historians, too. The primary interest in mediaeval art and architecture, a product of romantic nationalism that was discussed in the introduction, was gradually complemented by the awareness of more recent art. Great impact on this development in the Czech lands had the art historians of the so-called Vienna School, Alois Riegl, Franz Wickhoff, alongside the Swiss Heinrich Wölfflin, and the German historian Wilhelm Dilthey.[115] Riegl and Wickhoff had a profound influence on young Czech art historians who studied in Vienna with them or were familiar with the writing of the scholars.[116] The art critic and historian Vincenc Kramář helped to construct the narrative of modern Czech art on the basis of the Vienna school views, which he applied on reading of contemporary art, international as well as national. Kramář became particularly influential in interwar Czechoslovakia – as director of the Picture Gallery in Prague, he became responsible for a great number of major purchases. Kramář also collected works of arts for his private collection, which ranged from mediaeval painting to Picasso, and contemporary Czech art, and was closely associated with the art collector and art critic based in Paris, Henry Kahnweiler (1884–1979).

Kramář studied in Vienna under Wickhoff, Riegl, and Schlosser, and was in frequent contact with another Vienna based scholar, Max Dvořák (1874–1921).[117] Dvořák, born in Bohemia, was a Czech speaker who moved to Vienna in 1895. Influenced by Riegl and Wickhoff, he took up a professorship at the university in 1909, while retaining links with Czech colleagues in Prague and teaching a number of Czech students. Dvořák and Riegl were interested in detecting a universal development of art without drops or declines.[118] Similarly, Kramář saw artistic development as being a complex, autonomous process, and he examined surviving traditions and their rebirth into new forms.[119] In his opinion, in every period, there has been a certain prevalent way of understanding and expressing the world. Alongside this, there was either an older way that was fading away, which was destined to re-emerge again in some decades but in

a new form, and live a new life. Or, another artistic direction was germinating, which, despite all its revolutionary character, follows in the forms that have been seemingly extinct for a long time.[120]

Informed by Dvořák's writing, Kramář found parallels between works of art of different periods. Where Dvořák related El Greco to Expressionism, Kramář focussed on the connections between Cubism on the one hand, and Mannerism and the Baroque on the other.[121] They both placed the art of a specific nation within a more general artistic development, and considered art as being a part of the spirit of the age, or *Geist*. Already in his article on two Czech artists of the 19th century, Josef Mánes and Max Švabinský, Dvořák had suggested locating the two artists into the more general context of European art and explained their work as a combination of foreign and local influences; as inevitably reflecting the period's spirit. At the same time, their work demonstrated the importance of Czech art in the wider world, "the artistic height of a people is only to be ascertained by the contribution it has made to the general development of art."[122]

The views about a continuous development of art allowed many artists and art historians to claim that Czech art could absorb influences from France (or elsewhere) without losing its distinctive national character. Pavel Janák, a prominent designer and architect who constantly searched for modern language in his work, expressed such views in 1913. He pointed out that German and French artists started appreciating Czech art and "it can be said that in many ways we [the Czechs] have overtaken the Germans."[123] Janák took it as proof that local art, although criticised for losing its Czechness by its contact with foreign art, was the "expression of ever-expanding strengths of the national energy."[124] Along similar lines, Kramář claimed that "an artist of Czech blood, in symbiosis with Czech life and culture, an artist of intelligence, feelings, and imagination, will always create Czech art, whether he deals with local formal problems [...] or follows foreign forms."[125]

These ideas appeared in Kramář's extensive account of Cubism, the main subject of which was a reaction to Kahnweiler's book, *Der Weg zum Kubismus* (The Rise of Cubism) from 1920.[126] And although this key article was first published in 1921 in the journal *Moravskoslezská revue* (Moravian-Silesian Review), it was based on earlier writings that had remained unpublished due to WWI.[127] In his treatise, Kramář defended the originality of Cubism, represented for him mainly by Picasso and Braque, and explained it on the basis of formal analysis. He overviewed the key stylistic stages in the work of Picasso and related them to their historical precedents, which included the work of Cézanne, Ingres, and Greek ancient art.

Conscious of the contemporary clashes between exponents of the idea of international avant-garde and the defenders of narrow-minded nationalism, Kramář tried to reconcile the two positions and prove that they did not necessarily exclude each other.[128] He argued for

> [...] art that is less Czech, but in the first place better, proper art and the replacement of the endless quarrels about the nature of 'Czechness' with tireless work in the service of humanity and our own ideas. Only in this way can a new art be born [...] that will be of international standing and still remain Czech, because created by intelligent Czech artists, rooted firmly in our life and tradition.[129]

Authentic *Czech* art was not to be found in mere copies of those regarded as national artists because, "[...]many paintings of today, made in the light of Picasso's achievements,

contain far more of the true, genuine 'Czechness' than paintings which have the names of Mánes or Aleš written all over them."[130] Importantly, Kramář's new art therefore could be both Czech and international at the same time, if it remained faithful to local its spirit and rhythm instead of merely copying foreign templates.

The Persistence of National Art

In artistic practice, Cubism was introduced to Bohemia especially through exhibitions. Artists and art critics of the Skupina openly embraced international influences in their search for new art, prominently expressed in their work, in the group exhibitions they organised, as well as in articles of their journal, *Umělecký měsíčník*.[131] The journal frequently published reproductions of French Cubists, translations of their essays and theoretical studies of Cubism, such as "Du Cubisme" by the French philosopher and artist Albert Gleizes (1881–1953), and the artistic and critic Jean Metzinger (1883–1956) that appeared in 1912.[132] Yet the journal started soon privileging the Cubism of Picasso and Braque who were greatly promoted by Kramář and Filla.

As a part of their search for a new modernist language in Bohemia, artists and architects tested how widely they can apply Cubist theories. In the 1910s a number of Cubist buildings were designed in Prague and around Bohemia, including The House of the Black Madonna designed by Josef Gočár (1880–1945), and Josef Chochol's (1880–1956) apartment buildings in Prague or the designs by Pavel Janák in Pelhřimov [fig. 1.2]. Simultaneously, Czech artists such as Filla, the painter Bohumil Kubišta (1884–1918) and sculptor Otto Gutfreund experimented with new forms of Cubist expression in painting and sculpture.[133] These efforts can be understood as a conscious

Figure 1.2 Josef Gočár, The House of the Black Madonna, Prague. Štenc studio, f. 14 Gočár. National Technical Museum, Museum of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Prague.

search for new art. However, as Kramář's account on Cubism indicates, the adoption of the Cubist language did not necessarily mean a disposal of the belief in national art and traditions. Embrace of new art forms took place in a broader context of continuous traditionalist and conservative approaches to art and architecture which more openly subscribed to the idea of a "Czech national style." A number of institutions that were designed and built at the beginning of the century followed this trend, positing themselves as national in their function as well as in their architectural language.

Reactions to these new projects that so often nationalised modernism indicate how the notion of Czech art and architecture was constructed during this period. An example of such continuity is an institution that was intended as a celebration of the city of Prague, the Czech people, and of the Slavic "nation." Obecní dům (the Municipal House) was built for Czech representative and social events and as a response to an older German institution with a similar function [fig. 1.3].[134] Designed by the architects Osvald Polívka (1854–1900) and Antonín Balšánek (1865–1921), who both identified with Neo-Renaissance and historicism; and built between 1905 and 1912, the Municipal House drew on a combination of visual idioms, but these were predominantly Secessionist.

Using Secessionist architectural language at the beginning of the 20th century proved a controversial issue and ignited a discussion about the nature of Czech representative architecture. Already at its opening the Municipal House was criticised from various sides as an example of reactionary attempts by the artists and designers who participated in it.[135] Czech artists, architects, and critics, including Janák, understood Secessionist architecture to be an anachronism of the 19th century, unsuited for the modern life of the new century.[136] Just to provide a comparison – the Municipal House

PRAHA. - Representační dům u Prašné brány.

Figure 1.3 Municipal House, ca 1913. Postcard. Author's collection.

was completed in the same year that the nearby House of the Black Madonna opened. Designed by Gočár, the Municipal House was built as a department store with many Cubist features and details both in the exterior and interior.

At the same time, a number of art and architectural historians tried to reconcile the adoption of Secessionism with the idea of a local national style. Mádl, for example, recognised that Secession could be "nationalised" if it drew on local conditions, the people and the nationality of the authors.[137] In his view, the originality of this new style did not prevent it from being given a national character, for it emerged out of "the intertwined organism of the family, the land, and the tongue, which in the cases of strong, healthy intellects, crystallizes and turns into an individual style."[138]

Mádl was preoccupied with the question of what makes national art "national," in relation to not only the art of the past, like mediaeval architecture, but also in contemporary examples. Despite his criticism of some artists and tendencies, including Munch and later Cubism, he was concerned with the ways modern art can, or indeed should, be reconciled with national art. Already in 1898 in his article "Příchozí umění" (Incoming Art) on the architect Kotěra, he expressed his conviction that modern and national art were not mutually exclusive. Each new artistic style, in his view, became individualised based on the specific country, local materials, and the spirit of the local people. "The spirit of the national existence is therefore the Arcanum which should transform every foreign form into a Czech one. To preserve, to perfect [the national spirit], to intensify its expressions is to colour each modernism in Czech."[139]

With this belief in the existence of what could be called *nationalised modernism*, Mádl therefore fought against the suspicion of the older generation of art critics, art historians and architects in Prague towards the representatives of new artistic tendencies, especially Kotěra. At the end of the 19th century, the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, where he and many other young architects studied, became one of the centres of the Secession and its geographical as well as cultural proximity made it into a popular destination for students of architecture and arts from Moravia and Bohemia. After their return to their homeland, they often challenged the local advocates of historical and eclectic styles. These were established architects such as Vojtěch Ignác Ullmann (1822–1897), who adopted Neo-Renaissance language, Antonín Barvitius (1823–1901) with Neo-Classical architecture, Josef Mocker (1835–1899) who participated in a number of Neo-Gothic completions in Prague, including the Cathedral and the Castle.[140]

Kotěra studied architecture in Vienna under Otto Wagner and brought his ideas to Bohemia where he was active as an architect of public as well as private projects. His practical work underwent a significant development: from his early architecture influenced by the Secession, he turned to vernacular motives, and eventually to more simplified and monumental forms in architecture. Kotěra also wrote about contemporary issues in art and architecture and expressed his own views, not dissimilar to Mádl's, on the debate regarding the national aspects of modern art in his article entitled "O novém umění" (On New Art) published in *Volné směry* in 1900. Here, he defended modernism and argued for its specifically national potential. For him, the local character of modern architecture could be derived from "our" – meaning local – sources: "Seeing how well primitive folk art treats wood – I am learning to find the way how from our tasks, from our constructions, from our material in our climate I may be able to find and create our form."[141] The task of the modern architect was, then, to capture the particular climate and purpose in an appropriate, native form, and also to

be truthful to the material. For that reason Kotěra and many other authors called art and culture with native or local features "ours," which to an extent was identifiable with the national.

Yet even though he acknowledged the existence of this native expression, Kotěra denied the possibility that any nation could develop its very own and distinctive art, as in his opinion most nations have a similar system of education and similar culture. "The grounds and therefore also the forms will be identical; only the modes of expression will bear the national character. It is utopian to wish to awaken national art on the basis of a tradition through copies and new combinations [...]."[142] According to this understanding of art's place between nationalism and modernism, nationality of modern art could be detected only in external features growing out of universal cultural and historic foundations.

Regional Nationalism and Regional Modernism

The experience of and responses to modernity in the Czech lands were not limited to Prague as much as the revival of national sentiments was not restricted to the capital. The search for "new and appropriate modes of expression" that would befit the emerging nation and lively discussion about the role of modern art in the national revival broke out in many other places across Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. While Prague, as the largest city and the historic capital of Bohemia, was a natural heartland of both Czech nationalism and modernism, efforts to mobilise national consciousness and contribute to the narrative construction of Czech were also on the rise in smaller cities and towns, as well as in rural Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. Artistic societies, regional museums, and local publications that started flourishing with a more or less pronounced embrace of modern art all played a vital role in this process.

As Pieter Judson recently noted, from about 1900, local nationalist organisation branches were established across Austria, provoking an increase in regional activism.[143] New networks in transportation, trade, communication, and administration brought an influx of urban workers, such as teachers, administrators, and tourists to the countryside, and with them came cultural and social gentrification as well as attempts to intensify national awareness in the provinces.

While the responses to the so-called peasant culture in Czech modernism will be the focus of the following chapter, here I shall concentrate on the establishment of regional cultural centres at the turn of the century with the help of a selection of examples in Moravia. This part of the Czech-speaking lands had for a long time been bilingual, and language-based nationalism, associated more with Prague, was not as strong here. While the countryside was widely Czech-speaking, until the late 19th century urban centres had mostly German majorities.[144] With the influx of workers into urban industries, the linguistic base started to shift towards Czech, yet German remained the dominant language of culture, education, and commerce.

The rise of an educated Czech-speaking bourgeoisie saw a growing number of middle-class intellectuals trying to attain recognition for a distinctive Czech culture and identity in Moravia. Local nationalists started searching for their new centre. Brno, the largest and predominantly industrial city in Moravia, sometimes referred to as the Moravian Manchester for its thriving textile factories had in 1910 a population of about 216,000.[145] The German middle and upper classes were traditionally more active in supporting the arts. They financed, for example, the Deutsches Haus

Figure 1.4 The German House, Brno. Postcard. Author's collection.

(the German House), opened in 1891 to accommodate concerts, balls, lectures, and a gallery [fig. 1.4]. Similarly, the local artists' organisation, the Mährischer Kunstverein (The Moravian Art Association) was founded in 1882 as a primarily German institution to organise art exhibitions, lectures, promote local artists and popularize art.[146] It opened its own purpose-built gallery (today's Brno House of Arts) in 1911, in which it held group exhibitions of mainly German Moravian, Austrian and German artists.

The first specifically Czech artistic organisation in Brno was established in 1899 as the Klub přátel umění (Friends of the Arts Club), catering for not only the visual arts but also, for instance, for music and literature. However, the Club did not have the same resources or influence of its German equivalent, the Kunstverein.[147] The members of the Club consisted of Czech artists, writers, local businessmen, and aristocrats, as well as institutions, like schools, other clubs, and museums.[148] Just as the Umělecká Beseda in Prague promoted Czech culture, the main aim of the Club was to advance what they termed the "Moravian" character of culture and art. Such cultural identity was linked to the historic Margravate of Moravia, and put emphasis on the Slavic roots.[149] František Mareš, a teacher who promoted schooling of women in Moravia, and who was one of the initial members, outlined this at the founding meeting of the Club in 1900, "Moravia does not yet have an artistic centre. And it needs one, as Czech art also contains specific Moravian character."[150]

The Club envisaged the promotion of such a Moravian character through talks, exhibitions, and plans to establish a physical cultural centre in Brno. It was also involved in initiating the idea of constructing a new theatre, which would stage performances in Czech. When it was suggested that a Czech-language national theatre

should be constructed in Brno in 1908, a debate about local sites of national significance followed. The local discussion, which had parallels in many other places across the Czech lands, serves as an example of how regions responded to ideas of modernism and nationalism.

The proposed theatre was to provide a Czech alternative to the Municipal Theatre that had existed there since 1882, and had staged performances mostly in German. The new building was intended to replace a temporary structure for Czech events torn down in the same year.[151] The ensuing debate about the form such a representative building should take, lead between defenders of traditionalist and modernist approach to architecture, was similar to those that surrounded the building of the Municipal House in Prague. In Brno, however, Czech nationalists were not in such a strong position as in Prague, where the national revival movement had more success in founding new institutions with a strong emphasis on Czech culture and language, for instance, the Czech National Theatre in 1881 or the Czech part of the university in 1882.

Vilém Mrštík was a playwright and critic based in Southern Moravia, and one of the signatories of the Manifesto of Czech Modernism who envisaged the architect Dušan Jurkovič (1868–1947) to design the theatre. Jurkovič, who will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, had already established himself as an architect who translated his interest in the Arts and Crafts movement into the Czech, or rather Moravian environment. In his private and public building projects, Jurkovič applied elements and colour schemes of regional architecture. In response to this suggestion, the local architect Karel Hugo Kepka (1869–1924), a long-standing critic of Jurkovič, not only dismissed the formal features and eclecticism of Jurkovič's work, but compared the folk elements of his architecture to the naivety and vulgarity of the peasantry, which, in his view, were not fit for a cultural institution such as the Czech national theatre:

> Folk architecture must be seen as inferior to art. Not only the form, but also the spirit within the form, must be completely covered in the naivety and vulgarity of the village and it must correspond to the specific needs and requirements of the peasants. Under different circumstances, these forms degrade into copies, a compilation of existing forms of various village authors.[152]

Kepka called Jurkovič's approach a "dishonest fashion" which, for him, was foreign to the Czechs because of its commercial appeal.[153] In this way, he unwittingly paralleled Riegl's claims that the commodification of folk art contributed to its extinction.[154] Kepka was especially critical of the *Volkskunst* movement of the late 19th century and its attempts to reproduce folk art.[155] Kepka's position typified a tendency of some Czech artists and critics who regarded folk art and craft to be of lesser quality. This, for him, had two main reasons. On the one hand, folk art came from the rural working classes, which were uneducated and lacked aesthetic refinement, and on the other, it contained the eclectic imitation of local and foreign styles and motifs. Architects such as Kepka argued that architecture with vernacular elements was thus not suitable as a vehicle for meeting the Czech social, political, and cultural aspirations in Brno, which was heavily industrial in character.

Rather than being a proponent of international modernism, however, Kepka was a defender of historicism. And although the departure point of his criticism was

therefore different from that of the more progressive, contemporary artists, architects, and theorists closely associated with the emerging Czech modernist movement, they shared a scepticism of the inclusion of vernacular elements into contemporary art. As I will discuss shortly, much of the criticism of the imitation of folk art originated in the modernist approach to art and architecture, with its negative attitudes towards decoration.

Ultimately, due to the various delays, legal contestations, and controversies stemming from the design competitions, the construction of the new theatre did not start until 1958. In 1915, before a new design contest was announced, *Volné směry* criticised the unsuccessful attempts to build a Czech theatre in Brno.[156] Comparing the importance of such an institution to the building of the National Theatre in Prague, the editor Otakar Novotný, himself an architect and student of Kotěra, claimed that the Brno theatre promised to be one of the few examples of Czech monumental architecture. Yet there was not enough will in Brno to agree on even the membership of the jury for the architectural competition, with some arguing that the committee should not include any foreign authorities, and therefore the project failed to "break through the divinely naïve serenity of Moravian artistic production."[157] Novotný most probably saw this serenity as identical with a rather quiet artistic life in the Moravian city.

Such comments, even though pronounced in the capital with a rather patronising attitude towards the provinces, hinted at an important fact. Namely, many intellectuals in Prague believed that in terms of the rise of national awareness that often took place in important national institutions, Brno and Moravia were lagging behind the Bohemian capital despite the appearance of new networks across the cultural and political field. It was not until 1918 and the invention of a Czechoslovak nation, which will be the subject of Chapter 4, that Czech (or rather Czechoslovak) identity was more firmly established in Brno.

Conclusion

In 1913, Karel Čapek, a writer, journalist, playwright, and an influential commentator on the Czech and international art world, published a short essay in which he summarised his view of what constituted national art, a topic that he identified as a constant issue for debate in the Czech context.[158] For him, there were two most common views of what national art represented: art that was related to national history, that is, historic subjects in painting and historic architectonic styles. The other one was embedded in the belief that nationality is preserved in the traditions and creativity of Czech peasants. Disagreeing with both positions, Čapek called for Czech national art to connect with the national spirit. The spirit of the nation and its art, in his view, were constantly developing towards something new. He believed that the national spirit should be continuously aware of progress in Europe and participate in it, yet artists should not passively adopt foreign stimuli. Art, according to Čapek, should be individual, authentic, and original.[159]

Čapek's preoccupations with the nature of national and modern art were in many ways typical of the concerns art writers had before WWI. The discussions about individuality, authenticity, and originality show how Czech writers understood modern Czech art and its position in the forming Czech nation at this time. Many fought against the conviction that there was an opposition between modern (i.e. international)

art and national art. Yet, the question remained how Czech art could become modern and international while retaining its originality and authenticity, let alone its national specificity.

There were many routes through which the new art was formed, and many agents that helped to facilitate the negotiation between being modern and being national. Two of them stand out: the proliferation of exhibitions – especially in Prague – and the rise of art criticism and its presence in major journals and dailies. One thing they had in common was an appeal to a wider, non-specialist audience; one could say the nation. Exhibitions, which placed alongside artists from Bohemia and those from abroad, as well as individual shows including those of Rodin, Munch, and Costenoble, created an important dialogue between Czech and international art. These encounters served as proof to many art writers that Czech art needed to open up to external influences in order to become truly modern.

I also tried to show that the widespread, lasting, and persistent concern with the idea of national art in the face of modernism was motivated by the political environment in which Czech modern art and its narratives were formulated. Czech nationalists in the Czech lands mobilised national consciousness for the purposes of political emancipation through which they gradually gained more rights within the Habsburg Monarchy – especially in relation to Bohemian Germans. Yet it was not only the ardent nationalists who actively applied the concept of national art. Driven less by ethnic divides, a new generation of art critics, including Čapek, Šalda, Jiránek, and others modernised the nationalist discourse of art writing. They were motivated by a desire to create a sense of authentic, historic, and simultaneously modern Czech culture in art writing which fitted the discourse of the national emancipation of a modern nation. This chapter therefore showed that being modern, many commentators across the generations believed, did not exclude being national. They accepted almost without doubt that there indeed was Czech *national* art which could become *modern* Czech national art.

Notes

1 Miloš Jiránek, "O českém malířství moderním," *Volné směry* 13 (1909): 263.
2 Jiránek, "O českém malířství," 263.
3 Jiránek, "O českém malířství," 204 and 207.
4 Tomáš Winter, *Miloš Jiránek. Zápas o moderní malbu 1875–1911* (Cheb and Prague: Galerie výtvarného umění and Arbor vitae, 2012).
5 Jiránek, "O českém malířství," 258.
6 Jiránek, "O českém malířství," 199.
7 Miroslav Lamač, *Osma a Skupina vytvarnych umělců 1907–1917* (Prague: Odeon, 1988); Marek Lašťovka et al., *Pražské spolky: soupis pražských spolků na základě úředních evidencí z let 1895–1990* (Prague: Scriptorium, 1998), 173–212.
8 Tomáš Vlček, "Malířství, kresba a grafika generace devadesátých let," in *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění IV, 1939–1958*, ed. Rostislav Švácha and Marie Platovská (Prague: Academia, 2005), 24.
9 Roman Prahl, "Hagenbund a Mánes: mezi Vídní a Prahou," *Umění* XLV (1997): 445–460.
10 Roman Prahl and Lenka Bydžovská, *Volné směry: časopis secese a moderny* (Prague: Torst, 1993), 26–27.
11 Karel Čapek's letter to S. K Neumann, quoted in Alessandro Catalano, "'Zrovna teď je chvíle, kdy by bylo na místě udělat prudký vír.' Nástup mladé umělecké generace a hledání nového umění v české předválečné kultuře," in *Almanach na rok 1914. Mezi modernou a avantgardou*, ed. Erik Gilk (Prague: Akropolis, 2016), 15; cf. also Vojtěch Lahoda

"Malířství v Čechách 1907–1917. Osma, Skupina výtvarných umělců a jejich generační druhové," in *Dějiny českého vytvarného umění IV. 1880–1938*, ed. Vojtěch Lahoda (Prague: Academia, 1998), 233–293.

12 Naomi Hume, "Context and Controversy around Prague's *Umělecký měsíčník*, 1911–1914," *Centropa* 10, no. 3 (2010): 204–220; Nicholas Sawicki, "The View From Prague: *Moderní revue* (1894–1925); *Volné směry* (1896–1949); *Umělecký měsíčník* (1911–1914); *Revoluční sborník Devětsil* (1922); *Život* (1922); *Disk* (1923–5); *Pásmo* (1924–6); and *ReD* (1927–1931)," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, Vol. 3, Europe 1880–1940*, eds. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1074–1098.

13 "Dějiny Národopisné výstavy českoslovanské," *Národopisná výstava českoslovanská v Praze, 1895,* ed. E. Kovář et al. (Prague: J. Otto, 1895), 532.

14 "Manifest české moderny," *Rozhledy*, no. 1 (1896): 361–363, reprinted in "Manifest české moderny," in František Buriánek, ed., *Čítanka českého myšlení o literatuře* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1976).

15 "Manifest," *Rozhledy*, 361.

16 "Rozhledy časopisecké," *Naše doba* 4 (1897): 553–555.

17 "Manifest," 363.

18 "Manifest," 363.

19 "Manifest," 363.

20 "Manifest," 362.

21 "Manifest," 361.

22 The Catholic priest Karel Dostál Lutinov (1871–1923) was the editor in chief of *Nový život*. Other key members included the priest Ludvík Sigismund Bouška (1867–1942), the painter Felix Jenewein and the sculptor František Bílek. Artists of the Sdružení výtvarných umělců moravských (The Association of Moravian Visual Artists) founded in 1907, which is discussed in the following chapter, worked closely with the Catholic modernists.

23 Fr. H-ek (František Holeček), "K prohlášení České moderny," *Nový život* 1, no. 1 (1896): 20.

24 Fr. H-ek, "K prohlášení České moderny," 20.

25 "Několik slov úvodem," *Nový život* 1, no. 1 (1896): 2.

26 František Holeček, "K prohlášení České moderny," *Nový život* 1 (1896): 21.

27 "Několik slov," 2.

28 Cf. Martin C. Putna, *Česká katolická literatura v evropském kontextu 1848–1918* (Prague: Torst, 1998).

29 Aleš Filip and Roman Musil, "Katolická moderna a výtvarné umění," in *Zajatci hvězd a snů. Katolická moderna a její časopis Nový život (1896– 1907)*, eds. Roman Musil and Aleš Filip (Prague: Argo and Moravská galerie, Praha and Brno, 2000), 273; cf. a review of a fictitious monograph of Josef Mánes, Sigismund Bouška, "Velké kritické dílo o Josefu Mánesovi," *Nový život* 1 (1896): 13–14; Sigismund Bouška, "Mikuláš Aleš," *Nový život* 1 (1896): 85–86.

30 Arnošt Procházka, "Glosa k České moderně," *Moderní revue* 3 (1895–1896): 25–26.

31 Procházka, "Glosa," 2.

32 Nicholas Sawicki, "The View from Prague: Moderní revue (1894–1925)," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, vol. 3 (Europe 1880–1940), eds. Peter Brooker et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1076–1079. Here are also references to further sources on *Moderní revue*.

33 Arnošt Procházka, "Doslov," in *Prostibolo duše*, ed. Karel Hlaváček (Prague: Moderní revue, 1897), 57–70; Otto M. Urban, "Embers of Grief," in *Mysterious Distances. Symbolism and Art in the Bohemian Lands, 1880–1914*, ed. Otto M. Urban (Prague: Arbor vitae, 2015), 134.

34 Otto M. Urban, ed., *Moderní revue. 1894–1925* (Prague: Torst, 1995), 34–35.

35 Petr Wittlich, "August Rodin et la modernité tchèque," *Inspirations françaises recueil d'interventions portant sur l'histoire de l'art: journées académiques franco-tchèques, tenues dans le cadre de la Saison tchèque en France les 7–8 novembre 2002 à Paris: Université de la Sorbonne établissements de l'école normale supérieure*, vol. I (Prague: Faculté des Lettres à l'Université Charles de Prague, 2006), 117–138.

36   Martina Pachmanová, "Slyšet šepot duše v dunění moderního pokroku. K počátkům české ženské umělecké kritiky," in *Artemis a Dr. Faust. Ženy v českých a slovenských dějinách umění*, eds. Milena Bartlová and Martina Pachmanová (Prague: Academia, 2008), 40 and 45.

37   An example is an ethnographic study published in 1913, Jaroslav Vlach, *Žena ve zvycích a mravech národů* (Prague: I. L. Kober, 1913); see also Martina Pachmanová, *Zrození umělkyně z pěny limonády. Genderové kontexty české moderní teorie a kritiky umění* (Prague: VŠUP, 2013), 30.

38   František Xaver Šalda, "Nová krása – její genese a charakter," in *Boje o zítřek: meditace a rapsodie* (Prague: Volné směry, 1905), 84–110.

39   Šalda, "Nová krása," 110. Martina Pachmanová, "Ženské práce v mužném věku. Ornament, zločin a nemoc intimity," in *Neznámá území ceského moderního umení: Pod lupou gender* (Prague: Argo, 2004), 29.

40   Pachmanová, *Zrození umělkyně,* 32.

41   A good overview of the Czech women's movement is provided in Katherine David, "Czech Feminists and Nationalism in the Late Habsburg Monarchy: "The First in Austria," *Journal of Women's History* 3, no. 2 (1991): 26–45.

42   Pachmanová, "Slyšet šepot duše," 36.

43   Renáta Tyršová, "K výstavě děl Mánesových," *Osvěta* 11, no. 2 (1881): 161.

44   X (Teréza Nováková), "Práce ženy na Jubilejní výstavě pražské," *Ženský svět* 18 (1908): 240.

45   X (Teréza Nováková), "Práce," 240.

46   X (Teréza Nováková),"Výtvarné umění," *Ženský svět* 16 (1912): 312.

47   Iota X (Teréza Nováková), "Tragedie ženy a jiné obrazy Anny Costenoblové," *Ženský svět* 1–2, no. 1 (1896): 14.

48   Karel Hlaváček, no title, *Moderní revue* V (1897): 79.

49   "Feuilleton," *Národní listy*, Nov 22, 1896, 1; "Výstavy," *Volné směry* 2 (1896/97): 99–100.

50   Karel Hlaváček, no title, *Moderní revue* V (1897): 79.

51   "Anny Consteblové Tragedie ženy," *Volné směry* 1, no. 2 (1896): 99.

52   "No title," *Národní listy,* Nov. 22, 1896, 1.

53   Anonymous, no title, *Zlatá Praha* XIV (1897): 35.

54   Renáta Tyršová, "Rozhledy v umění výtvarném," *Osvěta* 27, no. 1 (1897): 69.

55   Alexandre Arsene, *Exposition de 1900: L'Oeuvre de Rodin* (Paris: Societe d'Edition artistique, 1900). Anna Masaryková, *Josef Mařatka* (Prague: SNKLHU, 1958): 21–22.

56   Cathleen M. Giustino, "Rodin in Prague. Modern Art, Cultural Diplomacy, and National Display," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 597.

57   Nicholas Sawicki, "Rodin and the Prague Exhibition of 1902. Promoting Modernism and Advancing Reputations," *Cantor Arts Centre Journal* 3 (2002–2003): 186.

58   Jan Rotrekl, "Šlechtický mecenát v 2. polovině 19. století (Šlechta v Krasoumné jednotě a Společnosti vlasteneckých přátel umění)" (Masters Thesis, Jihočeská univerzita, 2007), 29–30.

59   A. M. Rodin, folder "Tchécoslovaquie Prague 'Mánes'" (Expos 1901–1902, 1908 1911 et letters du groupe Mánes), letter from Kotěra and Jiránek to Rodin, January 24, 1902. Quoted in Cathleen M. Giustino, "Rodin in Prague: Modern Prague, Cultural Diplomacy and National Display," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 599.

60   A. M. Rodin, folder "Tchécoslovaquie Prague 'Mánes'" (Expos 1901–1902, 1908 1911 et letters du groupe Mánes), letter from Kotěra and Jiránek to Rodin, January 24, 1902. Quoted in Giustino, "Rodin in Prague," 599.

61   "O výstavě Rodinově," *Zlatá Praha* XIX, no. 22 (March 28, 1902), 264; Karel Bartoloměj Mádl, "Auguste Rodin," *Zlatá Praha* 19, no. 27 (May 5, 1902), 313–314.

62   "Rodin v Praze," *Národní listy* (May 31, 1902), 3.

63   "Rodin v Praze," 3.

64   Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, "Výstava děl sochaře Augusta Rodina v Praze," *Moderní revue* 6 (1902): 477.

65   Sawicki, "Rodin," 194.

66   Nicholas Sawicki, "Between Montparnasse and Prague: Circulating Cubism in Left Bank Paris," in *Foreign Artists and Communities in Modern Paris, 1870–1914. Strangers in Paradise*, eds. Karen L. Carter and Susan Waller (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015).

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68   Camille Mauclair, "Preface," in *Le Paysan Tchèque: Bohême, Moravie, Silésie: Costumes et Broderies*, eds. Renáta Tyršová and Henri Hantich (Paris: Libairie Nilsson and Prague: Librairie F. Topič, 1911); Camille Mauclair, "L'art tchèque," *Le Progres de Lyon* (June 1, 1913).

69   Reviews by, for example, Mádl, "August Rodin," 394. This newspaper as well as *Národní politika* and *Národní listy* published several reports on Rodin's visit.

70   "Rodin v Praze," 3.

71   "Norský malíř Edvard Munch," *Národní politika* (February 4, 1905), 3.

72   "Edvard Munch," *Moravská orlice* (February 12, 1905), 9.

73   František Xaver Šalda, "Násilník snu," *Volné směry* 9 (1905): 103–117.

74   (F. X. Šalda) "Edvard Munch a tzv. česká kritika," *Volné směry* 9, no. 1 (1905): 131–132.

75   Šalda, "Edvard Munch," 131.

76   Šalda, "Edvard Munch," 132.

77   Karel B. Mádl, "Edvard Munch," *Národní listy*, supplement to no. 43 (February 12, 1905), 13.

78   Mádl, "Edvard Munch," 13.

79   Mádl, "Edvard Munch," 13.

80   Karel Bartoloměj Mádl, "Mánesu," *Umění včera a dnes* (Prague: Topič, 1904), 1–10; Karel Bartoloměj Mádl, *Dějiny umění výtvarných* (Prague: Bursík a Kohout, 1905); Karel Bartoloměj Mádl, "Matyáš Rejsek a Beneš z Loun," *Světozor* XV, no. 31–35 (1881): 367–369, 379–380, 391–393, 403–405, 415–418.

81   Mádl, "Matyáš Rejsek," 415.

82   Karel Bartoloměj Mádl, "Dvě výstavy," *Zlatá Praha* (October 25, 1912), 83.

83   Lamač, *Osma a Skupina*, 20.

84   The eight artists were Emil Filla, Antonín Procházka, Bohumil Kubišta, Otokar Kubín, Willy Nowak, Bedřich Feigl, Max Horb, Emil Artur Pittermann (Longen); cf. Nicholas Sawicki, *Na cestě k modernosti: Umělecké sdružení Osma a jeho okruh v letech 1900–1910* (Prague: Charles University, 2014); Lamač, *Osma a Skupina*; Vojtěch Lahoda, "Malířství v Čechách, 1907–1917," 235–293; review of their first exhibition by Max Brod, "Frühling in Prag," *Die Gegenwart* (May 18, 1907), 14.

85   Václav Vilém Štech, "V zamlženém zrcadle," in *Kavárny a spol. Pražské literární kavárny a hospody*, ed. Karl Heinz Jähn (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1990), 55.

86   Karel Čapek, "Ohrožená památka," in *Kavárny a spol.*, 146.

87   Langer, "Arma virumque cano…," in *Kavárny a spol.*, 90.

88   Emil Filla, interview with V. Závada, *Rozpravy Aventina* VII, no. 30 (1932), quoted in Lamač, *Osma a Skupina*, 40.

89   Lamač, *Osma a Skupina*, 41.

90   Emil Filla, "Edvard Munch a naše generace," *O výtvarném umění* (Prague: Karel Brož, 1948), 67.

91   Filla, "Edvard Munch," 71.

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93   Filla, "Edvard Munch," 73.

94   Filla, "Edvard Munch," 75.

95   Filla, "Edvard Munch," 76.

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 99 Neil Stewart, "The Cosmopolitanism of Moderní revue (1894–1925), in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Vol. 3: The Making and Remaking of Literary Institutions*, eds. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishings, 2007), 66.

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101 Prahl and Bydžovská, *Volné směry*, 62.

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106 Meier-Graefe,"Nacionalismus," 67.

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109 František Xaver Šalda, "Problém národnosti v umění," *Volné směry* 8 (1904): 3–11.

110 Šalda, "Problém národnosti." 4.

111 Šalda, "Problém národnosti," 8.

112 Šalda, "Problém národnosti," 5.

113 Šalda, "Problém národnosti," 9.

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156 O. N. (Otakar Novotný), "Soutěž na Národní divadlo v Brně," *Volné směry* 18 (1915): 48.

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158 Karel Čapek, "Otázka národního umění," *Volné směry* 17 (1913):160–163.

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2   The People

When Rodin came to see the Prague exhibition of his work in late May 1902, he was also invited to venture into the "primitive" Slavic outpost of southern and eastern Moravia. The French sculptor was accompanied by Alfons Mucha, who was born in this part of the Czech speaking lands and designed the exhibition poster, and other Czech artists, including Zdenka Braunerová, and several other members of the Mánes Association, such as Stanislav Sucharda, Miloš Jiránek, and Josef Mařatka.[1] When in Moravia, Rodin was shown the gorge of Macocha, north of Brno, and taken to he also visited the exhibition of Moravian and Slovak artists in Hodonín. Rodin was also taken to Joža Uprka's house in the village of Hroznová Lhota and presented with staged displays of local folk culture and arts.[2] His visit was accompanied by the almost permanent presence of "comely" girls dancing and boys in costume singing, traditional folk musicians, and decorated horses, re-enacting the popular annual tradition of the Ride of the Kings – also a subject of a couple of Uprka's paintings at the end of the 19th century [fig. 2.1]. This custom involves a small boy dressed up as a king, riding on a horse through a village in the company of other village boys and girls in traditional costumes.

According to the recollections of Braunerová, who was very close to Rodin, and of Uprka's daughter, Božena, the sculptor was impressed by what he saw, especially the folk costumes, embroidery, pottery, and songs [fig. 2.2]. His stay – following another local tradition – also involved wine tasting and dancing long into the night.[3] The visit to the local exhibition as well as the meeting with Uprka can be seen as significant examples of an encounter between urban modernism and local folk traditions. Importantly, this particular episode was not interpreted as a one-way exchange, because folk art was acknowledged as an important inspiration and artistic source for modern, metropolitan artists. When, for instance, Jan Hudeček, a local geometer, gave Rodin his welcome, he emphasised that after years of following the models of French art, French artists were now coming to see the work of their former students.[4] He was referring to Uprka, who had spent some time working in Paris after his studies at art academies in Prague and Munich. Such recognition of folk art and its ability to inform modern art was, in the eyes of the Czech participants of this episode, a significant step forward in the dialogue between the modern and the traditional in the Czech lands.

From the end of the 19th century, lively discussions on the role of folk (or vernacular) art and design within modernist artistic practice took place between practitioners and theorists, who advocated the use of vernacular art as a source of renewal for modern art. The folk art of the villages and countryside in the Czech-speaking lands of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia was discovered as a source of primitivist innocence, serving as an exotic reference to a reality outside the urban milieu of the artist.

Figure 2.1 Joža Uprka, The Champion on his Horse in the Ride of the Kings Parade, ca. 1892.
Painting. George Drost Collection.

Yet exoticising folk art was only a small aspect of a larger agenda that saw folk art as being closely related to national identity.

The close link of folk art with the concepts of the nation and the people is clear from the linguistic definitions and associations of the basic terminology in the Czech language. The Czech translation of the adjective "folk" is "lidové," as in "lidové umění" – folk art, and it has its roots in the word "lid" – the people, but more specifically, ordinary people, the peasants. "Lidové umění" therefore literally translates as people's art. Yet the term also reflects its attribute of being "lidové," which can be translated into English as folk, vernacular, and popular. Importantly, within the Czech context "lid" (the people) has historically been paralleled with the concept of *nation*, – "národ." Such proximity makes the association between folk and national art even more striking. The translation of "lidové umění" as "folk art" is therefore also close to the German term "Volkskunst," as much as the Czech word "lid" is close in meaning with the German "Volk."[5]

However, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Czech term *lidové umění* (referring to the art of the people from rural areas) began to take on a new meaning when many artists and art historians started to turn their attention to urban popular culture. *Lidové umění* also became the art of the people ("umění lidu") or – in a more political sense – proletarian art. This was a specific type of primitive art from the towns and cities. As I will discuss here and in the next chapter, the popular art of amateurs was favoured by the avant-gardes because, in contrast to the traditionally conceived folk art of the rural areas, it was not appropriated by academicism, nationalism, or historicism. For all these associations, the concept of folk art in its general sense became a contested, politicised, yet unavoidable concept, linked to the construction and

Figure 2.2 Dancers in Hroznová Lhota during Rodin's Visit, 1902. Fotoarchiv Fund, The Museum of Czech Literature, Prague.

advancement or even denial of Czech national identity. Given the proximity between the Czech equivalent of "folk art" and the nation/people, I am using the more neutral term "vernacular art" to refer to the art and craft production and culture from the out-of-town areas. This term should therefore reflect my broader understanding of the phenomenon which is not limited to the romanticised image of the peasantry constructed by the national revival. It is thus the aim of this chapter to examine the artists and art writers who both attempted to position vernacular art as being an important component of modernism, and used it to question the modern Czech identity.

The People as a Subject

Vernacular culture – ranging from architecture and decorative objects to music and tales – had been a popular resource for many national revivalists in Bohemia, and coincided with a wider interest in the topic around Europe during the 19th century.[6] Furthermore, the attention given to vernacular art in the visual arts also came out of a broader movement found in various other art forms. Following the example of the Grimm brothers, who saw folk traditions and language as a common identifier of "Germanness" in the fractured Germany of the first half of the 19th century, Czech

writers and poets started to collect folk tales, poems, and stories in the Czech-speaking regions in an effort to revive national consciousness. Their own prose or poetry was based on folk resources, which they considered to be "a pure folk art untainted by urban and upper-class 'Germanization.'"[7] They therefore saw their work as a kind of national art. Two of the most prominent representatives of this trend were Karel Jaromír Erben (1811–1870), the author of many collections of narrative poems, ballads, and fairy tales such as *Kytice* (The Garland, 1853), and Božena Němcová (1820–1862), the author of the novel *Babička* (The Grandmother, 1855), which celebrated life in the village and its rapidly disappearing rural traditions. Both Němcová and Erben collected fairy tales from villages and remote parts of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia and then reworked them into a literary genre that has been popular with the Czechs ever since.

Following the success of such literature based on folk culture, a similar tendency emerged in music, where compositions drawing on motifs from folk music enjoyed considerable popularity. Well-known examples included the symphonic poem *Má vlast* (My Country, 1878) by Bedřich Smetana, and Antonín Dvořák's (1841–1904) *Slovanské tance* (Slavonic Dances, 1878) or his romantic lyric opera *Rusalka* (1900).[8] Folk motifs continued to inspire composers well into the 20th century. The most prominent of these include Leoš Janáček (1854–1928) and his opera *Jenůfa* (1904), and Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959) who, inspired by Erben's text, composed the ballet *Kytice* in 1937. As the latter commented, "[...] I use Czech folk songs as themes, but more often I create thematic material coloured by the style and spirit of Czech folk idiom."[9] Motifs from folk songs and tales were thus selectively reworked for contemporary audiences and used as a key source of inspiration.

The search for folk motifs in all art forms and their subsequent adaptation for modern audiences therefore became an integral part of the national revival in Bohemia during the 19th century, surviving well into the 20th century. The Czech peasant commonly emerged in the writings, songs, and images of patriotic artists as a romanticised symbol of Czech national identity and the keeper of ancient traditions, and as such became the focus of nationalistic feeling in the arts.[10]

At the end of the 19th century, vernacular culture also became the subject of two large exhibitions held in Prague: the Jubilee Exhibition of 1891, and the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition of 1895. These were not isolated events but part of a wider network of exhibitions proclaiming a visible sense of shared identity. Especially in Central and Eastern Europe, exhibitions of art and industry in regional capitals and towns, including Lviv (Lwów, Lemberg) and Budapest, coincided with a period of increasing national awareness amongst various ethnic groups of the region, which took place against the background of industrial transformation. Hungarians, Romanians, and Bohemian Czechs and Germans all turned to the medium of exhibitions to showcase their technical and industrial advances to themselves and to others.[11]

Members of Czech political and cultural life at the end of the 19th century realised the political, ideological, and cultural potential of exhibitions following the Weltausstellung (World's Fair) in Vienna in 1873, and the 1885 national exhibition in Budapest.[12] The initiators of the Prague exhibitions were members of the Czech Diet and the City Hall, but mostly came from the Prague Chamber of Commerce, which had gained Czech majority in the mid-1880s.[13] These were local industrialists, politicians, and aristocrats such as Bohumil Bondy, the chairman of the Chamber; František Křižík, the inventor of the arc lamp, and the aristocrat Karel Schwarzenberg. Apart from the exhibitions in

the region – Vienna and Budapest – they were to a large extent inspired by the *exposition universelle* in Paris in 1889, which had been visited by a group of 400 Czechs. As a result of this inspirational trip, the Jubilee Exhibition came to have its own version of the Eiffel tower built on a nearby hill, an iron-girder construction on the Petřín hill, as well as an illuminated fountain installed on the exhibition grounds.[14] The first of the two exhibitions, the *Jubilejní zemská výstava* in Czech – also referred to as Allgemeine Landausstellung in German (The Jubilee Exhibition) of 1891 – took place after several gains in recognition for the Czechs. These included the equalisation of the use of the Czech language with German in public administration (1880), and the creation of a Czech-language university due to the separation of the Prague university into Czech- and German-speaking parts in 1882 [fig. 2.3a and 2.3b].

The Jubilee Exhibition commemorated the industrial exhibition that took place in the Clementinum in 1791 at the occasion of the coronation of Leopold II as king of Bohemia (Leopold ruled as Holy Roman Emperor from 1790 to 1792). The 1891 exhibition in the Royal Game Preserve involved the construction of a number of pavilions, commissions of artworks, and cultural events, which were to display the state of industry, agriculture, and culture in Bohemia and Moravia. It presented various aspects of the industries and economy, alongside examples of high art and folk culture, in a number of pavilions including the Palace of Industries, the pavilions of the paper industries, sugar refineries, fishing, tourism, and the pavilions of various aristocratic families.

Even though the primary aims of the exhibition were economic and educational, the final concept and content of the exhibition were largely influenced by contemporary ideological and political concerns, a common feature of large trade fairs and exhibitions of the time.[15] The event was originally intended to bring together *all* of the ethnic groups living in the Czech lands of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. But, as happened so often at this time, the delicate politics of nationalism surfaced in many organisational

Figure 2.3a Ideal View of the Exhibition Grounds, The Jubilee Exhibition of 1891. From
Jubilejní výstava zemská Království českého v Praze 1891 (Prague: F. Šimáček,
1894). Museum of Czech Literature, Prague.

Figure 2.3b The Czech Village House. The Jubilee Exhibition of 1891. From *Jubilejní výstava zemská Království českého v Praze 1891* (Prague: F. Šimáček, 1894). Museum of Czech Literature, Prague.

issues. From the onset, the Czech and German initiators quarrelled over the division of duties, as well as the dates of the exhibition and its financial support. Finally, the failed Badeni compromise of 1890, in which the Viennese government attempted to find a solution to the increasing national conflict in Bohemia, which I will discuss in more detail shortly, led to a polarisation of the two communities. As a result, in November 1890, the German members of the exhibition committee refused to participate in the joint venture – something that was welcomed by the Czech organisers. The six-month-long event now became a showcase of Czech arts, industries, and national culture, and as a result, it became important for the nation's self-awareness.[16]

The promotion of and praise for what was seen as authentic Czech culture was evident throughout the exhibition grounds, and was most prominent in the display of vernacular art and culture in the Česká chalupa (Czech village house). This exhibit consisted of a single rural house designed by the contemporary architect, Antonín Wiehl, who took inspiration from village architecture of north-eastern Bohemia. It was therefore modified to serve as a building for the display of various objects, including folk costumes; objects of everyday and festive use, and photographs of vernacular architecture. As was becoming common for the Czech study of rural cultures of the time, the Czech Village House presented the country folk as curious, bizarre, and primitive while retaining the original forms of Czech cultural and artistic life. The early Czech ethnographers such as Čeněk Zíbrt (1864–1932) and Emanuel Kovář (1861–1898) had for some time promoted romanticised research into vernacular culture, which they had identified with national heritage. They studied the "national" culture of the countryside with its regional diversity and genuine Czech character, and intended to to show its richness, the maturity of the nation in the process of its emancipation, as well as the ability of its vernacular culture to compete with (or even supersede) Germanic culture, and to demonstrate its genuine Czech character.

The Czech village house closely followed this trend. In a way that was similar to other ethnographic and colonial exhibits abroad, it was designed as a fusion and imitation of real village buildings, and took its inspiration from the architecture found in various locations across Bohemia and Moravia. It was also equipped with mannequins dressed up in costumes representing the diverse types of people who came from the Czech lands, and attempted to portray their facial features, body postures, and "peculiar costumes."[17] Viewed by predominantly urban middle class visitors and placed next to industrial products and high art, the customs and traditions on display had been taken out of their natural context and brought into the modern urban setting of the Jubilee Exhibition grounds. The peasants were presented as bearers of authentic national heritage, but, at the same time, their visual and material culture was presented as archaic and primitive in comparison with the modernity of their surroundings.

Such exhibitions can therefore be understood as ideological projections, in which the local bourgeoisie viewed the peasant and vernacular art as remnants of its own past. At the same time, the belief in their autochthonous and somewhat primitive character created a juxtaposition with the urban middle-class culture. While the Czechs did not possess any colonies, they could nevertheless find their own exotic "other," or – as the art historian Piotr Piotrowski has put it – "a close other" in these remote regions of the countryside.[18] At the same time, it was precisely in this "other" that they could identify a preserved Czech national style, as well as the remnants of a romanticised primitive way of life. For Czech urban nationalists in Prague, like for many other exhibitors at ethnographic displays around Europe, "progress and civilisation were the key concepts behind the large-scale representation of middle-class Selves and savage Others."[19] However, because of the key position that peasants had held during the process of Czech nation-building as a prototype of Czechness, the discourse of the exotic, which is often applied to the treatment of allegedly inferior ethnic groups at exhibitions elsewhere around the world, is more difficult to use in the Czech (Moravian and Slovak) context.[20] There indeed was an element of an evolutionary view of the place of the peasant in Czech society – he or she was seen as uneducated and unspoilt by high culture. Yet from the second half of the 19th century onwards, Czech literature, the visual arts, as well as early ethnography all often portrayed the local peasant as a prototypical Czech, who typified a distinctive character of the Czech nation.[21] Here, Czech peasants were plain talking, skilled, and naturally wise men or women. In the mind of the contemporary revivalists, the peasants represented the "core of the nation"[22] and "preserved original national culture."[23]

The Czech Village House exhibit gave rise to a society, or circle of the same name under the chairmanship of Alois Jirásek, a prominent writer of historical novels, and with membership consisting of the initiators of the Jubilee exhibition, including Jan Koula, Čeněk Zíbrt, and Renáta Tyršová. They also started publishing *Český lid* (Czech people), a journal on "the study of the Czech people in Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia," focusing on a specific ethnic group of the Czechs across a territory wider than the Czech lands. More formal ethnography, or "nation-studies" as the name of the field translates from the Czech "národopis," therefore experienced a boom after the exhibition. The Czech Ethnographic Society was founded in 1893 with the aim to organise a purely ethnographic exhibition, establish a museum for objects from the exhibition, and start publishing a journal and an ethnographic encyclopaedia.

This institutionalisation of "nation-studies" was preceded by amateur and professional interest in the life of the peasant, dating back to the mid-19th century.

An important event was the Viennese Weltausstellung of 1873, which included ethnographic sections showcasing Austro-Hungarian folk culture alongside those from further afield, including Japanese and Native American cultures.[24] The first significant studies of the vernacular culture in the Czech lands were written by Tyršová, who was primarily interested in folk costume, lace, and textiles. She is also seen as a promoter of the autochthonous ("sváz") movement, which adopted folk motives for contemporary fashion and applied arts.[25]

"Czechoslavic" Life on Display

Národopisná výstava českoslovanská (The Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition) of 1895 took place in Prague, and once again displayed peasants as a specific stratum of the nation that preserved the original Czech traditions and heritage [fig. 2.4a and 2.4b]. It introduced various regional cultures of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, and presented folk art as a static display in the cabinets of the Ethnographic Palace, as well as a series of living exhibits in the Exhibition Village. The main aim of the Ethnographic Exhibition – according to the organisers, who included the director of the National Theatre, František Adolf Šubert (also spelt Schubert, 1849–1915); representatives of the municipality, bourgeoisie, and nobility, such as Vladimír, Count Lažanský, president of the venture; the Mayor of Prague, Čeněk Gregor, in the role of protector of the Exhibition; and various other professors of aesthetics, ethnography, and anthropology, the main aim of the Ethnographic Exhibition was to explore "the entire original life of the Czech people and preserve its image," to show the genuine and historical national culture independent of German influences, and educate

Figure 2.4a Vojtěch Hynais, The Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition of 1895. Poster. Author's collection.

Figure 2.4b   Re-enactment of Field Work and Dances. The Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition
of 1895. From Emanuel Kovář, et al., *Národopisná výstava českoslovanská v Praze,
1895* (Prague: J. Otto, 1895). Museum of Czech Literature, Prague.

the Czechs and the rest of the "world about the nation's originality, character and
strengths."[26] Such a nationalistically constructed idea of culture consisted of displays
of Czech music, literature, theatre, religion, and education, as well as the legal system,
industry, and trade in more than twenty pavilions. All of these were meant to sym-
bolise Czech achievements and self-sufficiency in staging such an event without the
financial support of the central Austrian authorities.

   Judging from the complimentary comments in both national and international press,
for instance, in the Polish *Czasopismo Akademicke* (The Academic Journal), *Gazeta
Lwowska* (The Lviv Gazette) or *Gazeta Narodowa* (The National Gazette) or the Austrian
Mitteilungen der Antropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien (Reports of the Anthropological
Society in Vienna), the 1895 exhibition was a success, and served as a significant inspira-
tion for other Slavic and non-Slavic ethnic groups of Central Europe who were undergoing
a renaissance of their own national consciousness' at the time.[27] The 1895 exhibition was
also visited by many foreign journalists and scholars from other Slavic groups, including
Poles, Serbs, Slovenes, Bulgarians, and Sorbs, as the event was promoted by the Czechs as
pointing out similarities and overlaps between the different Slavic cultures. However, they
did not intend to recreate the by now obsolete idea of Pan-Slavism that was being pro-
moted around the middle of the century. The fear of the possible subordination of smaller
ethnic groups to a more powerful entity (mainly Russia) led to the attempt to establish
closer relations among the Slavic peoples *within* the empire. The Slavic cooperation also
had a political equivalent in the Iron Ring cabinet of Count Taaffe (1879–1883) who
relied on the support of representatives from Slavic groups in Austria-Hungary.[28] Because
of this, Czech members of the diet grew stronger against the German liberals in the parlia-
ment and negotiated a number of concessions including the language ordinances of 1880
and the creation of a Czech section of the university in Prague.

The Slavic ideology was also reflected in the Exhibition's title; the adjective "Czechoslavic" (as opposed to the later 'Czechoslovak') was created to proclaim the unity of all Czech and Slavic inhabitants in opposition to the term *Deutschböhmen* in the region.[29] As a Czechoslavic event, the Exhibition was to serve as "a demonstration of the entire Czechoslavic nation, without differences […] not considering the dividing regional frontiers and not considering the Germans."[30] German Bohemian groups, excluded from the exhibitions of 1891 and 1895, soon started organising their own events in the north and north-west regions of Bohemia, in cities with German majorities, such as Ústí nad Labem (Aussig), Teplice (Teplitz), and Liberec (Reichenberg).[31] Following the success of the exhibitions in Prague, and in the wake of political events in Austria and Bohemia in the late 19th century, German cultural and political nationalism became much more prominent in the exhibitions organised by German councils, entrepreneurs, and interest groups. The Badeni crisis of 1897, named after the Austrian Prime Minister Count Kasimir Felix Badeni, was centred on the use of both Czech and German as administrative languages in Bohemia. Badeni proposed language ordinances that would extend the use of the Czech language in public institutions across the Czech lands. The decrees met with German obstructions of the Reichsrat as well as with demonstrations across the Austrian part of the monarchy.[32] One of the consequences was also the radicalisation of the political demands of both ethnicities. From the mid-19th century onwards, many Germans started leaving Prague, which had become a predominantly Czech city as well as a city of liberal German politicians, and moved to the north, creating a more radical environment for the political and national claims of Germans in Bohemia.

The Czech-German political disputes at the end of the 19th century were felt not only in the exhibitions, but also as is discussed here, in many cultural spheres. They were also one of the reasons why folk culture became so central for Czech authors, musicians, and artists who were looking to strengthen historic, authentically Czech and Slavic traditions.

Moravian Barbizon

The Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition and its success and aftermath in terms of the establishment of regional ethnographic museums and collections, together with the more global revival of arts, crafts, and traditional skills in fine art, all contributed to the rise of interest in the local vernacular culture. In the Czech-speaking lands, the peasant, understood in the romanticised and nationalised way, as being from the strata of Czech society that retained its allegedly authentic national heritage, traditions, and culture, became a popular subject in the work of a number of other artists and designers, well into the 20th century. Such an approach was prominent in the work of the 19th century painters Aleš and Mánes, mentioned in the previous chapter, who were based and schooled in Prague and only ventured to the outer regions to look for inspiration. In contrast, the turn of the century and the beginning of the new one saw an increase in the number of artists based in the rural areas, in closer proximity to the allegedly unspoilt culture of the peasants.

Especially in Moravia, there were many locations with concerted attempts to mobilise national consciousness and develop an artistic scene that would contribute to creating the nationalised landscape of modern Czech art. For instance, the town of Luhačovice in eastern Moravia grew into a popular tourist retreat (Luhačovice will be mentioned in detail shortly, in relation to local architecture). Here, Dušan Jurkovič

built a number of villas, hotels, and other structures using a combination of Arts and Crafts with vernacular details to accommodate Czech-speaking patriots. Still, it was the town of Hodonín, sitting on the southern border between Moravia (part of Austria), and Upper Hungary (what is now Slovakia), in the region called Slovácko, often translated as "Moravian Slovakia," which stood out as a regional artistic centre at the beginning of the 20th century. Despite its large German population of around 60% out of its 110,000 inhabitants at the end of the 19th century, attempts to promote Slavic distinctiveness have had a long tradition here.[33] Rather than either Czech or Slovak, the identity that was encouraged here was non-German and non-Hungarian. This was mostly related to the distinctive ethnography of this region, based on a dialect that was a combination of Slovak and Old Czech. Several exhibitions which were organised in the town at the end of the century supported these attempts; the most predominant of these being the 1892 Exhibition of Art, Industry, and Ethnography, and the 1902 Slovak Art Exhibition.[34] Five years later, a group of artists that left the Brno-based Friends of the Arts Club appeared in an exhibition which initiated the foundation of Sdružení výtvarných umělců moravských (the Association of Moravian Visual Artists) with local members, but also with those living in Prague or abroad [fig. 2.5].

The 1902 exhibition was probably the most influential, both locally and nationally. It prominently featured the work of the painter Joža Uprka, whose paintings

Figure 2.5 Joža Uprka, The Association of Moravian Visual Artists Exhibition, 1913. Poster. George Drost Collection.

depicted scenes of peasant life (Uprka will be discussed in more detail shortly). Apart from Uprka and his circle, a number of other local artists featured in the 1902 exhibition, showing their work amongst architectural designs and anonymous folk artefacts. The exhibition fully embraced the Moravian Slovak identity: "This year's artistic exhibition, a Slovak [meaning Moravian Slovak] exhibition, will certainly bring positive consequences for the spiritual life of the Moravian and Hungarian Slovakia."[35]

Importantly, the exhibition was noticed outside of the region and related to a nationwide rise of artistic and political activism in the provinces. Reports appeared in various publications, including the Prague-based newspapers and the Viennese *Das Vaterland*.[36] The author admitted that, while these local artists had lacked artistic education for a long time, the fact that their work had now started to appear on important markets signalled that they were deserving of attention. He expressed his belief that "the true artistry cannot be limited by the narrow constraints of nationalism" and called the exhibition the beginning of the heyday of Slovak art.[37]

The daily *Moravská orlice* (the Moravian Eagle), published in Brno, also described the importance of such a regional exhibition: "this undoubtedly interesting corner of our homeland, this poor region, neglected economically and politically, comes in front of the public with an independent, original exhibition."[38] The paper documented the exhibition's success by reporting on the various visits from local schools and groups of people from Brno, Vienna, as well as from several other towns along the railway line (fortunately, Hodonín was on an important train route). Indeed, the organisers' greatest achievement must have been the securing of a visit by Auguste Rodin.

Moravská orlice also highlighted the political importance of the exhibition. As a regional Czech town with a German council, the need to awaken nationalist feeling was ever more pressing, according to the paper.[39] It suggested that Hodonín could soon become a centre of a nationalistic fight for the wider region, which it referred to as Slovakia. Exhibitions such as this could help "awake interest of the countryside in Hodonín, [...] and in closer alliance between the countryside and the town."[40] Thus, at least at the beginning of the century, Hodonín provided an alternative location for a Czech/Slovak cultural and national way of life, away from the metropolitan competitions in Brno and Prague, where a distinctive, modern regional and cultural identity was formed and translated into art production.

The revival prompted artists to settle in regional centres or to visit them regularly in order to explore and depict rural culture, and many of them provide a good example of how folk art was promoted and understood at a regional level – except with national, or even international ambitions. In 1907 a group of artists comprising Joža Uprka, his brother, the sculptor Franta Uprka (1868–1929), Zdenka Braunerová, the ethnographer Josef Klvaňa, as well as the dramatists Vilém and Alois Mrštík (1863–1912, 1861–1925) and a number of others founded the Association of Moravian Visual Artists in Hodonín. In the same year, the members proclaimed that they wanted "to live from our art, to work with our themes, to avoid all harmful alien influences – retain, preserve and nourish the principle of nationality in art."[41] Vilém Mrštík was an especially ardent defender of the idea of the untainted nature and beauty of Moravian peasant art which he voiced in his dramas, novels, newspaper articles, and art criticism. He published articles in various literary and cultural magazines and in newspapers like *Národní listy*, *Rozhledy*, *Zlatá Praha*, *Česká revue* and *Lumír*, several short texts with his impressions and views of the Moravian village life were published in

Kniha cest (A Book of Travels) in 1905. His most famous drama, *Maryša* (1894), was set in a village and involved detailed descriptions of folk costumes; it included folk songs, and made use of local dialects. Mrštík believed Moravian peasant culture was capable of reviving the art of the entire Czech nation, and he argued that artists should try to "employ various means to increase the artistic quality and cultivate nationality in art, and art in nationality."[42]

Despite their claims about the need to combat foreign influences, the artists associated with the Moravian Artists association were well aware of international contexts and the work of artists outside of Moravia and Bohemia. Joža Uprka, whose studio and house were on the itinerary of Rodin's visit, is perhaps the most prominent example of this effort to combine attention to regional folk culture with international modernism.[43] Born in the village of Kněždub in south-east Moravia, he studied at the art academies in Prague and Munich and exhibited his work in solo exhibitions in Vienna (1897) and Prague (1904), at the Venice Biennale (1907), and at the Parisian Salon in 1894, where he was awarded *mention honourable* (an honourable mention) for the painting entitled *Pouť u svatého Antonínka* (The Pilgrimage to St. Anthony). The painting from 1893 depicts a field full of young women and girls in festive dresses, resting on their way to a pilgrim church. It is executed in vivid, contrasting colours of green, red, and white; its treatment of light, as well as the patchy quality of its colour, reveals Uprka's debt to Impressionism, which he encountered in Paris.

In his sympathy with peasant culture, Uprka differed from many other Czech artists who were based in towns and cities and treated the countryside as a faraway, nonetheless intriguing region. The occasional venture into the country by painters from Prague, such as Jiránek and Braunerová, continued the practice started (to some extent) by Mánes and Aleš. In this regard, folk art – as well as the work of Mánes and Aleš – had a profound impact on the painter František Kupka. Similarly to Aleš, he kept diaries with his writings and drawings of folk costumes and ornaments from southern Bohemia in his early youth.[44] Combined with his later study of colour and ornament at a craft school in eastern Bohemia, this provided him with an important input for his later work.[45]

Such approach to folk art, however, seemed to be more the observations of outsiders in comparison with the studies of Uprka and his brother Franta, or with other Moravian and Slovak artists from and around Hodonín. They saw themselves as not just documenting or depicting folk life and traditions in their art, but preserving them. Born and settled in a village, Joža Uprka combined an academic approach to his subjects with modernist composition; an in-situ experience of rural life and a descriptive attention to detail. Moreover, this descriptiveness, which was mainly prominent in his late work, brought his paintings of various female headwear and scarfs or peasant fur coats into the service of ethnography.[46]

In Bohemia at least, the reception of Joža Uprka's work during his own time was mixed. Nevertheless, his paintings, with their emphasis on atmosphere, the use of vivid colours (especially their strong tonal contrast between red and white) and linear treatment of their subjects, were well received abroad as a form of exoticism and orientalism. According to Elizabeth Clegg, they were "painted in the knowledge that they would be 'consumed' […] by a refined Viennese public whose pleasure in them was superficial in the extreme."[47] His works also sold well in Prague, thanks in part to Braunerová's support, with Uprka's publicity and Braunerová's connections.[48]

Indeed, in contrast to, for example, Courbet's and Millet's works, most of Uprka's paintings provided little social commentary or criticism, because the Czech painter depicted an idealised village life devoid of any social or economic hardship. Uprka's figures were often clad in occasional, festive costumes, and were depicted during special events such as weddings, processions, and church services. As such the peasants were more participants in staged pageants than examples of laborious everyday life in the countryside. Only occasionally did Uprka depict peasants at work in the field in his paintings and sketches, when he tried to convey a message similar to French Realism, with which he was familiar from his trip to Paris. Although Uprka was once called "our Czech Millet," he nonetheless retained something of an apolitically pictorial and descriptive approach rather than anything approaching critical observation.[49] Contemporary observers soon noticed that, where Millet seemed pessimistic, serious and philosophical, Uprka was optimistic, upbeat, and spontaneous.[50]

Despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of a critical approach to village reality, Uprka, who has often been marketed as a folk painter, became a successful artist who was aware of contemporary artistic trends and turned them into his own localised visual language.[51] His search for the rural idyll was part of a more general tendency to find inspiration in local, allegedly authentic culture, in terms of his techniques, materials, and colours, and this can be traced in the work of a number of other artists or artists' colonies across Europe. Yet, whereas Uprka was born and lived most of his life in a Moravian village, artists in colonies at, for example, Worpswede in Germany, Collioure in France, or Skagen in Denmark, as well as individuals such as Gauguin in Brittany, Kandinsky in Old Russia, or the aforementioned Millet in Barbizon all sought to escape the city, attracted by local folklore and landscape.[52] There are also visible parallels between Uprka's work and the staged compositions of processions, prototypical peasants, and idyllic views of the countryside of for instance the English painter George Clausen (1852–1944), and the Germans Leopold Graf von Kalckreuth (1855–1928) and Carl Bantzer (1857–1941). Clausen, who was later an official British war artist during WWI, often depicted an Impressionist rendition of peasant life. Von Kalckreuth focussed on fishermen and rural scenes from Germany and Silesia, while Bantzer's subjects came mostly from rural churches and village celebrations. Similarly, the rural idylls of another French painter, Jules Breton (1827–1906), were fairly known in the Czech lands at the end of the 19th century – his depictions of peasant festivals or "poetic" work in the field were occasionally reproduced in Czech newspapers and magazines.[53] Such images evoked the traditional world order, "untainted by modern class divisions and alienated labour relations."[54]

For Uprka, though, the revival of folk traditions, including their visual form, was also an instance of deliberate myth-making. Czech national revivalists saw vernacular culture as the carrier of residual knowledge of the past that was also, crucially, needed for the present and future life of the nation.[55] This was part of a broader tendency as many others across Central Europe, for instance in the Hungarian Nagybánya or the Polish Zakopane, the latter of which will be discussed shortly, saw folk traditions as having the potential to mobilise social change or enhance national awareness. In the national revival movements of the 19th century, national traditions became capable of creating a sense of unity and historic connectedness with a certain group of people by reminding them of their common, ancient (even if it was sometimes invented) past, in this case embedded in the peasantry.

Understanding and Interpreting the Vernacular

In Bohemia, the interest in local vernacular culture and its allegedly primitive – that is to say, "unspoilt" – character had already been evident in the work of many artists and designers (as well as in the theoretical writing of art critics) for some time. Artistic examples date back to the early 19th century and were linked to the growing popularity of excursions to the countryside, as well as the writings by Erben and Němcová. The work of artists, most prominently the aforementioned painters Mánes and Aleš, was usually embedded in sentimental and romantic ideas about the peasant art and culture of Bohemia, Moravia, and, to a lesser extent, what is now Slovakia.

Mánes's studies of folk costumes and his illustrations of Czech songs, or his decorations of the astronomical clock on the Old Town Hall in Prague, in many ways respond to the romantic mood of the 19th century Czech national revival, which identified the village with the nation's history and traditions. The clock of 1865, for instance, consists of twelve circular allegorical depictions of seasonal work and life in the countryside, and the twelve different signs of the zodiac executed against a golden background. Similarly, the peasants ploughing the fields in the February medallion, or the depiction of them collecting grapes in the October medallion, represented a generic image of villagers at work in clothes that were regionally undistinguishable.[56] They were depicted in this way to fit the decorative purpose of the clock; such stylisation and sentimentality was typical of many of Mánes's other works from mid-19th century onwards. In his illustrations, Mánes often depicted contented peasants going about their lives in various domestic situations or else working in the field, with the emphasis on black outlines and ornaments serving as decorative additions.

Many Czech art historians of the 19th and 20th centuries saw the subject matter of both Mánes and Aleš, as being the key to their "greatness and Czechness" as painters.[57] They identified their ability to capture the true character of the "Czech soul" through their depictions of the peasant and his or her local countryside.[58] According to Miroslav Tyrš, one of the first Czech art historians and husband of Renáta Tyršová (as discussed in Chapter 1), Mánes preferred to depict the inhabitants of the eastern parts of the Czech-speaking lands (and this included Slovakia at the time), because they "retained greater purity" than those in the Western regions.[59] The allegedly smoother facial features of the Moravians and Slovaks as well as "greater tenderness and softness" of the former, he argued, were suitable for Mánes's idealisation and lyrical epical style.[60] Alongside the physical features, such emphasis on softness and tenderness could be related to a broader understanding of what was seen as typical for the Slavs. Johann Gottfried von Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte* (Ideas on the Philosophy of History) from the end of the 18th century described the characteristic features of different nations, among them the Slavs and the Germans, which had a crucial impact not only on the writers, ethnographers, and historians of the Czech national revival, but their influence also projected into the 20th century.[61]

For Herder, the Slavs were a people with a love for agriculture, domestic arts, commerce, and music, who "were never an enterprising people of warriors or adventurers like the Germans […]. They were charitable, hospitable to excess, lovers of free country ways, yet submissive and obedient, averse to pillage and robbery."[62] Herder therefore stressed that the Slavs were an agricultural people of mild nature. And it was assertions like these that perpetuated the romanticised view of the peasant which carried on up until the 20th century.

The romanticised peasant in Mánes's work continued to attract the praise of Czech art historians well into the 20th century, and his work became subject to reconsideration at the beginning of the century. Already in 1904 the art historian Max Dvořák found similarities between German artists and Mánes, who, in his view: "interpreted national history and the present, was a poet of fairy tales and myths like [Moritz von] Schwind or [Alfred] Rethel, and illustrator of national songs like [Adrian Ludwig] Richter."[63] Dvořák's aim was, however, not to contest Mánes's "Czechness," but rather to demonstrate, in keeping with the Vienna School's approach, how his work fitted into a wider European context of the history of art.

Published at the very beginning of the century, Dvořák's approach stood in contrast to the more nationalistically oriented attempts of his Czech contemporaries, who emphasised the autonomous original inventiveness of Czech art. Dvořák explained Mánes's interest in "national" topics and folklore by the environment of the early national revival in Bohemia, in which Mánes worked. Inevitably, he located himself in the national revival with his depictions of national past and present, national myths and tales as well as authentic life of the people in the countryside.[64] Yet, Dvořák emphasised that considering Mánes to be a national artist did not necessarily mean that he had created a national style. "National individualism, as well as the personal one, is not dependent on some act of will, it is a circumstance, the influence of which is taught to us by hundreds and thousands of years."[65] The combination of new ideas and forms with the local character produced, according to Dvořák, national artistic varieties.[66] In other words, national cultures have their own versions of wider worldviews, manifested through the formal features of the works of art. While positioning Czech art in the broader context of artistic development, Dvořák acknowledged its authenticity and originality caused by the specific political and cultural conditions of the national revival, in which a certain fascination with the countryside had played a key role.

In contrast to Mánes, Aleš, the author of many decorative illustrations of national literature and historical murals, did not travel to villages to capture the romantic idyll. He based his images of peasants on contemporary photographs, postcards, and descriptions.[67] Nevertheless, his works, such as the ornamentation and wall decorations found in the tourist resort of Pustevny in eastern Moravia, or his designs of the "Homeland" series for lunettes in the National Theatre (1877–81), depicting historically important places and myths of Bohemia, were all seen as embodying the Czech national identity. The mural paintings in the refuge of the Pustevny resort, designed in 1898 by Dušan Jurkovič, show various figures from Czech and Slovak legends, such as the popular Slovak highway robber Jánošík (1688–1713) or the bandit Stavinoha, as well as idealised peasants who are all executed in an illustrative style, putting an emphasis on the decorative quality of the outline. The Pustevny resort, set on a hilly range associated with ancient Slavic legends, became a popular hiking and skiing destination at the end of the 19th century, and continues to be popular today. Both Jurkovič's architecture and Aleš's interior paintings were to provide the visitors with a suitable setting replete with folk and ancient Slavic references.

Aleš became involved in other projects linked to places that were of historical importance to the Czechs. These included mural paintings in the foyer of the National Theatre in Prague, as well as the sgraffito decorations on various houses in Prague and other Bohemian towns. His graphic approach proved suitable for this purpose, while he remained thematically faithful to the depictions of peasants and ancient Slavic myths. These frequently depicted ancient rituals or legendary figures thought to stand

at the birth of traditional Czech folk culture. Aleš thus often clad the mythical heroes in costumes decorated with folk ornaments, creating a sense of continuity between the ancient times to the present day. Moreover, in places with a large German minority, such as in the western Bohemian town of Plzeň, such depictions had a special ideological significance for the local Czech community.[68] Contemporary art historians believed that it was Aleš's subject matter, together with his references to folk motives in ornament, that captured the quintessential character of the Czech people.[69] Aleš's fictional recreations of the past and vernacular culture therefore fitted into the narrative of imaginary folk culture constructed from the late 19th century.

The Vernacular in Architecture

The buildings at Pustevny by Jurkovič and the interiors by Aleš are pertinent examples of the incorporation of vernacular elements into contemporary production. Turn of the century architecture in particular was often understood as capable of strengthening the sense of collective (national) identity, and folk culture provided a rich source of inspiration, not only in the Czech lands but also in the wider Central European region. An often-cited case of architects using vernacular motifs to revive contemporary craft and design, enriching their own practice and recreating a national art, is the so-called Zakopane style.[70] In the remote Podhale region in the Tatra mountains of southern Poland, Stanisław Witkiewicz (1851–1915) "discovered" in the 1880s what he called the "genuine style" of the highlanders, which he believed was unspoilt by European influences and historicism. His goal was to promote the architecture and applied arts of this remote town as "a recipe for Polish national art," and to produce designs in this style, in Zakopane and elsewhere.[71]

Witkiewicz's idealised view of the local visual and material culture was shared in many other parts of Austria-Hungary in the folk art revival. Yet I would emphasise that in the Czech lands, vernacular motives were transformed in a more active way in order to befit modern architecture and design. Jurkovič, who had studied in Vienna with Camillo Sitte, represents such an approach. He found his inspiration in the structural and decorative features of vernacular art, and provoked further discussion on folk (national) and modern architecture.[72] Making his first appearance as the designer of a number of buildings and exhibits at the 1895 Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition, Jurkovič's subsequent practice and theory drew on his research into the visual language of Moravian and Slovak vernacular culture. He authored several articles on vernacular architecture and made a collection of photographs from his field trips, criticising the Slavish architectural imitations of historical, "classical" styles, in addition to the lack of independence of contemporary architects in searching for inspiration.[73] Instead of using foreign forms which are incomprehensible to local audiences, he called for a return to local vernacular architecture because it "corresponds with the spirit of the people for whom we are building;" it grows out of the local climate, environment, circumstances and needs.[74] He claimed that,

> if our art should become an organic outpouring of national originality, national peculiarity, I do not know of any other departure point for us other than trying to build on what our people has already created and continue in the interrupted development of their art.[75]

Jurkovič used the "typology of vernacular wooden structures" which in many cases tried to relate the function of the buildings (spa pavilions, tourist hotels, etc.) to the allegedly unspoilt quality of rural life and remoteness from urban civilisation that he found during his research trips to northern Slovakia.[76] His buildings, however, as well as those of Witkiewicz, were primarily constructed for urban dwellers. It was the cottages for the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition, the retreat at Pustevny, or the spa buildings and hotels in the town of Luhačovice, as well as villas for the wealthy and reconstructions of castles, dominated his work before 1918.

Luhačovice in eastern Moravia, mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, is a pertinent example of his use of vernacular forms, which were successfully incorporated into commissions for the middle and upper classes. Approached by František Veselý, a medical doctor from Brno, and financed by a local aristocrat, Otto Serényi, who owned most of the property, Jurkovič carried out several reconstructions, designed new spa buildings in the valley and built a number of villas for the local middle classes in the Prague Quarter, just outside of Luhačovice, between 1902 and 1915. Among the most notable interventions were his reconstructions of the hotel Janův dům (Jan's house, which is known today as Jurkovič's house), the cultural centre, Slovenská búda (the Slovak hut), a restaurant, a bandstand, and a number of family houses [fig. 2.6].

The philosophy behind the architectural language of these buildings complied with the contemporary popularity of rural retreats, but also with that of the attempt to create a meeting point for Moravian and Czech patriots.[77] Jurkovič's half-timbered structures featuring colourful ornamental decoration in wood and fresco, most notably on the Janův dům, were intended to satisfy both. They appealed to the predominantly urban visitors to the spa with their vernacular look combined with modern comfort,

Figure 2.6 Dušan Jurkovič, Jan's House, Luhačovice, 1902. Postcard. Author's collection.

and created a feeling of complete "harmony with nature" while remaining original and creative.[78]

Kotěra, an architect and Jurkovič's fellow enthusiast for vernacular architecture, appreciated already in 1904 the architect's emphasis on a unity of the interior and exterior as well as his attempt to not simply imitate previous models but create new, original architecture that was "correspondent to the local situation and the surrounding landscape."[79] Jurkovič's adaptation of the local folk architecture with its "impressions of Slavic buildings" to the "aesthetic needs and needs for hygiene" of the present, including his use of large windows and skylights (Jan's House, 1902), stone (villa Vlastimila, 1903) and diagonally sloping corners (Inhalation pavilion, 1903) was influenced by several contemporary trends in architecture.

Indeed, Jurkovič's attempt to capture a local "Czechoslovak" spirit in architecture was not isolated from the rising awareness of vernacular inspiration elsewhere in Europe and in the United States. The English detached house caught his attention with its layout, situation, and modernity, and it was mainly the architects Baillie Scott, Edgar Wood, and Charles Rennie Mackintosh who had influenced his practical work.[80] Jurkovič was also familiar with the theories of Ruskin and Morris and was a regular reader of an English magazine called *The Studio*, focusing on the decorative and fine arts.

And it is these models, especially the popularity of the English house, which is also found in the work of many other Czech and Central European architects, such as Hermann Muthesius (1861–1927) or Leopold Bauer (1872–1938), that, in my view, complicate the question of the national roots and sources of vernacular tradition that Jurkovič sought with his houses. Although Jurkovič was against an uninformed application of foreign forms, and claimed that he was not interested in mechanical imitation of vernacular models, the fact that he found inspiration in Mackintosh and Muthesius suggests that he was looking for a new architectural language that would combine the traditional (authentic) vernacular of Moravia and Slovakia with the latest architectural design – something more cosmopolitan and better suited to modern living.[81] Architecture, designed on the combination of these principles, was in Jurkovič's view based on values that stood outside of transient fashion.[82]

As a result, like the *Heimatstil* in decorative architecture popular in Germany in the second half of the 19th century, the work of architects such as Jurkovič (or Witkiewicz in Poland) was directed at a deliberate creation of a new style informed by the local vernacular architectural language – especially ornament, colour, techniques, and material – constructed to suit the needs of the early 20th century. Vernacular architecture was regarded as the expression of the national tradition of a particular country, but at the same time it also provided a fashionable and exotic reference to a reality outside of the modern urban civilisation.

Jurkovič was not the only one to have worked with the various folk elements and principles of the Arts and Crafts movement. Other architects also tried to devise a completely new modern language that would draw on local traditions. This was the case of Jan Kotěra, a prominent architect who designed the Mánes pavilion for Rodin's exhibit in 1902. A pupil of Otto Wagner, Kotěra started establishing himself in Prague after returning from his studies in Vienna in 1898, joined Mánes and edited *Volné směry* for three years.[83] He was one of the few progressive young architects "so much needed in Czech architecture at this time if we do not want to draw in artistic conservatism that has been eradicated elsewhere," as the art historian Mádl put it.[84] According to the art historian, Kotěra combined a cosmopolitan sensibility with national individuality and

created original architecture by not simply copying old models but reworking them in an inventive way, informed by contemporary architectural trends abroad.[85]

Kotěra himself outlined his views of architecture and design in an article entitled "O novém umění" (On New Art) which I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter.[86] Kotěra claimed that architectural form was shaped by the building's function, its construction, and the more intangible local conditions. First, as regards the function, this new art was a reaction to new architectural tasks: administrative buildings, schools, railway stations, as well as new housing derived from the new needs of a changing society. Second, Kotěra thought that architects need to be true to material and not imitate both the material and function of architectonic elements. For instance, he argued that "it cannot be right and it cannot be beautiful when a bearing column, in a shape of a support, is glued to the wall as a decoration."[87] For Kotěra, being true to material and function was also accompanied by the need to be true to the local environment in which architects place their buildings.

The question of local conditions or environment was nevertheless rather abstract in Kotěra's theoretical writing. He claimed that, because different nations share similar levels of education and face similar tasks in architecture, they cannot develop a truly unique art as far as form is concerned. What can, however, differ and create a "national character" of art, is expression. Yet in his mind, national art cannot be created by the simple act of copying or by using new combinations of forms from the past. Rather, "the local character of the origins of art and the artist's personality give the form its characteristic accent."[88]

These ideas emphasising the effects of specific local and author's conditions on works of art translated into Kotěra's early practice. Influenced by Wagner, as well as the theories of John Ruskin and William Morris, he found the sources of organic decoration in nature and combined them with a more austere modernist language.[89] His private villas in Prague and elsewhere from the beginning of the 20th century explicitly drew on vernacular models not only of villages but also of small, provincial towns. Kotěra was also informed by the writings of his German counterpart, Muthesius, especially *Das englische Haus* (The English House, 1903) and adapted the country cottage to modern, urban purposes.[90] In villas such as Trmal in Prague or Mácha in Bechyně (both 1902–1903), he combined the aesthetic principles of the Arts and Crafts movement with motifs from vernacular architecture (both local and English), which he saw as "a refreshing spring" of new architecture not just for him but also for his students.[91] The result was a new type of house consisting of half-timbered gables, overhanging roofs, large chimneys, sloping corners of the exterior walls, and restrained Art Nouveau ornamentation, which he believed should always come second to the function of the building.

As I have shown, such inspiration in vernacular forms and their combination with modern language was becoming popular at the turn of the century. Moreover, such practice went far beyond architecture, and the vernacular culture of the Czech-speaking lands of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia was more generally discovered as a source of primitivist innocence and served as an exotic reference to a reality outside the urban milieu of the artist. The notions of "primitive art," and primitivism in art, as well as their relationship to the modern artistic idiom, were explored by a number of contemporary artists in Bohemia and Central Europe.[92] As elsewhere, primitivism served to confirm the dominant position of urban modernity, and, in many cases, was found close to the cities – in the vernacular art and material culture created by those who lived in the nearby villages.

A View from Abroad

It was not only Central European artists but also theorists who saw the potential of vernacular art and culture for the future, which they believed could be modernised and could thus contribute to constructing a favourable image of the modern nation.[93] In this respect, vernacular art was closely associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, which is typified by Jurkovič's work. Indeed, using vernacular art motives and skills to revive contemporary art and design was commonplace in many European countries. Importantly, alongside the national interests of the locals in the vernacular forms of expression, folk culture therefore became an object of fascination for visitors and commentators from abroad (hence Rodin's trip) and provided a wealth of material for foreign scholars too. They either studied it as an interesting phenomenon in its own right, or used it as a source for the revival of Arts and Crafts in Europe. One of the first scholars to become interested in Central European vernacular art was the Swiss writer and art critic William Ritter (1867–1955) who frequently travelled throughout Central and Eastern Europe, including Romania, Hungary, and Poland. He saw in these regions what he regarded as a preserved, authentic heritage that had been unaffected by European modernism, which was something he disapproved of.[94]

Ritter had also been concerned with art in Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia, and at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century he published a number of articles on the topic, in which he expressed his attachment to Slavic folk culture.[95] He had visited the Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition in 1895 and because he believed that an artist's work should be analysed in the context of its own ethnic or cultural background, he travelled to Moravian Slovakia several times to study and collect artefacts.[96] The same part of Moravia that Rodin visited around the same time represented, in Ritter's view, another example of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idea of the "natural, unspoilt, rural life," where what he saw as authentic, popular art flourished.[97] Ritter became particularly fascinated by Uprka's work, whom he called a "painter of colourful village festivities" and "a surviving witness of the ancient Slavonic world."[98] He saw his work as a form of "barbarism," understood in a positive sense as imbued with moral health, and counterpoised the "authentic" artists of villages against those of the "tragic, black" city of Prague.[99] For Ritter, therefore, the folklore of the village was an exotic paradise, which had been lost in many urbanised places but retained in the work of a few artists.

At the turn of the century, the attention to the Arts and Crafts movement that had originated in Great Britain enticed fascination with European folk art among many international scholars. Charles Holme (1848–1923), the English writer and magazine editor, founded *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Arts* in 1892 to promote "good design." Starting in 1894, the journal published issues written by specialists on topics such as crafts, etching, architecture, and photography.[100] A series of special volumes were also devoted to peasant art in Europe – *Peasant Art in Sweden, Lapland and Iceland* (1910) was followed by a volume on Austria and Hungary (1911), Russia (1912), and Italy (1913). "Peasant" in these volumes was understood as the "primitive" inhabitant of rural areas who expressed "naive charm in the spontaneous designs and quaintness of thought shown in the work of unschooled daughters of the soil."[101]

Importantly, the contributors to the volume on Austria and Hungary, including the Austrian ethnographer Michael Haberlandt (1860–1940) and the Anglo-Austrian

art historian Amelia Levetus (1853–1938), considered the Austrian peasant, following the official lines of Austrian ethnography, to be a generic type that represented *all* races subject to Austrian rule. Although there were regional differences between the three main groups comprising the population of Austria (German speakers, Slavs, and speakers of Romance languages), Levetus, for example, saw "no fine line of demarcation [that] can be drawn to indicate where the peasant art of one nation begins and another ends."[102] In fact, both Haberlandt and Levetus argued that, despite its varied forms, which could be put down to geographical and cultural differences, folk art had an underlying universal quality that transcended national divisions.

Such a view, of course, was not accepted in the individual regions of Austria and Hungary, where vernacular art was seen as a distinctive and original form of national expression. Haberlandt and Levetus acknowledged the existence of what they called "racial" differences and variations in the method of executing folk art, but insisted on using the term "Austrian peasant" to encompass all of the ethnic groups of Austria. Haberlandt, author of a chapter on Austrian peasant art in the volume, nevertheless recognised the "national character" of peasant artefacts and, in the case of embroidery in Bohemia and Moravia, related it to "national pride."[103] Yet both Levetus and Haberlandt approached peasant art as a form of primitivism. For instance, the latter claimed that Moravian embroidery had a "naïve charm," but at the same time stood above that of the Carpathian region, which was "much more primitive."[104] Primitive expression in this sense was meant as crude execution and unrefined and simple ornament, detail, or colour.

In the Habsburg Monarchy, this interest was closely linked to the design reform movement, which involved the establishment of museums of applied arts as well as the introduction of a reform in art and design education from the 1870s.[105] More traditional forms of education were promoted, especially by the art historian Rudolf von Eitelberger (1817–1885), who was born in Olomouc in central Moravia, became the first chair in art history at Vienna and the founder of the Austrian Museum for Arts and Industries.[106] Such education in, for instance, carpentry, clay making, embroidery, and woodcarving, was aimed at training craftsmen and teachers in technical as well as artistic skills and was closely linked to existing factories which were supplied and consolidated by the newly established schools.[107]

Thus, the revival of the so-called "Peasant Design" often took place at official Habsburg institutions with official Habsburg policies, and, as such, had many critics from local patriots. For example, the teaching (based on the copying of Tyrolian-Viennese models at the School of Wood Industry in Zakopane), was harshly criticised by Witkiewicz, who saw it as a "threat to instinctive peasant skill and to the innate Polishness of peasant culture."[108] Witkiewicz understood the curriculum of the School as a Germanic exploitation of local, peasant skills, which were hindered by the use of foreign ornament. The national identity preserved by the peasantry (and not only in Galicia) was thus seen as endangered by state support for uniform design education and museums, together with its commercialisation.

The debate about the role of vernacular art was held across the Habsburg Monarchy from the end of the 19th century. Many historians, museum curators, and craftsmen saw what they referred to as house industries as an inspirational source for contemporary design and its renewal, promoted from Vienna by Eitelberger and followed by Jakob von Falke (1825–1897), a cultural historian and Eitelberger's successor as director of the Museum for Art and Industry from 1895.[109] Yet, importantly – and

this is what Witkiewicz and others criticised – such efforts linked to state-found museums and schools represented a politically motivated promotion of the official political vision of the monarchy.[110] Such vision did not understand folk art as representative of a nation in the political sense. It, however, acknowledged cultural differences between ethnic groups which are visible in the products of the rural populations across the Empire.

Criticism of contemporary attitudes to and the commercial exploitation of peasant art had already been expressed by Alois Riegl.[111] In his view, folk art, although still preserved in some remote parts of Austria-Hungary, such as Bukovina, was inevitably doomed to extinction and as such, it can be studied, classified and appreciated but not reproduced.[112] And while Witkiewicz believed that the allegedly authentic peasant culture could be preserved if it were not challenged by imported influences, Riegl, who was indeed critical of such efforts, saw the phenomenon as a historical artefact. Riegl, as well as many of his Viennese colleagues, was also critical of the origins of vernacular art. Suggested already by Falke, vernacular art was seen as a simplified version of high art, not an authentic and ancient expression of a nation. In the early 20th century and in the interwar period, such proposition – seen as almost blasphemous by the nationalistically oriented historians and artists – would lead to a renewed discussion of the role vernacular art plays in Czech and Slovak culture, which I will examine in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

Interest in the peasants and their visual and material culture had been widespread in Europe since the second half of the 19th century, and the Czech fascination with the countryside can be seen as part of this movement. The narrative of "the native" who lived right outside of the city retained art and material culture that became an inspiration for many was commonplace for the urban, intellectual middle-class. In the discourse of Czech national revivalists in the 19th century, local vernacular culture was embedded in the local traditions of the Czech villages and managed to defy foreign (meaning German) influences. It was therefore in the position of becoming a source and basis of what was seen as a truly national art. At the turn of the century, references to vernacular art, most often imagined, were used as a contested field linked to the construction and advancement of their national identity. To this extent, parallel attempts can be found in vernacular revivals across Central Europe, including Poland and Hungary. The turn to vernacular art was not only an escapist reference to an idyllic past or idealised present, it was also closely associated with local ethnicity and with what was considered as authentic traditional culture.

Yet, in the Czech-speaking lands, vernacular art soon became a significant resource for modern artists, and the abstract idea of "the people" – understood as peasants of the rural regions – an active player in the construction of Czech modernism. This practice survived well into the 20th century and took a form of *modernised nationalism* in the sense that the visual language of nationalism was reinterpreted for the purposes of modernism. Vernacular art of the people from villages in the Czech-speaking lands thus played an active role in the formulation of Czech modern art in its nationalized form.

For Czech artists and architects who embraced modernism, vernacular culture became a popular resource that could be imitated or reinvented for the purposes of the present. Indeed, it was also an exotic phenomenon that could be proudly shown

to famous French sculptors. In this way, its allegedly primitive and unspoilt character was emphasised as an important aesthetic feature that can inform the language of modern art. And despite the increasing criticism of the misuse of the vernacular in contemporary art and design practices (and emphasis of its derivative nature), Czech historians, art historians, and ethnographers, as well as art critics, recognised it as an important tool of both nationalism and modernism.

Notes

1 Jiří Mucha, *Alfons Mucha* (Prague: Mladá fronta, 1982), 267–269, "Rodin na Slovácku," *Moravská orlice*, June 4, 1902, 1–2; Cathleen M. Giustino, "Rodin in Prague. Modern Art, Cultural Diplomacy, and National Display," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010); Nicholas Sawicki, "Rodin and the Prague Exhibition of 1902. Promoting Modernism and Advancing Reputations," *Cantor Arts Centre Journal*, 3 (2002–2003): 185–197.

2 A few photographs from the visit were published in *Zlatá Praha* XIX (1902), 396.

3 Božena Nováková-Uprková, *Besedy s Jožou Uprkou* (Strážnice: Ústav lidové kultury, 1996), 160; cf. also the manuscript by Zdenka Braunerová, quoted in Barbara Jebavá, "Estetická criteria a východiska v literárním odkazu Zdenky Braunerové" (Master Thesis, Masaryk University Brno, 2008), appendix 1.

4 Nováková-Uprková, *Besedy*, 158–159.

5 For a discussion on the subtleties of the meaning of *Volkskunst* and folk *art*, see Stefan Muthesius, "Alois Riegl, Volkskunst, Haussfleiss und Hausindustrie," in *Framing Formalism. Riegl's Work*, ed. Richard Woodfield (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001), 135–150.

6 Mitchell Schwarzer, "The Design Prototype as Artistic Boundary. The Debate on History and Industry in Central European Applied Arts Museums, 1860–1900," *Design Issues* 9, no. 1 (1992): 33; see also Roger D. Abrahams, "Phantoms of Romantic Nationalism in Folkloristics," *The Journal of American Folklore* 106, no. 419 (1993): 3–37.

7 Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 74.

8 Matthew Riley and Anthony D. Smith, *Nation and Classical Music. From Handel to Copland* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), 33 and 59–60.

9 Bohuslav Martinů, quoted in Michael Beckerman, "In Search for Czechness in Music," *19th Century Music* 10, no. 1 (1986): 64.

10 Lada Hubatová-Vacková,"Folklorismy," in *Budování státu*, 179–244.

11 Rebecca Houze, "Exhibiting Cloth and Culture," *Textiles, Fashion, and Design Reform in Austria-Hungary Before the First World War* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), esp. 107–113.

12 Jutta Pemsel, *Die Wiener Weltausstellung von 1873: das gründerzeitliche Wien am Wendepunkt* (Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau, 1989); Matthew Rampley, "Peasants in Vienna. Ethnographic Display and the 1873 World's Fair," *Austrian History Yearbook* 42 (2011): 110–132.

13 Catherine Albrecht, "Pride in Production: The Jubilee Exhibition of 1891 and Economic Competition between Czechs and Germans in Bohemia," *Austrian History Yearbook* 24 (1993): 105.

14 Vilém Kurz, *Lanová dráha a rozhledna na Petříně. Vzpomínka na jejich vznik a stavbu za příležitosti jich slavnostního otevření v den 20. srpna 1891* (Prague: Klub českých turistů, 1891), Vilém Kurz, *Der Eiffelthurm Prags, ein Zukunfsbild aus dem Jahre der Jubilaums-Ausstellung* (Prague: Klub českých turistů, 1890).

15 Marta Filipová, ed., *Cultures of International Exhibitions. Exhibitions in the Margins 1840–1940* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

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23 Antonín Robek, *Dějiny české etnografie* (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 1979), 10.

24 Rampley, "Peasants," 111.

25 Renáta Tyršová, *Svéráz v českých zemích* (Plzeň: Th. Mareš, 1918); Tyršová, *Svéráz v zemích československých* (Plzeň: Český deník, 1921).

26 Emanuel Kovář, et al. *Národopisná výstava českoslovanská v Praze, 1895* (Prague: J. Otto, 1895), 532.

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28 Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press 2006), 114.

29 Jan Pargač and Stanislav Brouček, *Mýtus českého národa, aneb Národopisná výstava českoslovanská 1895* (Prague: Littera Bohemica, 1996), 12.

30 Kovář, *Národopisná výstava*, 42.

31 Tomáš Okurka, "'Witness to the Momentous Significance of German Labour in Bohemia': Exhibitions in the German-Speaking Regions of Bohemia before the First World War," in *Cultures of International Exhibitions*, 91–111.

32 Hugh Agnew, *Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), 149; Nancy Wingfield, "The Battle Joined: Protesting the Badeni Language Ordinances," in *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands became Czech* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 48–78.

33 Jaroslav Pelikán, *Průvodce historií a stálou expozicí Galerie výtvarného umění v Hodoníně* (Hodonín: Galerie výtvarného umění, 1985), unpag.

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35 *Hodonínské listy*, 1902. Quoted in Vojtěch Novák, "Slovenská výstava v Hodoníně v roce 1905 jako nástroj národnostní emancipace," (BA thesis, Masaryk University, Brno), 19.

36 G. Herbert, "Slowakische Kunst. Ein Gang durch die Gödinger Ausstellung," *Das Vaterland*, May 18, 1902, 1–2.

37 G. Herbert, "Slowakische Kunst," 1.

38 Hl. K., "Umělecká výstava slovenská v Hodoníně," *Moravská orlice* 40, no. 113 (May 17, 1902), 1.

39 Hl. K., "Umělecká výstava," 1.

40 Hl. K., "Umělecká výstava," 1.

41 Ladislava Horňáková et al., *100 SVUM: 100.výročí založení Sdružení výtvarných umělců moravských* (Hodonín: GVU v Hodoníně, 2007), 10.

42 Quoted in Leopold Weigner, *Lidové umění československé* (Prague: Josef Vilímek, 1917), 64.

43 Štěpán Jež, *Joža Uprka, K pátému výročí umělcovy smrti* (Prague: Sfinx, 1944); Helena Musilová and Eva Bendová, eds., *Joža Uprka. Evropan slováckého venkova, 1861–1940—A European from the Moravian-Slovak Countryside, 1861–1940* (Prague: National Gallery, 2011); Jaroslav Kačer, *Joža Uprka. 1861–1940* (Hodonín: GVU, 2011).

44 Meda Mladek, "Central European Influences," in *František Kupka 1871–1957. A Retrospective*, eds. Meda Mladek and Margit Rowell (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1975), 15–19.

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47 Elizabeth Clegg, *Art, Design and Architecture in Central Europe, 1890–1920* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 102.

48 Dana Mikulejská, "Joža Uprka a Zdenka Braunerová – postřehy ze života," in *Joža Uprka. Evropan slováckého venkova, 1861–1940*, ed. Helena Musilová and Eva Bendová (Prague: National Gallery, 2011), 158–159.

49 Alois Kalvoda, "Náš český Millet," *České slovo*, October 29, 1911.

50 Štěpán Jež, *Joža Uprka, K pátému výročí umělcovy smrti* (Prague: Sfinx, 1944), 261.

51 Most recently, an exhibition in the National Gallery of Prague and its catalogue Helena Musilová and Eva Bendová, ed., *Joža Uprka (1861–1940): European of the Slovácko Region* (Prague: National Gallery, 2011). The exhibition catalogue presented Uprka as an original painter of folk subjects and a neglected modernist. Cf. the exhibition review by Milena Bartlová, "In margine (nejen o Jožovi Uprkovi)," accessed February 13, 2013, *artalk.cz*, http://www.artalk.cz/2011/12/06/in_margine-nejen-o-jozovi-uprkovi.

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54 Nina Lubbren, "Painted Peasants," in *Rural Artists' Colonies*, 63.

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57 Karel Bartoloměj Mádl, "Mánesu," in *Umění včera a dnes* (Prague: Topič, 1904), 4–5.

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59 Miroslav Tyrš, "K výstavě Mánesově v místnosti Lehmannově" (1880), reprinted in Renáta Tyršová, ed., *Dra Miroslava Tyrše úvahy a pojednání o umění výtvarném* I (Prague: Tělocvičná jednota Sokol, 1901), 44.

60 Tyrš, "K výstavě Mánesově," 44.

61 J. G. von Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 4 vol. (Riga and Leipzig: J. F. Hartknoch, 1784–1791).

62 Ibid., 107.

63 Max Dvořák, "Von Mánes zu Švabinsky," *Die Graphischen Künste* 27, no. 5 (1904): 29–52. In Czech as Max Dvořák, "Od Mánesa ke Švabinskému," *Volné směry* IX (1910): 285.

64 Dvořák, "Od Mánesa," 285.

65 Dvořák, "Od Mánesa," 288.

66 Mitchell Schwarzer, "Cosmopolitan Difference in Max Dvořák's Art Historiography," *The Art Bulletin* LXXIV, no. 4 (1992): 674.

67 Jeřábek, *Folklorismy*, 17.

68 Cf. Ivana Jonáková, ed., *Mikoláš Aleš v Plzni* (Plzeň: Západočeská galerie v Plzni, 2013); Václav František Eisenreich and Emanuel Svoboda, *Mikoláš Aleš, Plzeňská sgrafita* (Prague: Učitelská rada, 1932).

69 Mádl, "Mánesu," 4–5. In this text, Mádl noted, for example, that Aleš personified the Czech soul and character as well as the strengths and faults of the people that distinguish it from other races and tribes. Aleš's work was authentic, Mádl claimed, and that was one of the reasons it should not be seen as contrary to modern art.

70 David Crowley, *National Style and Nation State. Design in Poland from the Vernacular Revival to the Industrial Age* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1992); David Crowley, "The Uses of Peasant Design in Austria-Hungary in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century," *Studies in Decorative Arts* 2, no. 2 (1995): 2–28; Elizabeth Clegg, *Art, Design and Architecture*; Nicola Gordon Bowe, ed. *Art and the National Dream: The Search for Vernacular Expression in Turn-of-the-Century Design* (Blackrock, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993); Ákos Moravánszky, *Competing Visions: Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European architecture, 1867–1918* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1998).

71 Bowe, *Art and National Dream*, 103.

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73 Dušan Jurkovič, *Práce lidu našeho* (Vienna: A. Schroll & Company, 1905); Dušan Jurkovič, "Slovak Popular Art," in *Racial Problems in Hungary*, ed. Robert William Seton-Watson (London: A. Constable, 1908).

74 Dušan Jurkovič, "Umění stavitelské jindy a dnes," *Věstník samosprávný a národohospodářský* 6 (1906): 56.

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77 Dana Bořutová, *Dušan Jurkovič. Architect and His House* (Brno: Moravian Gallery, 2010).

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79 Kotěra, "Luhačovice," 60.

80 Jurkovič's introduction to František Žákavec, *Dílo Dušana Jurkoviče - kus dějin československé architektury* (Prague: Vesmír, 1929), xiv. For the parallels between Jurkovič and Mackintosh, see the short text by Danuše Kšicová, "Secese and Art Nouveau: Dušan Jurkow and C. R. Mackintosh," *Scotland and the Slavs: Selected Papers from the Glasgow-90 East-West Forum*, eds. Peter Henry, Jim MacDonald and Halina Moss (Glasgow: Astra Press, 1993), 123–130.

81 Kšicová, "Secese and Art Nouveau."

82 Dušan Jurkovič, *Pustevně na Radhošti. Turistické ubytovny Pohorské jednoty Radhošť ve Frenštátě, vystavěné a zařízené po způsobu lidových staveb na Moravském Valašsku a Uherském Slovensku* (Brno: A. Píša, 1900).

83 Jindřich Vybíral, "Jan Kotěra: Stubborn Seeker of Truth," *Centropa* 6, no. 1 (2006): 35; Vladimír Šlapeta ed., *Jan Kotěra 1871–1923: The Founder of Modern Czech Architecture* (Prague: Obecní dům, 2001).

84 K. B. Mádl, "Příchozí umění," *Volné směry* 3 (1899): 119–120, reprinted in *Výbor z kritických projevů a drobných spisů*, K. B. Mádl and Arsén Pohribný (Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, 1959); Jindřich Vybíral, "Jan Kotěra ve sférách idejí a sociálních vztahů," *Česká architektura na prahu moderní doby. Devatenáct esejů o devatenáctém století* (Prague: Argo, 2002), 230.

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3   Society

Ideály humanitní (The Ideals of Humanity), which Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk originally presented as a lecture in 1901 and published in 1919, outlined his views on the importance of ethical and moral principles of the whole society.[1] Here, he developed his concept of "humanita," usually translated as humanity, which he had already introduced in *Česká otázka,* published first in 1895 and described as the universal aspirations, or embrace, of a nation's ideal.[2] This ideal was linked to the belief in moral and social justice, and progress.[3] It was based on several sources: the writings of the mediaeval Church reformer Jan Hus (c1369–1415), the seventeenth century Protestant philosopher and pedagogue, Jan Amos Komenský (1592–1670), the national revival writers Josef Dobrovský (1753–1829) and the Slovak writer and proponent of Pan-Slavism Ján Kollár (1793–1852). The German concept of Humanität, an attitude to life permeated by the spirit of humanism, also informed Masaryk's view of "humanita."[4]

Masaryk claimed in *Ideály* that the Czechs had to face a social question prompted by the continued industrialisation and urbanisation in the Czech lands. Poverty, insufficient living conditions, diseases, and the exploitation of and violence towards women were just a few of the examples that Masaryk criticised. The tendency towards humanity, the ethical and social ideal, should reflect in modern life. He therefore argued that the idea of humanity and of a nation needs to be understood with the social aspect in mind: "the people is a different concept from the nation, the popular quality ('lidovost' in Czech) becomes a motto, the ideal of our desires. Socialism, like nationality, is an expression of the same humanity ideal."[5] While socialism should be understood here almost as the process of socialisation, and a more intimate association of people rather than a political system, the humanity ideal was, in Masaryk's view, a natural result of religion, law, morality, philosophy, and social standing.[6]

After the state of Czechoslovakia was created on 28 October 1918, these ideas translated into practice as reforms in the justice system and human rights; land reforms which nationalised or redistributed a large amount of property owned by the aristocracy, and attempts to resolve the housing crisis. This included the construction of new housing estates as well as new administrative buildings around the country. In response to the changes in the experience of modernity, architects and designers therefore started rethink the role of art, architecture, and design in relation to social needs.

The concerns about social issues linked to industrialisation and urbanisation paralleled a similar development around Europe from mid-19th century. Yet in interwar Czechoslovakia, the needs dictated by class distribution, especially compared to the rest of Central Europe, were somewhat different. Despite the large rural areas of Moravia, Slovakia, and Ruthenia, Czechoslovakia had a rather small peasant population in the

interwar period which amounted to about a third of the whole nation. In comparison, the peasantry in Poland constituted about two thirds and in Hungary half of the population.[7] This difference can be ascribed to the fact that intense urbanisation of the Czech lands started during the industrial revolution and continued after the war. By 1921, more than ten percent of inhabitants of the Czech lands lived in the largest administrative, industrial and cultural centres, such as Prague, Brno, Ostrava, Plzeň (Pilsen), and a total of forty-six percent lived in urban areas.[8] The geographical and ethnic distribution of workers was also important, with ninety percent of them living in the Czech lands and only ten percent in Slovakia and Subcarpathean Ruthenia.[9]

In Czechoslovakia, the working classes were represented by several political parties of both nationalities, the largest being the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party, which dated back to pre-war times with a base of urban workers as its main voters. The Agrarian party (in full, the Republican Party of Farmers and Peasants) led by Antonín Švehla, the Prime Minister between 1922 and 1926, supported the interests of rural working and middle classes.[10] The Communist Party, founded in 1921, also became an important platform that promoted the working classes and quickly grew in influence and numbers.

Yet the global economic crisis of the early 1930s aggravated many issues that the urban working class faced. Czech and German national socialist and fascist movements started intensifying their activities, which included demonstrations and strikes, sometimes organised jointly with the communists who also grew in number.[11] They especially mobilised in the border regions that had a large population of German workers where the economic struggle after the crisis had continued.[12]

The composition of society and the party distribution in interwar Czechoslovakia indicate that the working class had an important place in the new state. Local politicians, historians, and philosophers (including Masaryk) were clearly aware of this fact and reflected on it. Naturally, the many social issues related to the developing society quickly became a concern for a number of visual artists, architects, theorists, and art critics in a number of ways. While many searched for a new visual language that would reflect the desired modern nature of the state and nation, they also believed that art had the power to actively affect various aspects of social life. They engaged in trying to come up with theoretical and practical solutions for the place of the working class in the new state, rethinking the relationship between class and nation. This included the new visual symbolism, which they had devised and hoped, or believed, was suitable for the lower classes. This chapter therefore considers class to be an important topic in the formulations of modern Czech art in the international artistic and social movements. It critically explores the efforts to revise the role of modern art within the nation's and the state's social structure, and engage with it politically, showing the limits of such a struggle.

Art and the Proletariat

After 1918, in the days of rapid political, economic, and social changes, a number of practicing artists and theorists started rethinking the role of the visual arts in the new environment. The collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, as well as the end of WWI, seemed to many people to be an appropriate moment for a broader societal and cultural change, as well as a prompt for the renewal of art. The first decade of the new state was therefore marked by a lively search for new, meaningful roles that the arts should have in a nation and state that could now govern its own affairs. This role was

envisaged mainly as an active instrument of change in the lives of people by means of architecture and design, as well as fine art.

Czech artists and art writers turned their attention to the urban working classes already before WWI, yet it was after the war that they started calling more emphatically to return to the so-called "common man." This discourse, as Miroslav Hroch pointed out, involved a search for "the ideal of the common people," not only in the distant lands but also on the domestic grounds. Such common man was commonly seen as "the vehicle of elementary, universally human, national values" and, as I would emphasise, was not limited to living in the countryside, but was now recognised as being part of the urban working class.[13] "The war discovered small nations. The war also discovered the small man," the painter Karel Holan (1893–1953), who fought in the war, claimed in 1924.[14] This small (or common) man was, in Holan's view, predominantly a member of the working class. Similarly, when F. X. Šalda pondered two years earlier about politically engaged art, he highlighted the role of art in the moral rebirth of humanity and its ability to embrace the common man. Šalda asked, "[…] but could a person be truly human who is indifferent, who *is able to be* indifferent and neutral in the fight for a [moral] transformation, he who lacks a solid faith and conviction about the new composition of the world and life?"[15] Šalda therefore claimed that artists and their art should appeal to all people and not be exclusive – they needed to take into account the changed conditions of modern life. Speaking from a leftist position, he demanded that the post-war generation of young artists paid more attention to social issues and became politically engaged.

Immediately after the war, many of the internationally-oriented artists in what was now Czechoslovakia turned their attention to the so-called popular art, which had a multitude of sources as well as interpretations. As discussed in the previous chapter, *popular* was traditionally associated with vernacular art that was linked with the concept of the people, *populous* (in Czech "lid"), but increasingly came to signify a more general sense of the mass of people, especially the urban working class. At times, however, the popular encompassed more than just urban or folk production, and more broadly came to signify the art of amateurs. These could be untrained craftsmen, children or "exotic" peoples. All of these uneducated art producers, whether living in cities, towns, or villages, were believed to have preserved a certain timeless innocence and truthfulness in their skills and ways of expression.

This turn to the people, to their needs and possible education, took place across the board, throughout the arts. Literature, theatre, film, as well as the visual arts, made the working class into the subject, source, consumer, and potential creator of new art. However, until recently, discussing the working class and the class system in general was burdened in Czech historiography by the obsolete Marxist categorisation and overuse of the term by the communist regime after 1948, leading to subsequent aversion amongst Czech art historians to the use of the concepts of "proletariat" and "working class."[16] "Proletariat" is still understood in this loaded sense today. Yet since the 19th century, politicians, writers, and artists of the left claimed the term "proletariat" to describe the industrial working class that was seen as having no material culture of its own, its own "proletarian art," and I use it in this way too. For Czech interwar modernists on the left, however, social class and the idea of the proletariat and their culture were important notions that featured in many discussions about contemporary Czech art and its place in society. And similarly to Baudrillard and Baumann, I see class as being an important code of difference in the thinking of Czech art writers, whether they were aware of such use or not.[17]

Many Czech artists and art theorists at this time reacted to an established belief that art was something exclusive and associated with bourgeois values; that artists were genius individuals. Many artists and art critics in Bohemia tried to challenge these views by turning attention to art's possible broader appeal and ability to improve society. There were various ways that were suggested to achieve that which will be discussed in this chapter but in most cases the argument was for art that would be more accessible to uneducated individuals and/or would be created by them. Interestingly, these discussions were not exclusive to the modernists and representatives of the avant-garde on the left of the political spectrum, but also included conservatives and traditionalists.

One of the first writers who seriously started discussing class in relation to Czech culture, especially the visual arts and literature, was the poet, translator, and art critic Stanislav Kostka Neumann (1875–1947). In many ways, Neumann was a versatile person who symbolised the ever-changing political environment in the Czech-speaking lands with his developing views. An anarchist poet at the beginning of the 20th century and a defender of futurism, Neumann turned into a pronounced Marxist critic of modernist art and literature in the interwar period.[18] During the twenties, he promoted proletarian poetry and was one of the founding members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in 1921. He was eventually expelled from it in 1929, after signing the so-called "Manifest sedmi" (The Manifesto of Seven) alongside with six other artists who declared disagreement with the Bolshevik direction the party took under Klement Gottwald (1896–1953), a Czechoslovak communist politician who later served as Czechoslovak president between 1948 and 1953.[19]

Despite, or because of, his changing political stance, which nevertheless was always leftist, Neumann in his texts on art constantly searched for the meaning of "people" and "the proletariat" and was preoccupied with the relationship between people and art from very early on. In his early work, his interest in the people and in their ability to emancipate society through a social revolution were indebted to the ideas of Peter Kropotkin, Jean Grave, and Élisée Reclus, the first a Russian, the two others both French anarchists and activists.[20] They all had close links to anarchism, and, being aware of the social injustices of their respective societies, promoted collectivism and communism. Neumann was particularly influenced by Kropotkin, whose work he translated for his journal, *Nový kult* (New Cult, 1897–1905).[21]

Already by the end of the 19th century he had outlined his views of what a relationship between art and the people should be like. In his 1898 article, "Umění a lid" (Art and the People), he condemned the search for the authenticity of folk culture in the allegedly unspoilt countryside conducted by those who wished to discover the spirit of the people.[22] Instead, he called for an opening up of the arts to a larger, non-elitist audience made up of ordinary people, in order to establish a closer relationship between the artists and the people.

Yet, his views of what kind of art should be presented to the lower working classes were somewhat patronising, as he referred to what we would today call the dumbing down of art. When, for instance, he contemplated what art should be presented to working class audiences, he claimed that

> there are […] things that the people would not understand, because [these things] are hard to comprehend even by the intelligentsia. […] what the people is able to understand, when explained properly, should be more than enough to fulfil the mission that art has in relation to the people.[23]

In his view, art should be simplified enough so that uneducated individuals can understand it, because the aim of bringing art to the people, its "popularisation," was to *aestheticise* the people. This, according to Neumann's socialist conviction, should be done alongside freeing the people economically in the future. "Beauty and freedom are the two indispensable phenomena of the future people."[24]

Neumann's call for popularisation of art appeared within a broader context of rethinking the questions of education, and improving conditions for the working classes. These preoccupied many commentators, who looked for ways that the arts could be used to improve the lives and social conditions of an increasingly industrialised and modernised society. In the Bohemia of the turn of the century, two main views could be identified in relation to the role art could play in improving the life of the working classes. Neumann, the historian, the musicologist Otakar Hostinský (1847–1910), and the anti-clerical journalist Karel Pelant (1874–1925), as well as others, believed that with the correct level of simplification, art could improve the lives of working class people and eventually lead to their emancipation. Pelant saw the working class as being uneducated but hungry for knowledge: "people consume every crumb that falls down in their direction from the rich table of culture."[25] Such consumption improves the ability of people to understand art and culture in general, and it is the task of an artist or writer to produce work that would be comprehensible to them. As he called, authors should "recognise the spiritual level of people as the result of your society, do not condemn them!"[26] At the same time, if the people were continuously presented with more challenging journals like *Moderní revue* and *Nový kult*; if they encounter works of literature or art in socialist propaganda pamphlets, they would get elevated and educated.

Not everyone shared this optimistic belief in art's ability. The literary critic Arnošt Procházka, for instance, disputed the claim that art had the power to educate the working classes.[27] He argued that people did not need art, instead they needed basic entertainment and subsistence. "[…] the people do not miss art, they […] don't need it. […] the people as a compound of utilitarian, materialistic instincts and desires are not interested in art, they do not have any understanding of it."[28] Furthermore, no one can be educated to appreciate art, he claimed, as much as creativity cannot be taught. And even amongst educated people there is only a fraction of those who can truly love or create art. In other words, art – which Procházka called the ultimate blossom of culture, was not for everyone; the notion of the people and art stood in contradiction.[29] And while Neumann tried to contest and challenge art's elitism, many others, like Procházka, retained the belief that its exclusivity had to be preserved. Both sides, however, recognised the complex nature of art and the limits of its comprehensibility amongst the working classes.

Opening Windows of Czech Art

Neumann thought it would be possible to reorganise the spiritual level of the people by art in order to improve their lives. Not all art was suitable, though, and thus he also needed to distinguish between the art that was beneficial for the people and that which should be forgotten. In 1913 he published a key text of Czech modern art: a manifesto entitled *Otevřená okna* (Open Windows).[30] He assumed a radical attitude against the nationalistic promotion of folk culture surviving from the 19th century, and emphasised in its place a future-oriented modernism. Although he acknowledged the key

influences of regional (or folk) art on contemporary artistic production, Neumann insisted, like the authors of the 1895 The Manifesto of Czech Modernism before him, that artists should not superficially imitate works of folk art, and demanded that they should also be knowledgeable of current developments in European art. With an interest in urban culture and technological progress, Neumann distanced himself from the enthusiasm for the remnants of tradition and folklore. He called for an end to many aspects of traditional as well as contemporary Czech culture, including conservative journals such as *Česká kultura* [The Czech Culture], "the kitschy superficiality of academism and impressionism, […], folklore, embroidery from Moravian Slovakia, Alfons Mucha, […] The Museum of Arts and Crafts […]," and he demanded an end to historicism, professors, politics, women's handicrafts, and town halls run by the Young Czechs party.[31] The individual items Neumann revoked were indeed related to things of the past or the conservative present: traditional arts, such as crafts and embroidery; the ornamental style of Mucha's posters, and a number of historical styles, particularly Baroque, which the avant-gardes associated with pathos and imposing monumentality. Yet, *Moderní revue*, a journal in which Neumann had published several texts, also made it on the list, most probably for its association with Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic, a poet and critic of symbolism and decadence.

At the same time, Neumann demanded, "long live […] Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, […] artistic advertisement, […] modernity, flowing life and civil art," machines, cinema, the world's fair, new materials such as concrete and steel, and such artists and architects, as Josef and Karel Čapek, Josef Gočár, Bohumil Kubišta, or Otto Gutfreund.[32] These phenomena Neumann related to everyday modern life, while the artists he named were members of the incoming generation who were well informed of the latest developments on the international art scene, especially Cubism and Futurism.

However, according to some of his contemporaries, Neumann did not go far enough in his criticism of traditional culture. An anonymous commentator in the journal *Umělecký měsíčník* noticed that Neumann still worked with the concept of *nation*, a concept that French and Italian futurists had disposed of completely.[33] He compared Neumann's manifesto to the style of Apollinaire's "L'antitradition futuriste" (The Futurist anti-tradition), which presented a list of favoured and unfavoured items, the latter including museums, ruins, historians, or academism. Similarly, Felix Del Marle's "Manifeste futuriste contre Montmartre" (Futurist manifesto against Montmartre) placed more radical demands calling for the destruction of the essential piece of French national identity – the Montmartre.[34] According to the critic, Neumann refrained from being as drastic, and "where the Futurists call 'Let Beethoven [Wagner, Poe, Whitman] etc. die,' [Neumann's] list lacks calls such as 'Let Dvořák, Smetana, Hradčany, Aleš, Mácha die!'"[35] Instead, Neumann used phrases like the "strong, modern nation," and, only a year earlier, had complimented Mikuláš Aleš, whose work heavily featured historic themes and references to folklore and stylised ornament.[36] A year earlier, on the artist's sixtieth birthday in 1912, Neumann called Aleš "the nation's genius" who had "created absolute Czech values," and linked his work with "the spirit of the homeland." Aleš was, for him, an "epic painter of the Czech village and of what was so dear in the past to the Czech heart."[37]

This could be read as Neumann's recognition that constant values indeed existed in Czech art, and that they had helped to create a national culture. Such an attempt to reconcile progressive artistic tendencies with an acceptance of some level of national tradition was, however, not exclusive to Neumann. In the same issue of *Lidové noviny*,

where Neumann praised Aleš, the poet and graphic artist František Gellner scrutinised Aleš's "Czechness."[38] He linked it to the topics the artist favoured the most; in his view, these were folk costumes and songs and what he understood as the past glory of the nation. Yet Gellner found connections between the reductive drawing technique and the sensitivity of Aleš's drawings on the one hand, and that of German and French graphic artists on the other. He noted that, with its timeless appeal, Aleš's work had made it to a journal of Czech Cubists and Futurists, by which he most probably meant *Umělecký měsíčník*, as "a model of perfect and respectable work."[39] Aleš was thus often recalled by Czech writers of various artistic and political affiliations for not only depicting a "Czech identity," especially in his themes and subjects, but increasingly also for his linear abstraction that became inspirational for Czech modernists.

As discussed in Chapter 1, *Umělecký měsíčník* was a platform that eagerly promoted Cubism in the early 1910s. The first volume from 1911–1912, edited by Josef Čapek, Pavel Janák, and František Langer, featured, for instance, articles on modern architecture by Janák, Josef Chochol, and Vlastimil Hofman, but also texts on what many Cubists saw as their primitivist inspiration, including an article on mediaeval tiles by Otto Gutfreund, or one on El Greco by Emil Filla. The praise of Aleš from the art historian Václav Vilém Štech (1885–1974) appeared next to them, and focussed on the artist's abilities to abstract his subjects by a linear depiction [Fig. 3.1]. Both Gellner and Štech therefore pointed out what they understood as a timeless quality

Figure 3.1 Mikoláš Aleš, Rider, 1891. Carton, paper, charcoal, 21 × 16.7 cm. Moravian Gallery in Brno. B 8724.

of Aleš's work, which they believed could revive art for the new times. This could be seen as contradicting the critique of the art that was considered historical, traditional, nationalist, or regional; voiced by many modern artists and art critics. Yet it could also be seen within the context of Cubism's embrace of the classical language related to the calls of the French critics Amédée Ozenfant and Léonce Rosenberg. In 1916, Ozenfant, who was also a painter, suggested a return to French classical tradition in order to purify and clean up Cubism.[40] After the end of WWI, in 1919, the influential art dealer and art critic Rosenberg also identified what he called the "constant" and "absolute" of Cubist art, which he thought artists should seek.[41] Many Czech art writers, discussed here, subscribed to this enthusiasm for permanent and universal qualities in art.

Similarly, the work of some of the artists that Neumann celebrated in the 1913 manifesto was more complex, and contained progressive as well as what could be seen as being more traditional elements. For example, the Čapek brothers, Josef and Karel, who were members of the short-lived Skupina výtvarných umělců, formed in Prague in 1911 and dissolved by 1914, were both influenced by aspects of folk or popular art, and often contemplated about their own relation to the so-called national art. Neumann generally favoured those artists who were open to more varied influences, and apart from Čapek, it was for instance Václav Špála, Vlastislav Hofman, and Josef Chochol, many of whom he had already named favourably in the *Open Windows* manifesto. Like Gellner and Štech, Neumann also appreciated historical artists that created, in his view, work that stood outside of time. Apart from Aleš, he included for instance the painter Miloš Jiránek, and the Impressionist painter Antonín Slavíček.[42]

Neumann made these comments in relation to two important exhibitions that took place in Prague in 1913. His remarks also reveal Neumann's attitude towards Cubism and its relationship with national art. The *Modern Art* exhibition staged by the Mánes was curated by the French symbolist critic Alexandre Mercereau, and included work by Czech artists such as Čapek, Špála, and Chochol, as well as artists from outside of Bohemia, for example, Constantin Brancusi, Raoul Dufy, Alexander Archipenko, and others. The other exhibition, organised by the Skupina, took place in the Municipal House, and, among others, featured the work of the Czechs, Filla, and Gutfreund; with international guests such as Munch and Picasso, as well as African art from the Congo and Cameroon.[43] For Neumann, these were two separate, very different exhibitions, in that the one featuring Picasso was full of slavish copies of the Spanish artist, while the other presented a more original approach to modernism. Painters like Emil Filla, Neumann argued, were too dogmatic in following Picasso. Instead, Neumann called for a "Czech Cubism, a Czech form of the new art [and] our own individualities."[44]

By distinguishing between these two separate streams of Czech modern art, Neumann identified, or even constructed, an important divide in how artists had, in his view, understood Czech modernism and the potential direction it should take. He became critical of what he regarded as a passive adoption of Cubism, and what he called "Picassism" in Czech art, represented mainly by Filla.[45] Cubism was, for Neumann, "an extravagance because it granted a high level of autonomy to creativity [and] it contradicted the social function of art."[46]

For Neumann, this social function was an important component that modern Czech art should contain. He further developed his ideas about the social engagement of art and artists in the next phase of his theoretical writing after 1918, with two main sources as his reference points. First, it was the democratic visions of the American

poet, Walt Whitman (1819–1892), and the poetry of the Belgian Emile Verhaeren (1855–1916) that appealed to him.[47] What came to be known as civilism in Czech literature and the visual arts attracted Neumann with its attention to social issues, modern life, and the everyday that both Verhaeren and Whitman addressed in their work. The second source, coming from the Soviet Union, however, seems to have had a more concrete impact on Neumann's work. With this turn towards the Russian intellectual environment, Neumann to an extent negated his earlier anarchic views.

It was the Soviet Proletkult that Neumann found particularly inspiring, although he did not identify with all of its goals. Proletkult was established in the Soviet Union in 1917 as an organisation supporting art that was created *by* the proletariat and *for* the proletariat. After the revolution, the people were expected to build a new cultural system to help defeat the old bourgeoisie.[48] Art was to be given a new role – to "inspire society to productive labour and break down the boundaries between refined culture and daily life."[49]

Neumann's embrace of communism and the Soviet ideology is linked to his acceptance of the 1917 revolution in Russia despite his original scepticism about its method.[50] He found Proletkult's spokesman Anatoly Lunacharsky (1875–1933), the Soviet art critic and politician, especially influential for his belief in the ability of proletarian culture to improve the lives of the proletariat, and for his sympathies to modern art. Other Soviet writers and thinkers, such as Maxim Gorky, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, were equally important for Neumann at this stage, although their attitude to modern art was much more critical than Lunacharsky's and Neumann's. Lenin, moreover, did not identify with the Proletkult, which he considered to be a threat to the party's authority.[51] All of them were published in the two main journals run by the leftist intellectuals in Bohemia and Czechoslovakia – *Kmen* (Trunk) was founded in 1917, while *Červen* (June) in 1918; both were highly selective in the kinds of articles they included. In *Kmen*, for instance, Neumann refused to publish any work of young poets unless it was comprehensible to an ordinary reader and supportive of the socialist revolution.

Inspired by the Soviet model, the Czech Proletkult was established on 14 August 1921 and announced in the newspaper of the communist party, *Rudé právo* (Red Justice).[52] Neumann's articles "Proletkult," published in *Červen* in September, and "Proletářská kultura" (Proletarian Culture) outlined its main aims.[53] These were: the education of culturally neglected people, and the removal of cultural divides between different classes. The means by which this should be achieved were identified by Neumann and the Proletkult committee as a foundation of various workers clubs, schools, and universities to engage workers in science, physical education, art, and general education. Eventually, this would lead to the end of class divisions, when "healthy results of bourgeois culture will merge with valuable results of proletarian culture" to create "a single national culture accessible to all people – a socialist culture."[54] This socialist culture, Neumann hoped, would therefore be the next step up from proletarian culture, which would importantly not avoid incorporating some aspects of the so-called bourgeois culture. This was an important acknowledgment from Neumann of the middle-class cultural heritage, most probably informed by Lunacharsky's ideas. The Soviet critic held that "in both science and art the proletariat will develop its own independent forms, but it should also make use of all the cultural achievements of the past and present in this task."[55]

These suggestions were often pronounced by the Czech Proletkult, both the organisation and its weekly, established in 1922. They were crucial platforms for

the formation of communist ideology and the formulation of proletarian art, even though they did not last long – the weekly ceased to exist in 1924 and was replaced by *Komunistická revue* (The Communist Revue, 1924–1933), and *Reflektor* (1925–1929).[56] The Proletkult journal offered lively discussions about proletarian culture and its role in the future of the state, yet these remained mainly limited to literary attempts and theoretical discussions, and did not offer any practical solutions as to what proletarian art should actually look like, and to what extent it should be (and indeed can be) created by the working class or for the working class.

Architecture and the People

Even though Neumann suggested various ways forward with proletarian culture, his calls were mostly left unanswered within visual arts practice. Beyond the Proletkult, however, it was a number of Czech architects, architecture theorists, and designers who started looking for a solution of how to address the issue of class and the comprehensibility of art. Many wanted to devise forms of visual expression that were simpler and unpretentious and thus more accessible to the working-class people. This included a departure from "pre-war artism" that critics associated with Formalism and "from an individual artistic form [in favour of] a broader general comprehensibility and utility, even at the price of a reduction in expressiveness," as the architect Pavel Janák put it.[57] As an architect, designer, and commentator on artistic and cultural affairs, Janák was responsible for a number of Cubist and Functionalist buildings in Prague and around Bohemia.

The call for the search for popular forms that would appeal to broader audiences and new political circumstances was answered by the Cubist architect Josef Gočár, and the sculptor Otto Gutfreund, who were both mentioned favourably in Neumann's 1913 *Otevřená okna* manifesto. Gočár also used Cubist and later Functionalist architectural language, while Gutfreund moved from Cubism to a more realistic expression, and both frequently received public commissions. After WWI, in the new state of Czechoslovakia, Gočár and a number of other architects, most prominently Janák, tried to develop a style that would reflect its newly acquired political independence and statehood. Janák, especially, was conscious of the crucial role that architecture could play in the new state, as was clear from his article discussed in the introduction to this book. Architecture should provide new typology for living, as well as a new form of living for all of the classes, he claimed and continued: "the nation needs to be accommodated and it will need a dwelling that is correspondent to its race, and it will also want a roof above its head the shape of which is [pleasing] the eye, which complements the idea of the nation," he claimed in 1918.[58] The architect in the new state, Janák held, needed to be both practically minded to come up with a "typically national" architecture, and he needed to be poetic, so that he could relate his work and ideas to his homeland.[59] The latter call can be related to Janák's embrace of decorative elements in architecture with which he tried to devise a new style that would be purely Czech (or Czechoslovak).

Together with Gočár, Janák wanted to combine the legacy of pre-war Cubist architecture with what were held to be Slavic traditions. These were often identified in the layout, material, most often wood, and a bright colour scheme. The result was a short-lived phenomenon, known as the National Style, previously called Rondocubism, or Decorativism, which was typified by the external ornamentation of the buildings'

facades.[60] The colourful decoration inspired by vernacular architecture was applied to official buildings, most often banks, administrative buildings, or churches, such as the Bank of the Czechoslovak Legions in Prague from 1922 by Gočár or Janák's crematorium in Pardubice from 1921–1923.[61] As Janák stated in his theoretical writings, he – and the other architects – was looking for forms "that would appeal to the understanding of the common folk."[62] Janák was a long-standing defender of applying what he termed "authentic," that is, vernacular forms, which he associated with unpretentious and genuine expressions of ancient folk art and "Czechness."[63] While he rejected the passive adoption of forms from vernacular architecture and a repetition of vernacular details, he called for a more spiritual association of architecture with the land (both physical and mental) in which it was rooted.[64]

According to Vendula Hnídková, however, of the main architects in the 1920s, only Janák possessed a vision of what a future national architecture should look like; one that had a concrete influence on the architectural development after 1918.[65] He argued for the dynamisation of the architectural mass and its liberation from the traditional architectonic elements with the aim of creating a uniform whole. Importantly, Janák claimed that architects should take into account the social needs of the nation, the local conditions, as well as the once rejected usefulness and practicality, which makes architecture national art: "if [our architecture] should become national, it must start […] organising the purpose of Czech life."[66] Architecture that took into account social purpose was, for Janák, *national* architecture, because it served the people and the nation. This was an important acknowledgement in Janák's writing – that the role of architecture within the nation was intimately linked to its social role.

Janák also looked elsewhere for parallels and contrasts in the approach to socially engaged architecture. With a high degree of criticism, he contrasted the social awareness in Czech architecture with contemporary efforts in Germany and Vienna: "Imperial German modern architecture, unstable in its artistic foundations, established without a system and relation to the mass, […] is a hotbed of moral decay and rot for its nation."[67] Correspondingly, the modern architecture of Vienna was, for him, "limited to artistic systems (however wrongly laid out), alienated from and detesting the social purpose, and therefore lacking national significance."[68] Without making an explicit reference to any ethnic links, his criticism was obviously directed against what he saw as a Germanic tradition of architecture in both Austria and Germany.

The social role of architecture in the new state was an important point that Janák raised in 1918 and which many others, such as the avant-garde spokesman, designer, art critic and poet Karel Teige (1900–1951), and the architect and theorist Jaromír Krejcar (1895–1950), also picked up. Janák also called for creating a new typology of buildings because "neither the nation as a whole nor the individuals have a corresponding and agreeable accommodation."[69] The task of an architect therefore was, in his view, to come up with the right form and spatial quality of a Czech detached house, apartment building, town garden, villa colonies, and the entire urban development. Janák's new typology and urbanism needed to reflect the latest consequences of the Czech soil and spirit. In other words, new architecture in the new state must be useful to the new society because until now, Czech architecture lagged behind Czech life.

The deliberations about the social aspect of architecture – and contemporary living in general – which architects started putting into words and practice after 1918, had a longer history though, predating the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. It reflected

the overall attention to the living conditions of workers in Central Europe in the first decades of the 20th century.[70] Masaryk had already touched on this topic in 1904 in his lecture entitled "A Modern View of Women."[71] The lecture, reported on in the journal *Naše doba* (Our Times), was significant for its enlightened attitude to gender issues, emancipation, and equality, but also outlined social tasks of both women and men.[72] Referring to the American sociologist and writer Charlotte Perkins-Gilman, who demanded relief of women from house chores by promoting professionalisation of childcare and housekeeping, Masaryk also expressed his interest in collective living. Houses with collectivised services would both emancipate women and lead to a social re-education of the working classes.[73]

Interest in affordable housing was also partly behind the rising popularity of the detached house as an alternative to the collective housing projects. Villas that catered for a single family were already promoted by Kotěra and Jurkovič before the war, and were discussed in the previous chapter. These attempts were prompted by the interest in the English house, which as, for instance, Zdeněk Wirth had claimed, could be turned into a housing colony, or a garden city for workers. Writing in 1910, he referred to examples in Bournville, United Kingdom, established by George Cadbury, and to Krupp's colony Essen in Germany, which were soon followed by many others across Germany.[74] Yet the idea that modern architecture could resolve social problems was halted by WWI, and revived only after 1918 by leftist architects and designers.[75] New housing for workers, which would provide better hygienic conditions, was therefore not developed until the late 1920s in cities with large industrial needs, such as Zlín, Brno, and indeed Prague.[76]

What needs to be stressed, too, though is that the rise in attention to the socially engaged architecture took place as a part of a broader building and designing activity in Czechoslovakia. In the early 1920s, many official, representative buildings were designed by more conservative architects, for example, Antonín Balšánek, mentioned already in relation to the Municipal House, and Josef Sakař in Prague, who were only gradually replaced by those with a more progressive vision.[77] Both of them sat on the State Planning Commission in the early twenties, and only gradually were replaced by Wagner's pupils, Antonín Engel (1879–1958), an architect of Neo-Renaissance and Neo-Classicism, and Bohumil Hypšman (1878–1961), whose initial historicist designs developed into a more functionalist style, and eventually by Janák in the mid-twenties. The language of historicism and Art Nouveau that had been established in the Czech lands was nevertheless applied to buildings of a different purpose: especially those linked with business, administration, and state representation. Official buildings, including banks, insurance companies, and government offices often adopted a monumental classicist language.

After 1918, state priorities were redefined, and the attention to social issues in architecture took place alongside the creation of a new visual symbolism of the emerging state. Importantly, existing structures were also updated, both structurally and ideologically. President Masaryk initiated the reconstruction of the Prague castle in a way that would combine representative and classicist ideas, and, at the same time, would appeal to broader audiences across the social spectrum. With the creation of Czechoslovakia, the castle once again became the seat of the head of state, but it was in serious need of architectural renewal. It was only rarely that politicians and architects openly discussed the cultural and political identity of the architecture of

the new state.[78] Masaryk, even though he was not intimately involved in the reconstruction of the castle, expressed his views on art and the state a few times. And even though his opinions were not the official policy of the Czechoslovak state, the weight of Masaryk's personality gave them enough significance.[79]

Masaryk, too, believed in the ability of art to educate people. Informed of John Ruskin's ideas, art could lead to ethical goals and help learning. As Berglund pointed out, Masaryk found Ruskin's call for private *as well as* public buildings to be planned in every detail as examples of great artistry, so that "the whole nation might be elevated aesthetically and morally, and general education might be spread."[80]

In his treatise written about the impact of WWI on world politics, philosophy, and culture, *Světová revoluce* (World Revolution*)*, Masaryk placed art and aesthetics amongst the founding pillars of the state and politics.[81] He identified some of the key tasks in the new state, which included creating new "democratic symbolism and ceremonies of the state."[82] Turning the monarchist castle into a democratic building, or thinking about its democratic garden and park were part of this project.

To carry out this project, Masaryk did not commission a Czech (let alone a Slovak, German, or Jewish) architect, but the Slovene Jože Plečnik (1872–1957), who was based in Prague at the time as a professor at the School of Applied Art. His appointment for the work on the castle could therefore be seen as part of the narrative that the new state abandoned inward-looking nationalism, and consciously embraced internationalisation. It could have also been, as Rostislav Švácha recently pointed out, a conscious gesture aimed at strengthening links with Southern Slavs. There had been close ties between the Czechs and the Slovenes for several decades – many Slovenes studied at Prague university, a number attending Masaryk's lectures, sharing his ideas on the national question, realism, and moderate Slavism.[83] On top of that, the Little Entente alliance, consisting of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania, promoted relations between these countries on a political as well as cultural level. [84]

The vision for the renewed castle was influenced by a number of people, including the Chancellor Přemysl Šámal, a number of architects, and Masaryk's daughter Alice.[85] She shared her father's vision of the castle as a democratic seat, and, as a believer in the moral and physical health of people, considered the castle and its architecture vital for reshaping of the Czech nation.[86] On top of that, she understood the castle as a divine fortress; a sacred acropolis. Plečnik's reconstruction therefore represented this union, using paraphrases of classical architecture and local architectural heritage, as well as the Slavic folk tradition [fig. 3.2].[87] These could be seen as a sign of Plečnik's conservative approach, but also as his attempt to relate to Czech history and culture. As Cynthia Paces suggested, through the use of the classical elements Plečnik saw a relation between Czechoslovak and Greek democracies.[88]

For Alice Masaryková (1879–1966), Plečnik's approach secured a preservation of the vision of unity between the new state, new society, and architecture of the castle. Writing to her father, she declared that "our house will be in such order, just as you wish for the whole republic."[89] Plečnik held a similar view of the role of architecture in providing social rejuvenation and help, even though his work was intimately linked with various institutions and usually affected the common people indirectly.

By referring to the castle as "our house," Alice Masaryková, as well as her father, tried to create a sense that the presidential seat was a democratic institution for all. In other words, the ruling class, in this case, the president, recreated its symbolic seat

Figure 3.2 Jože Plečnik, Hall of Columns, Prague Castle, ca. 1927–31. National Technical Museum, Museum of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Prague, f. 77.

to appeal to the common people, who they wished would accept the castle as a new national symbol. And by reconstructing the castle into a symbol which was deemed democratic and aesthetically appealing, they also tried to remodel the people into a democratic, more aesthetic nation.

Proletarian Art and the Čapek Brothers

Art and architecture with a wide appeal became a concern to many art theorists who, to start with, had attempted to define what art of the proletariat and its function was. Yet, the views of what such art of the proletariat, or proletarian art should look like, and what its purpose should be, differed considerably as much as views on the function of modern art in general differed. In 1925, the writer, playwright, and journalist Karel Čapek provided an overview of how the notion of proletarian art was categorised at the time.[90] His acquaintance with Masaryk should be mentioned in this connection, as Čapek is often seen as one of those who helped to disseminate Masaryk's (and the castle's) narrative through the published conversations between the two of them, which had started in 1925.[91] Čapek's concern with the working class and the proletarian culture could therefore be related to Masaryk's own thinking outlined already in *Otázka sociální* (The Social Question), a polemical debate with Marxism, and in *Ideály humanitní*, which I have mentioned earlier.[92]

Čapek's focus was on the various kinds of contemporary proletarian art. The first was the art created by the proletariat; the second was the art that took the proletariat as its subject; the third consisted of the art created for the proletariat, and, finally, there was the art that was determined by the spirit or belief in the proletariat's rule. Such spirit lies in the collective, revolutionary, international quality of the art. He critically evaluated all of these categories in reference to literature and the visual arts. The art made by the proletariat had not seen work of any outstanding quality and was mainly derivative, Čapek argued. Similarly, the intellectuals who, for some reason, subscribed to the proletarian revolution failed and produced "exclusive lyricism meant for a very narrow literary environment."[93] And those who chose the proletariat as their subject, often consider the workers from a superior position of the bourgeoisie and "examine the proletariat like some peculiar and extraordinary animal."[94]

Čapek also did not have much time for the art that was created for the working class. This art, often tried to present revolutionary ideas in an accessible, simplified form, but according to Čapek, "art for a political party does not necessarily mean art for the people."[95] The art inspired by the ideology of the proletarian revolution was, for Čapek, another dead end. Creative typography; theatre of the masses; evocations of exotic, distant lands; odes to heavy machinery could be entertaining for the creators, but they remained detached from the true proletariat. Without naming them, he expressed disapproval of the attempts of S. K. Neumann and other artists who will be mentioned shortly, such as Karel Teige and Jaroslav Seifert.

Instead, proletarian art was, for Čapek, such that was readily consumed by the proletariat – it did not pretend it could change the world; had a wide appeal; did entertain, and contained permanent values, such as love, beauty, excitement, adventure, and justice. It also should be vulgar in a down-to-earth sense, and this was a quality that did not necessarily appeal to the class-conscious proletariat of the communist persuasion. Čapek's concern was therefore not the proletariat as a political entity, but the people in the broadest possible sense. He talked about art for the people, which could be understood as popular art and popular culture in the contemporary sense of the expression.[96]

Karel's elder brother, Josef Čapek, the painter, illustrator, and writer, took similar interest in the question of what could be called "popular" art. He was one of the artists and writers who took notice of the close relation between artistic production and its social and political setting. He considered the influence of politics on art and design, but also contemplated the active role that art could have in forming politics and society. These ideas were also reflected in his practical work – not only in the subject matter, incorporating objects of everyday life, popular culture, and images of urban life, but also in the form which used post-Cubist simplification and references to dilettantism and naivety [fig. 3.3].[97]

Josef Čapek found the social usefulness of such art in its ability to bring an artistic element to the wider masses. "Art is not and should not be luxurious and one can see that it could thrive even under modest circumstances," he argued.[98] In the times when society was undergoing crucial transformation, Čapek claimed that art did not have to be lavish or exclusive, it needed to be more popular, that is, accessible to the people. "It is strange that even socialism considers art as something of a luxury, as a special sprout of culture, as a soft, by-product of civilisation," he remarked critically.[99] The working class needed "socialised" art, alongside all of the other socialised things that it had not had access to until now. Art was the product of work order, "of the

Figure 3.3   Josef Čapek, Woman's Head, 1910. Paper, linocut. Gallery of Modern Art Roudnice
nad Labem. G77.

formative, active relation with the mass, world, life and a human being."[100] As Vojtěch
Lahoda has pointed out, Čapek found inspiration for these views in the writings of
Walt Whitman, whose "modern man" was democratic and embracing of all people,
regardless of their race, social rank, or gender.[101]

Josef Čapek expressed his interest in the question of popular, or amateur, art forms,
most prominently in a collection of essays published as *Nejskromnější umění* (The
Humblest Art) in 1920.[102] His focus was not on folk art understood as the art of the
peasants, but rather on what he called art "without ambitions." Examples of such
art were amateur shop signs, pottery, toys, or photography, while he also focussed on
their relation to high art. Čapek saw the art of everyday life as the expression of popu-
lar culture produced by unambitious amateurs, which was nevertheless self-sustaining
and inspiring for professional artists. He did not talk, therefore, "about folk art as it is
habitually understood: national or peasant art."[103] Instead, his idea of contemporary
popular, or amateur, art was "the work of artisans and dilettantes from amongst the
people; urban art, or rather – suburban art" – and the creators of the art he analysed
were the inhabitants of towns and cities rather than villages and the countryside.[104]
Čapek found analogies between such art and the art of the *primitifs*, such as the French
naivist Henri Rousseau, or the 16th century painter Hans Holbein; both of which
Čapek linked to modern art.[105]

Despite his main focus on urban and "suburban" primitive art, Čapek also addressed
the art of the countryside. The roots of folk art, in the sense of peasant art, lay – in

his view – in the "tradition of the high art styles and in its own spirit."[106] By contrast, urban "amateur art" was, he argued, accidental, and disconnected from the specific culture and although at times inspired by higher art, it retained a certain level of purity, originality, and its own common sense.[107] His own practice reflected these theories. Around 1920, he inclined to naïve artistic expression, and wanted to "achieve even simpler and less stylised levels than Naivism was in the stage of the humblest art."[108] In the 1930s he became interested in rural themes and peasants. The bright colours and decorative lines of his paintings with subjects from the Slovak countryside evoked the idea of a simple, unspoilt life, which was as this time to be found in villages.

It is clear that Čapek was interested in primitivism in the broadest sense, and this included an awareness of the art of the "primitives" of Africa and Polynesia. He discussed this topic in a number of articles and his book, *Umění přírodních národů* (The Art of Native Peoples) published in 1938, however, was written several years earlier.[109] He saw the native art as a creative art that did not only copy and imitate reality, but rather, created a new reality in itself.[110] In short, whether it was African primitive objects, city folklore, or low art, Čapek was fascinated by any art that came, in his view, from untrained individuals whose artistic honesty and naivety could be used as inspiration for contemporary art. In his view, their apparent simplicity, with its elementary and inward quality, its spirituality and its plainness had the virtue of depth in contrast to what he saw as the superficiality of much contemporary art and culture.[111]

The appeal of simplicity, inward quality, and spirituality of what many considered as naïve art had parallels in other places across Europe during the interwar period, for instance, in France, Germany, Great Britain, and Yugoslavia. At St. Yves, for instance, the naïve seascapes of the painter Alfred Wallis represented an alternative to urban modernism and inspired a number of trained artists, while Wassily Kandisky of The Blue Rider found inspiration not only in Russian icons and prints, but in contemporary Bavarian religious work.[112]

At the heart of this search for new inspiration was artists' dissatisfaction with traditional institutions and the state of the artistic practice.[113] Artists searched for autonomous, authentic forms not burdened by academic training. Čapek, for instance, was familiar with contemporary German and French writing on the topic, especially Worringer's "Entwicklungsgeschichtliches zur modernsten Kunst," (History of the Development of Modern Art), and *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (Abstraction and Empathy).[114] Worringer caught the attention of Čapek and many other artists of the Skupina by his belief that abstraction predated modern abstract art and was common to all peoples and times. Influential were also the ideas on Cubism in André Salmon's *La jeune peinture francaise* (Young French Painting), and Guillaime Apollinaire's writing, frequently translated and commented on in *Volné směry*.[115] Apollinaire brought up the importance of African art for contemporary artists and saw connections between various artistic tendencies of the present and the past.

"Primitive" Art and Primitivism

Leaving aside the fascination with folk art and the noble peasant discussed in the previous chapter, the interest in primitive forms in Bohemia predates the interests of the Cubists. It goes back to the beginning of the century and coincides with the search for new forms of expression within modern art. As early as 1905, the literary historian Arne Novák (1880–1939) turned attention to the work of anonymous medieval

"primitivists," which was typical, he argued, of the "purity and richness of [the artist's] individuality."[116] Commenting on exhibitions of the *primitifs flamands* in Bruges, Sienese painting in Siena, medieval sculpture in Düsseldorf and French primitives in Paris, he appealed to contemporary artists to reconnect with their elementary roots and honesty in a similar way.[117] Equally, Emil Filla discussed the parallels between the "primitive art" of Giotto or Masaccio and French Cubism in 1911.[118] He compared what he called their neo-primitivism to the simplicity of forms, motives, and movements of "the early primitivism" of Giotto and his followers, who found inspiration in the tradition of Byzantine art.[119] According to Filla, the Neo-Primitivists, however, aimed to revive their art without the burden of traditions, especially those of Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism.[120] This type of primitivism sought abstraction and dematerialisation of form, and, as such, represented yet another kind of modern artistic renewal based on what was understood as primitive art.

These affiliations were expressed in a number of articles in *Umělecký měsíčník*, which discussed a range of topics from mediaeval and Baroque European art and El Greco, to Egyptian craft, which had influenced the members of the Group of Fine Artists. El Greco, in particular, was praised by, for example, Emil Filla.[121] Filla, most probably drawing on similar ideas expressed by Julius Meier-Grafe and Max Dvořák, related El Greco's "indigenous ideas," linearism and symbolic and psychological expression to the contemporary efforts of the Czech artists in a bid to show one of the possible sources for the renewal of modern art.[122]

Apart from the early mediaeval art and the art of the non-European peoples, many Czech artists and art critics became fascinated by the work of Henri Rousseau, whose work was well-known in Bohemia and who Čapek had also mentioned in *Nejskromnější umění*.[123] Rousseau's *Self-Portrait* was purchased for the Modern Gallery in Prague in 1923 and his correspondence was published in the journal *Volné směry* in the following year. A short essay by Wilhelm Uhde, a German art critic and collector, on the artist was not published in the same journal until 1929, but reports on his exhibitions had often appeared here and in other publications.[124] This certainly contributed to the popularity of what the art critic Václav Nebeský (1889–1949) called the "conscious primitivism" of Čapek and others in the early 1920s. The other artists included the surrealist František Muzika (1900–1974), whose work developed from classical Cubism to more metaphysical, surrealist images during the 1920s; the landscapist and painter Rudolf Kremlička (1886–1932), who engaged in naivist forms, especially in his figurative paintings and drawings; and the caricaturist, writer, and editor of *Lidové noviny*, Adolf Hoffmeister (1902–1973).[125]

The 1923 issue of *Volné směry* can therefore almost be taken as an interwar manifesto of primitivism – it included Guillaume Apollinaire's text on Rousseau, titled "Celník" [Le Douanier]; reproductions of the painter's work, and a photograph of the façade of the Bank of the Czechoslovak Legions designed by Gočár, with a frieze depicting the Czechoslovak legions marching through Siberia by the sculptor Otto Gutfreund.[126] While the architecture of the bank was indebted to Slavonic vernacular features and colour scheme, Gutfreund's relief, which stretches over the length of the building, embraces civilist forms which reduce the amount of detail in favour of more geometric expression.

In the first decade following the end of WWI, approach to primitivism in Czech modern art developed considerably. While the pre-war fascination with primitivism stemmed more out of a search for unspoilt, pure expression found in the art of

children or exotic people (both foreign and local), in the early years of the new state the attention to the primitivist forms, whether local, foreign or historic, could be seen as a reaction to the experience of WWI and the subsequent disenchantment with the current state of civilisation and social order. These ideas chimed with the theories of the Austrian writer and art critic Hermann Bahr (1863–1934), who was well known in the Czech environment through translations of his texts as well as personal contacts. He had a prominent position among Czech artists, musicians, and art critics for his sympathies with the Czech national cause prior to 1918 and was described by the Czech playwright and librettist Jaroslav Kvapil as someone who "loved the Czech spirit, Czech culture, [and] Czech art."[127] In relation to primitivist art, Bahr recommended flying away from civilisation that was destructive to lives and souls. Artistic inspiration, he claimed, should be found in the "primitive man, driven by fear of nature, [who] sought refuge within himself."[128] In the context of interwar Czech modern art, Bahr's plea often translated into an artistic search for pure forms outside of the "civilised" bourgeois environment.

The turn to the art of the proletariat, the so-called proletarian art that I am discussing here, therefore occurred alongside a more general turn to primitivism, including art found in distant, unspoilt lands. While not exactly the culture or art of a *primitive*, uncivilised man, the artistic production of an ordinary worker contained many of the desired features of untrained anonymous dilettantes that many artists and art critics hoped could renew postwar art.

After Proletkult: Devětsil and Poetism

In Czechoslovakia, the reality of the new state was seen by many as a promise of a reorganisation of the class system. Many incoming artists were members of or sympathised with the communist party and strove for social and class change. The collective, anti-individualistic, and anti-Formalist character of art was the aim for many of them. The interwar attempts to establish a new visual language that would in some way involve the working classes were linked with both individuals (artists, art critics) and groups. The most influential of the latter, Devětsil, formed around Karel Teige in 1920.[129] Devětsil's scope covered a variety of art forms – visual culture in the most general sense (including architecture, design, film, photography), literature, theatre, and had a wide membership, including the architects Chochol and Krejcar, the poets Jaroslav Seifert, Jiří Wolker, Vítězslav Nezval, and the painters František Muzika, Jindřich Štýrský (1899–1942), Toyen (1902–1980), and Josef Šíma (1891–1971).[130] They all stood on the political left, and, for that reason, their art was set out to be revolutionary and "tendentious" – in a combination of politics and art. As Wolker and Teige outlined where "every art conscious of its task has been tendentious. Proletarian art is more tendentious than others."[131] Tendentious art reached many art forms in the 1920s and 1930s, including music and theatre. For instance, the production of the politically vocal Osvobozené divadlo (The Liberated Theatre) was linked with the directors E. F. Burian and Jindřich Honzl, and actors Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich.[132] Their plays, sketches, and songs criticised contemporary social injustices, politics, and rising totalitarianism.

Teige was the spokesman of the Prague Devětsil and advocate of a version of "people's art" in interwar Czechoslovakia.[133] He saw in *people's art* an unspoilt, urban culture, the "freshness" of which could act, he believed, as a potential impulse for the new modern art of an ideal classless society.[134] In this context, the art of the people

comprised the practices of the urban working class and not those of the peasantry, and thus gave a very different meaning to the idea of people's art. Indeed, Teige did not have much time for the idealised and sentimental folk art of the villages, which he understood to be a historical relic, now placed in the "coffin of the museum," which was itself a concern of the past.[135] Similarly, he despised the folk art inspiration in, for instance, the "loud, painterly play-acting" of Joža Uprka, or the "inexhaustible and inartistic slush" of Alfons Mucha.[136]

For Teige, museums were detached from the contemporary world of industrial reality and the true authors of urban and suburban art. He emphasised the economic and social influences on art production and stressed the social links between the art of the 19th century and the rise of the bourgeoisie, and its consequent isolation of art from the rest of society.[137] This had led in his opinion to the commercialisation of art and to its dependency on the demands of the market and market value. At the same time, "capitalist industrialism gradually brought about the mass extinction of folk art production," which stood in opposition to official art.[138] This official art was associated with the ruling ideology, tradition, academicism, and the public sphere, and was exemplified by the works of Czech history painters such as Václav Brožík, Alfons Mucha and Vojtěch Hynais.[139] Bourgeois art was also accompanied by what he called "folk kitsch (*lidový kýč*) or kitsch for the people (*kýč pro lid*)," which represented the greatest decline in the quality of artistic production.[140] Teige understood these art forms to be the result of surplus production that was meant to deliberately keep people in ignorance.[141]

The view that kitsch was created for the masses brings to mind Clement Greenberg's discussion of the topic. In his view, kitsch, a product of Western industrialism, was not restricted to cities but "has flowed out over the countryside, wiping out folk culture."[142] For Greenberg the peasant who settled in the cities as proletariat required a new kind of culture for their consumption, which gave rise to kitsch. In contrast to Greenberg, however, Teige had much more faith in the working classes, whom he saw capable of *producing* and not only consuming proletarian art. Together with Čapek, he associated the art of the people with a rather romanticised working class, capable of creating a new independent art that would be of an international nature.[143] Both can therefore be seen as idealising urban culture as much as those, who especially Teige criticised, idealised the culture of the countryside.

It has to be stressed that, although Teige and other promoters of proletarian art turned their attention to the *urban* working classes, they still held an idealised view of them as much as their predecessors idealised the peasants. Teige also turned away from the bourgeois associations of high art informed by folk motives, to an anonymous and preferably classless *art of the people* in a classless society.[144] This future-oriented proletarian art was therefore to replace peasant art, which Teige associated with history, kitsch, and the bourgeoisie.[145]

It was in the manifesto of Devětsil from 1922 that Teige defined what he called proletarian art.[146] He once again acknowledged the role of the Russian revolution in turning art back to its social mission. Like Neumann, he was aware of Lunacharsky's ideas, and, recalling his thesis on the tasks of the working class, he firmly based art and art history in Marxist theory. The key feature of proletarian art was, for him, a "collective feeling and thinking;" it was derived from a person, found in the people, in the masses.[147] These ideas about the collective were closely related to French theory. The writer Charles Louis Philippe, for instance, depicted the poor with sympathy, and preceded by the Unanimists with their interest in human suffering and compassion with it. Jules Romains, another

French author, turned to defending individual rights across the social spectrum. The roots of his writing can be found in the sociology and psychology of the crowd related to the contemporary French sociologists, Émile Durkheim, Gustave Le Bon, and Gabriel Tarde. The emphasis on collectivism was seen as an antipode to cubofuturism and civilism, with their preference for individualism and l'art-pour-l'artism.

For Teige in the early 1920s, it was crucial that proletarian art retained a positive relationship with its class and remained comprehensible. The current popular art that the working class favoured – pulp literature, slapstick comedies, circus, Sunday football matches, and so on – were poor derivatives of the bourgeois culture as much as working class neighbourhoods were the "rubbish of industrial capitalistic metropolis."[148] Proletarian art, Teige suggested, should not present the worker with the harsh reality he or she encountered on every day basis, instead it should contain an element of romantic escapism – "not stories from lives of the poor, no images of mines and smelting works, but of tropical and distant lands" [fig. 3.4].[149] Such images could be associated with the work of, for example, the painter Jan Zrzavý (1890–1977),
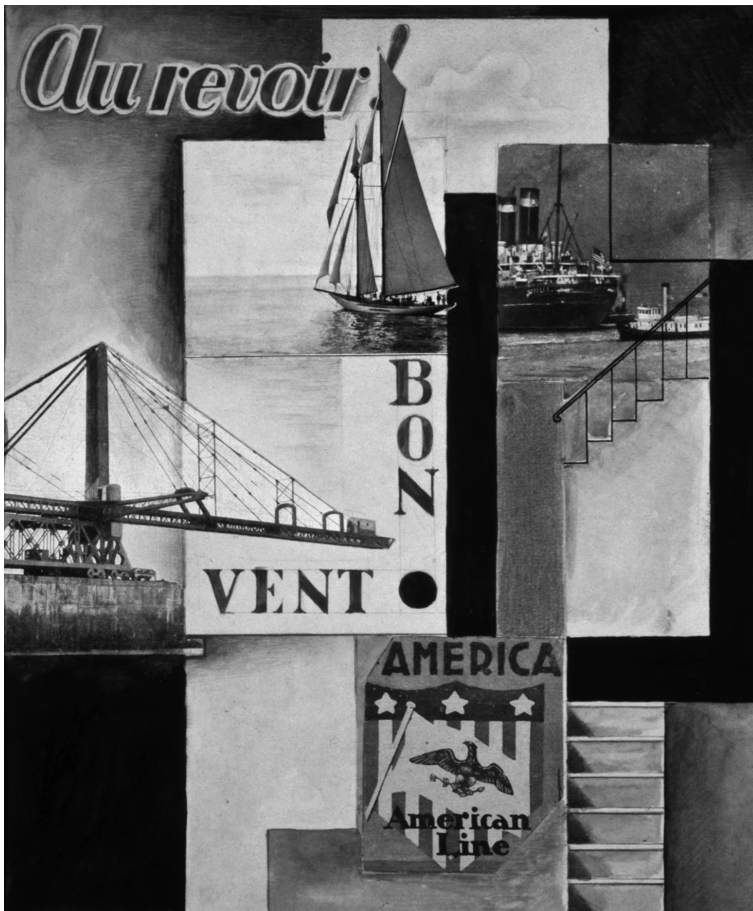
Figure 3.4 Teige Karel, Departure for Cythera, 1923. Collage. Prague City Gallery. K 2516.

a member of Sursum, Tvrdošíjní (The Obstinates), and Umělecká beseda, who depicted dream landscapes and still lifes with clear references to primitivism and mediaeval art. Contemporary artists could thus find inspiration in both Henri Rousseau and in anonymous artists from the people.

What is crucial, Teige also defined what proletarian art *was not,* and this included paintings on social topics by painters who depicted the working class, such as Courbet and Van Gogh. He also included 19th century caricature, Manet's naturalism or Ruskin's attempts to socialise art through the Arts and Crafts movement. These were, for Teige, authentic works of bourgeois art that did not offer any real change; they only adopted socialism through their depicted subjects.[150] Teige also disregarded what he called communist art, poems, and short stories that were only using a communist political formula.[151] He compared such works to the tendentious works of 19th century nationalism.

Similarly to Karel Čapek, Teige attempted a division of proletarian art. He distinguished between two kinds: one that he called true proletarian art, the new popular art, while the other was the traditionally conceived folk art that had survived in the villages. And both were embedded in the social structure of the new state. The latter had been derived from the culture of the ruling class, either feudal or bourgeois, which was a view shared also by Czech art historians like Antonín Matějček and V. V. Štech, which will be discussed in the next chapter. However, Teige announced that in socialist society, there would not be any difference between the art of the ruling class and the undercurrent of primary production, popular, proletarian art.

Such claims already contained elements of Poetism, a programme that Teige formulated in 1924 in an article of the same name and later developed in 1928 in "Manifest poetismu" (The Poetism Manifesto), which I will examine more closely in Chapter 5.[152] It was published in Devětsil's flagship magazine *Revue Devětsilu*, or *ReD*, which was edited by Teige and focussed on avant-garde production. It also included several other manifestos in its lifetime, such as the manifesto of Artificialism, composed by Toyen and Štýrský (1927) and proclamation of Levá Fronta, an organisation founded in 1929 to replace Devětsil, which will also be discussed in more detail later. According to the manifesto, Poetism was not a specific style or art in the traditional sense of the word, but rather a way of life which "integrated ourselves into the rhythm of collective European creation" and replaced "national insularity and parochialism."[153] The art of Poetism would rise from "the disappearance of handicrafts, the abolition of decorative art, mass production, norms, and standardization" and the "everyday activity of humankind," Teige argued.[154] It was a reaction against Romantic aesthetics and traditionalism. Poetism could use radio, optic, and acoustic inventions; the circus, dance, and music halls, and it should entertain and please the audience. According to Teige, Poetism wished "to heal the moral hangover and mental traumas" caused by the war, as well as illnesses that came out it, which he associated with expressionism.[155]

Teige's views on proletarian art therefore developed from an early embrace of Neumann's notion of comprehensible and tendentious art, to favouring constructivism and poetism, more in line with the international (one might say Western) avant-garde.[156] This is evident in the kinds of texts and reproductions that appeared in Devětsil's publications, too – they contained poems and texts by contemporary writers and poets, such as Seifert, Nezval, Vančura, images by Zrzavý, and later the Surrealist artists, Toyen and Štýrský.

Social art: HoHoKoKo

From the range of views of proletarian art outlined so far, it is clear that around the mid-1920s, opinions on what proletarian art was and ideas about its role in Czech (and Czechoslovak) society were indeed diversified. And while Teige, Neumann, and Karel Čapek mostly just theorised the proletariat and its art, there were some who attempted to translate the socialist ideas into artistic practice. The Sociální skupina (Social Group) was a grouping of artists who inclined to ideas of social and Socialist Realism. Originally entitled HoHoKoKo after the first two letters of the members' surnames, it was founded by the painters Karel Holan, Miloslav Holý (1897–1974), Pravoslav Kotík (1889–1970), and the sculptor Karel Kotrba (1893–1939). The group combined interest in contemporary, ordinary people with an attempt to revive a more classical, yet sufficiently modern visual language.[157] The founding members left Umělecká beseda and published a statement in the 1923 volume of *Život,* where they identified their roots in the traditions which, in their view, did not contradict being modern.[158] Here, Kotík, who in his own work focussed on everyday life, identified a tradition that artists should be aware of – that of the nation; the people [fig. 3.5]. He described its basis and meaning as a "deep sense of moral purity, justice, and the awareness of [the need to be] taking the side of those who suffer."[159] The painters Mánes, Aleš, Preisler, Slavíček, and Kubišta were, in his view, examples of such a sensibility as they placed the true (ordinary) man at the centre of their work. When art ceases to be exclusive and individualistic, it would appeal to all humankind and become collective, Kotík argued.
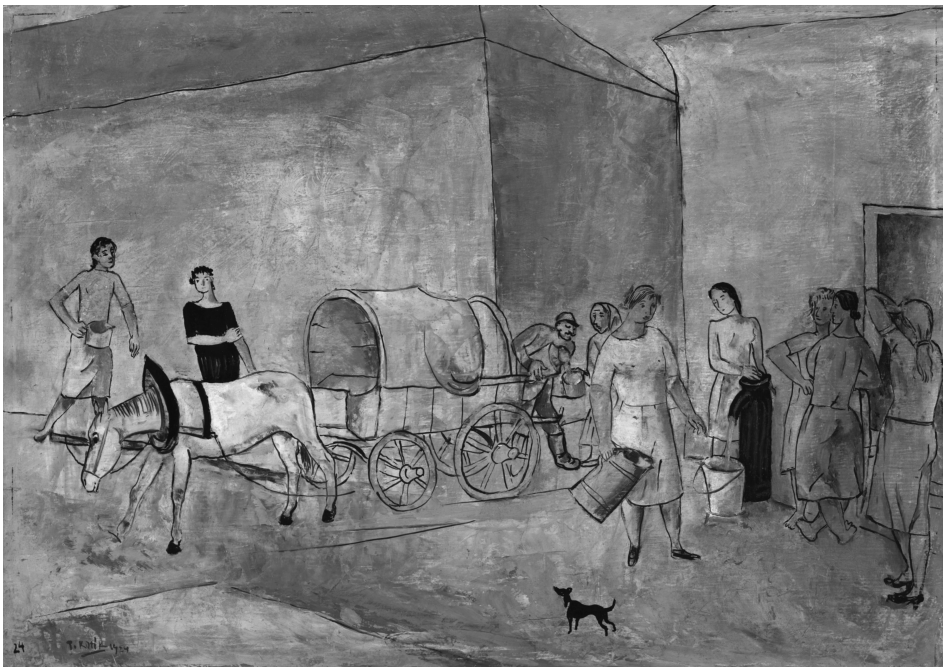
Figure 3.5 Pravoslav Kotík, In the Street, 1924. Oil, plywood. Olomouc Museum of Art. O1137. Photographer: Zdeněk Sodoma.

This position was mainly prominent in the Group's subject matter, which often focussed on social topics from rural or urban life, and put emphasis on depicting the psychological state of the subjects. The paintings from Prague peripheries, train lines, hospitals, and courtyards were meant as a critique of the social divide after WWI. Even though parallels with such social critique can be found in the work of some German artists, such as Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), the artists from the Social Group never openly embraced foreign influences in their work.[160] As Kotík put it,

> we do not want to copy Africa, China or France… we want to be knowledgeable of them, learn from them… but we do not just want to 'open the windows'. We want to be artistically independent, which does not mean a flippant individualism but rather a self-confidence of collectivism.[161]

Karel Holan, a painter of social motives from Prague outskirts, understood art as a part of life, and, for him, it had not only social but religious functions.[162] Such art was tendentious – an example being folk art or the art of the primitives, which aimed at creating both respect and horror. In a view close to Bahr's thoughts outlined earlier, he claimed that the war had discovered the little man who can enrich art by his "simplicity of his feeling, clear, primitive view of the present."[163]

Holan wanted to address these common people who were, in his view, often left forgotten – the peasants, workers, the gentle lovers, the mothers, the soldiers. Art should speak to the anonymous collective mass instead of being individualistic and self-important. Criticising Cubism, he called for tendentious art that would be formally perfect and accomplished in its implementation. "[Art] shall not be devoid of content, shall be rich in ideas the inner beauty of which will extort similarly beautiful formal expression."[164]

The Social Group did not live long, falling apart in 1927. Yet it embodied an alternative to the vision of proletarian art of the more radical left, represented by Teige, Neumann, or Čapek. The proletariat was certainly depicted in the paintings and sculptures of these individuals, yet most probably it was not the target audience. As Teige critically remarked, the working class did not wish to encounter the same miseries of everyday life in works of art.[165] Where these two groups did meet was in their view that art needed to be tendentious and it had to have a purpose, both political and social. They tried to achieve this by referencing proletarian culture.

Yet the limits of proletarian culture as a source of modern art became evident to a number of critics. One of the most outspoken ones was Ferdinand Peroutka (1895–1978), a journalist and political commentator. He was a close ally of T. G. Masaryk and an attendee of the so-called Pátečníci (the Friday Men), a group of culturally and politically active individuals of diverse political views. They included Josef Čapek, the minister of foreign affairs and Masaryk's successor, Edvard Beneš (1884–1948); the historian Josef Šusta, and, occasionally Masaryk, who met at Karel Čapek's house to discuss current issues as well as various lighter topics.[166] In his 1924 reaction to the Devětsil proclamations, Peroutka took an issue with the turn to the proletariat by artists and philosophers of the new state.[167] He criticised the assumption that the proletariat possessed "a new, self-contained, already formed culture" that can be readily referenced by modern artists. After all, the socialist idea, which as he claimed was the foundation of the proletariat, was formulated not by the proletariat itself, but rather by individual members of the bourgeois intelligentsia: "all the founding socialist

thinkers are bourgeois or aristocratic renegades… Owen, Marx, Engels, […] Lenin."[168] He also did not see the artistic efforts of Devětsil members as actively creating a new proletarian culture, but rather as "a negative criticism of the bourgeois aesthetics."[169]

Importantly, Peroutka focussed his critical attention on one of the key features of proletarian culture: its collectivity. He did not see it as a positive feature because, for him, it was a product of capitalism. He claimed that the proletariat preferred anonymous collectivity and that it was hostile to individualism. Yet it was happy to follow a leader, who was more often than not of bourgeois origin, as it did not have its own political or cultural will.[170] "If someone calls for dictatorship of the proletariat, they most probably mean dictatorship of those who hold the proletariat's hand," Peroutka argued.[171] Peroutka therefore did not share the rather romanticised view that many artists and art critics of the left had held of the people, and was more sceptical about their role in contemporary and future culture. He thus represents a more pragmatic outlook of the social structure in interwar Czechoslovakia and its potential to contribute to its culture and politics.

Conclusion

The war, the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, and continuing industrialisation and modernisation played a significant role in reshaping the social, political, and cultural landscape of the Czech lands. Many issues that Czech society faced already in Austria-Hungary became more prominent and pressing in the newly independent political structure. Class division, for one, became a key discussion topic and a political theme of many parties that predated Czechoslovakia or were created anew. The living conditions of the working class and housing shortages, and the potential role of art and architecture in improving the lives of the proletariat, were all widely discussed by politicians, art theorists, and artists.

It is in this period that art becomes especially politically engaged and that artists established a new relationship with the working class. The urban working classes – the proletariat – became a subject of artists, like the members of the Social Group, who focussed on their everyday experience. The proletariat was also made into an intended recipient of the new and somewhat challenging visual language that artists like Teige and Neumann tried to promote. Art created by the proletariat itself did not get much recognition, though, for its apparent lack of originality. On top of that, some authors, especially the Čapek brothers, called for completely new art that would be directed to the wider masses with the aim to provide entertainment and be generally popular on a large scale.

These different approaches to the so-called proletarian art and culture share an embrace of the anonymous "common" or "ordinary" man (rather than a woman) was identified in the working class. This urban working class also shared many features with the so-called ordinary people in the villages and with their culture – the people were equally anonymous and their art supposedly unspoilt and untrained. Yet the urban working class was also enrooted in uniformity and especially the international character of the proletariat. In the Czech lands, it provided an alternative to the ethnically tinted emphasis on the peasant as the bearer of Czech national qualities, which did not distinguish between individual minorities in Czechoslovakia. The Czech, German, Slovak, Hungarian, Jewish, Polish, and Ruthenian could all be seen as workers, the proletariat.

Common to all of these versions of proletarian art was the attempt to make modern art less elitist, exclusive, and individualistic. This was determined especially by the leftist political orientation of the artists and art critics concerned with the proletarian art based in Prague and other large cities, who argued for an art that would be more in touch with the people and have a more collective nature. Yet, underlying the theoretical calls for modern art to become more tendentious, more collective, and less elitist was a double irony. First, art in itself had bourgeois elitist and individualist origins, which was a fact that many of these writers tended to ignore. And second, these authors themselves approached the proletariat and their art from the position of an outsider – or even what could be seen as the cultural elite, which resulted in their often patronising attitude to them.

Notes

1 Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Ideály humanitní, několik kapitol* (Prague: Domov, 1919).
2 Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Česká otázka* (Prague: Čas, 1895).
3 Bruce R. Berglund, *Castle and Cathedral in Modern Prague: Longing for the Sacred in a Sceptical Age* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2017), 48–50.
4 Martin Wein, *History of the Jews in the Bohemian Lands* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 60; Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle. The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 32.
5 Tomáš G. Masaryk, *Ideály humanitní, několik kapitol* (Prague: Čin, 1946), 7–10.
6 Vít Procházka, "Masarykův humanitní ideál jako výzva dnešku (úvaha nad knihou Ideály humanitní)," E-polis.cz. Accessed June 2, 2017. http://www.e-polis.cz/clanek/masarykuv-humanitni-ideal-jako-vyzva-dnesku-uvaha-nad-knihou-idealy-humanitni.html.
7 George G. Heltai, "Changes in the Social Structure of the East Central European Countries," *Journal of International Affairs* 20, no. 1 (1966): 165. Aleksander Gella mentions 39 percent of inhabitants of Czechoslovakia working in agriculture and forestry. Aleksander Gella, "Time of Estate Order," *Development of Class Structure in Eastern Europe. Poland and Her Southern Neighbors* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 36.
8 Zdeněk Kárník, "České země a její obyvatelé," *České země v éře První republiky (1918–1938): Díl první. Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918–1929)* (Prague: Libri, 2000), 278–282. According to Kárník (301), manual workers made up about 58 percent of all people actively working.
9 Kárník, "České země," 510. After the war, the largest industry in Czechoslovakia continued to be textiles, followed by construction and metal manufacturing. In terms of ethnicity, workers were mostly Czech and German.
10 Workers also enjoyed a number of social security changes codified in law in the interwar times, which included 8-hour working day, unemployment and social benefits, health insurance, and their interests were also protected by the unions.
11 Zdeněk Kárník, "Specificky československý výstup ze světové hospodářské krize. Podíl Českých zemí na něm," in *České země v éře První republiky (1918–1938): Československo a České země v krizi a v ohrožení*, vol. 2 (Prague: Libri, 2002), 447.
12 Kárník, "Sociální hnutí dělnictva, nezaměstnaných a rolníků a jejich snesitelná I tragická vyústění – nástup socialist, komunistů a nacistů do krize," in *České země*, 97. In 1929, the German nationalistic party in Czechoslovakia had about 50% of workers as members, started social and nationalistic radicalisation and took an active part in workers' unrests.
13 Miroslav Hroch, "National romanticism," in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1770–1945). Texts and Commentaries. Volume Two: National Romanticism – The Formation of National Movements*, eds. Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), 6.

14 Karel Holan, "K tendenci současného umění," *Život* IV (1924): 82.

15 F. X. Šalda, "O literární příští," *Most* I (1922), quoted in Štěpán Vlašín, "Jaro poválečné generace," in *Avantgarda známá neznámá, vol. 1. Od proletářského umění k poetismu*, ed. Štěpán Vlašín (Prague: Svoboda, 1971), 18.

16 Michal Pullmann and Jakub Rákosník, "'Dělnická třída' v moderní sociální historiografii," *Dějiny – teorie – kritika* 2 (2007): 273.

17 Cf. also Chris Lorenz, "Representations of Identity: Ethnicity, Race, Class, Gender and Religion. An Introduction to Conceptual History," in *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, eds. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 24–59.

18 Peter Zusi, "Tendentious Modernism: Karel Teige's Path to Functionalism," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 3 (2008): 828.

19 The six others were the writers Ivan Olbracht, Helena Malířová, Marie Majerová, Vladislav Vančura, Jaroslav Seifert and Josef Hora. Cf. "Projev sedmi," in *Avantgarda známá a neznámáIII. Generační diskuse 1929–31*, ed. Štěpán Vlašín (Prague: Svoboda, 1970), 49–53; Josef Hora, "Spisovatel a politika," in *Avantgarda známá a neznámá III*, 68–69.

20 Stanislav K. Neumann, *Politická episoda* (Prague: Dr. Rudolf Brož, 1911), 83.

21 Stanislav K. Neumann, *Vzpomínky* (Prague: Svoboda, 1931), 84; cf. Also Neumann, Socialism a svoboda, 1904–1908 *(Bílovice nad Svitavou: S. K. Neumann,* 1909), reprinted in *Spisy a stati II* (Prague: SNKLU, 1966), 1–135.

22 Stanislav K. Neumann, "Umění a lid," in *Stati a projevy* I (Prague: SNKLU, 1964), 35. Originally in *Akademie* 3 (1898): 74–77.

23 Stanislav K. Neumann, "Umění, umělci a lid," in *Stati a projevy* I: 85–86. Originally in *Nový kult* (1900): 220–232.

24 Neumann, "Umění, umělci a lid," 89.

25 Karel Pelant, "Sociální demokracie a umění," *Akademie* (1898): 482.

26 Pelant, Sociální demokracie," 483.

27 Vilém Barnet, "Umění a lid," *Moderní revue* 3 (1903): 214.

28 Barnet, "Umění a lid," 220.

29 Barnet, "Umění a lid," 220.

30 Stanislav K. Neumann, "Otevřená okna," *Lidové noviny*, Aug 9, 1913, 1–2. Reprinted in Jiří Padrta, ed., *Osma a Skupina výtvarných umělců 1907–1917. Teorie, kritika, polemika* (Prague: Odeon, 1992), 138–140.

31 Neumann, "Otevřená okna," 139–140.

32 Neumann, "Otevřená okna," 140.

33 Anon, "Pryč s tradicí, pryč s Montmartrem," *Umělecký měsíčník* 3 (1913): 255–256.

34 Guillaume Apollinaire, *l'antitradition futuriste: manifeste-synthèse*, 29 June 1913. Reprinted in Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggy, Laura Wittman, eds., *Futurism. An Anthology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009): 152–154; Felix Del Marle, "Manifeste futuriste contre Montmartre" *Paris-Journal* (1913). Reprinted in Pontus Hulten, ed., *Futurism & Futurisms* (Venice: Palazzo Grassi, 1986), 463–464.

35 Anon, "Pryč s tradicí," 255–256.

36 N., "Mikuláš Aleš. K jeho šedesátým narozeninám," *Lidové noviny* (November 17, 1912): 1.

37 N., "Mikuláš Aleš," 2.

38 František Gellner, "Aleš ilustrátor," *Lidové noviny* (November 17, 1912): 2.

39 Gellner, "Aleš ilustrátor," 2.

40 Amédée Ozenfant, "Notes sur le Cubisme," *L'Elan*, no. 10 (1916), reprinted in "Notes on Cubism," *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 223.

41 Léonce Rosenberg, "Introduzione," *Valori Plastici* (1919): 1–3, reprinted as "Tradition and Cubism," in *Art in Theory*, 234 (234).

42 Stanislav K. Neumann, "Kubism, čili aby bylo jasno," in *Ať žije život* (Prague: František Borový, 1920), 230.

43 Padrta, *Osma a Skupina*, 190.

44 Neumann, "Kubism," 229.

45 Neumann, "Kubism," 229.

46 Neumann, "K otázce třídního umění," in *Konfese a konfrontace* II (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1988), 394.

47 František Kautman, "K hodnocení úlohy Neumannova Června," *Česká literatura* 15, no. 5 (1967): 396.

48 Cf. Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

49 Mally, *Culture of the Future*, 254.

50 František Kautman, "K hodnocení úlohy Neumannova Června," *Česká literatura* 15, no. 5 (1967): 384–419.

51 V. I. Lenin, "On Proletarian Culture," in *Art in Theory*, 383.

52 "Proletariátu!" *Rudé právo* (August 14, 1921), reprinted in *Avantgarda známá* I, 169–170.

53 Stanislav K. Neumann, "Proletářská kultura," *Červen* 4 (1921): 162–163. Reprinted in *Stati a projevy* V (Prague: Odeon, 1971), 227–230.

54 Neumann, "Proletářská kultura," 230.

55 Lunacharsky, *Rabochii put'* (October 17, 1917), quoted in Mally, *Culture of the Future*, 30.

56 František Kautman, "St. K. Neumann v letech 1922–1926," *Česká literatura* 16, no. 6 (1968): 632 (621–638).

57 Pavel Janák, "Čtyřicet let nové architektury za námi – pohled zpět," *Architektura* 2 (1940): 129–132.

58 Pavel Janák, "Národní věc a čeští architekti," *Národ* 2, no. 23 and 24 (1918): 295 and 305–306, quoted from Pavel Janák, "Národní věc a čeští architekti," in *Pavel Janák, Obrys doby*, ed. Vendula Hnídková (Prague: Arbor vitae, 2009), 100 (96–101).

59 Janák, "Národní věc," 100.

60 Vladimír Šlapeta, "Competing Ideas in Czechoslovakian Architecture," in *East European Modernism. Architecture in Czechoslovakia, Hungary & Poland between the Wars*, eds. Wojciech Lesnikowski and Vladimír Šlapeta (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 37; Marie Benešová, "Úsilí o moderní výraz. Architektura kubismu," in *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění IV, 1880–1938*, eds. Marie Nešlehová et al. (Prague: Academia, 1998), 253. Most recently on the topic Vendula Hnídková, "Rondokubismus versus národní styl," *Umění* 57, no. 1 (2009): 74–84.

61 Cf. Alena Janatková, *Barockrezeption zwischen Historismus und Moderne. Die Architekturdiskussion in Prag 1890–1914* (Zurich and Berlin: Gta Verlag and Gebr. Mann, 2000); Anthony Alofsin, *When Buildings Speak: Architecture as Language in the Habsburg Empire and its Aftermath, 1867–1933* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008); Vojtěch Lahoda, "Search for a 'Democratic' Shape in Czech Modernism at the beginning of the 1920s," *Centropa* 8 (2008): 26–35.

62 Pavel Janák, "Čtyřicet let nové architektury za námi – pohled zpět," *Architektura* II (1940): 129–132, quoted in Hnídková, "Rondokubismus," 74.

63 Pavel Janák, "Opět na rozcestí k svérázu," *Národ*, no. 32 (1917): 577.

64 Pavel Janák, "Ve třetině cesty," *Volné směry* 19 (1918): 218–226. Reprinted in Hnídková, ed. *Pavel Janák, Obrys doby*, 108–114.

65 Vendula Hnídková, *Národní styl, politika a kultura* (Prague: Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová, 2013), 55.

66 Janák, "Ve třetině cesty," in Hnídková, 112.

67 Janák, "Ve třetině cesty," in Hnídková, 113.

68 Janák, "Ve třetině cesty," in Hnídková, 113.

69 Janák, "Ve třetině cesty," in Hnídková, 113.

70 Ákos Moravánszky, "Architecture of Social Reform," in *Competing Visions: Aesthetic Invention and Social Imagination in Central European Architecture, 1867–1918* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1998), 410 (409–444).

71 Tomáš G. Masaryk, *Moderní názor na ženu: otisk přednášky z roku 1904* (Vyškov : Zemská organisace pokrokových žen moravských, 1930).

72 Ed., "Ženská otázka," *Naše doba* 12 (1904–1905): 233–236.

73 Hubert Guzik, "The Diogenes Family. The Collectivization of Accommodation in Bohemia 1905–1948," *Art in Translation* 1 (2009): 386 (381–417). Originally as Hubert Guzik, "Diogenova Rodina. Kolektivizace bydlení v Čechách 1905–1948, *Umění* 2 (2006): 162–176.

74 Zdeněk Wirth, *Malý dům a zahrada* (Hradec Králové: Městské průmyslové musezm, 1910), 15.

75 The topic will be revisited by Karel Teige in 1931 in his article on the minimum dwelling. Karel Teige, "Nejmenší byt," *Stavba IX* (1930–1931): 28–29, 47–49, 65–68. http://www.archiweb.cz/salon.php?action=show&id=2952&type=17; Cf. also Helen Meller and Heleni Porfyriou, *Planting New Towns in Europe in the Interwar Years: Experiments and Dreams for Future Societies* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016).

76 Anthony Alofsin, *When Buildings Speak: Architecture as Language in the Habsburg Empire and its Aftermath, 1867–1933* (Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), Zdeněk Kudělka and Jindřich Chatrný, *For New Brno: Brno's Architecture, 1919–1939* (Brno: Muzeum města Brna, 2000); Wojciech Leśnikowski, ed. *East European Modernism. Architecture in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland between the Wars* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); Rostislav Švácha, *The Architecture of New Prague, 1895–1945* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1995); Jaroslav Anděl, *New Vision for New Architecture: Czechoslovakia, 1918–1938* (Prague: Slovart, 2005).

77 The Construction Act of 1919, the newly established State Planning Commission for Prague and Environs (1920) and the Greater Prague Act were three most influential measures to regulate architecture. Švácha, *The Architecture of New Prague*, 148.

78 Jindřich Vybíral and Vendula Hnídková, "Architektura a politická moc," in *Budování státu*, 109.

79 Jan Herben, "Masaryk – umělecký zjev," *Volné směry* 26 (1928–1929): 286.

80 Tomáš G. Masaryk, "Ideals of Humanity," 168; Quoted from Berglund, *Castle*, 172.

81 Tomáš G. Masaryk, *Světová revoluce za války a ve válce 1914–1918* (Prague: Čin, 1925).

82 Masaryk, *Světová revoluce*, 563.

83 Irena Gantar Godina, "The Influence of T. G. Masaryk on the Slovenes up to 1914," in *T. G. Masaryk (1850–1937)*, vol. 1, ed. Stanley B. Winters (London: MacMillan, 1990), 115–116.

84 Lahoda, "Civilismus," 69.

85 Švácha, *The Architecture*, 174. Vybíral and Hnídková, "Architektura," 126.

86 Berglund, *Castle*, 7.

87 Vybíral and Hnídková, "Architektura," 126. Lively discussions were led not only about the part new architecture could play in the new state, but also about arts and crafts and their role in new society. Debates around what was called small arts, industrial art and applied art took place especially in the circles of designers, artists and art historians at the School of Art and Design in Prague, but reached more general public too. Articles about suitable decorations of interiors etc. were published in specialised journals such as *Volné směry* and *Styl*, but also in national papers like *Národní listy* and *Lidové noviny*, indicating the importance of these discussions for the wider public.

88 Cynthia Paces, *Prague Panoramas: National Memory and Sacred Space in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 146.

89 Alice Garrigue Masaryková to Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, October 8, 1925 in Berglund, *Castle*, 9.

90 Karel Čapek, "Proletářské umění," *Přítomnost* 2, no. 33, (1925): 518–519. Reprinted in *Avantgarda známá neznámá* II, 173–179.

91 Andrea Orzoff, "The Husbandman: Tomáš Masaryk's Leader Cult in Interwar Czechoslovakia," *Austrian History Yearbook* 39 (2008): 123.

92 Masaryk, *Otázka sociální: základy marxismu sociologické a filosofické* (Prague: Jan Laichter, 1898).

93 Čapek, "Proletářské umění," 176.

94 Čapek, "Proletářské umění," 176.

95 Čapek, "Proletářské umění," 176.

96 Cf. also Matthew S. Witkowsky, *Avant-Garde in Everyday Life: Early-Twentieth Century European Modernism* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2011).

97 Lahoda, "Search," 33.

98 Josef Čapek, "Sociální užitečnost umění," in *Věci a slova: umělecký průmysl, užité umění a design v české teorii a kritice 1870–1970*, eds. Lada Hubatová-Vacková, Martina Pachmanová and Pavla Pečinková (Prague: Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová, 2014), 233.

99   Čapek, "Sociální užitečnost," 234.

100 Čapek, "Sociální užitečnost," 234.

101 Lahoda, "Search," 31.

102 Josef Čapek, *Nejskromnější umění* (Prague: Dauphin, 1997), first published as Josef Čapek, *Nejskromnější umění* (Prague: Aventinum, 1920).

103 Josef Čapek, "Co potkáváme," in *Nejskromnější umění* (Prague: Dauphin, 1997), 83.

104 Čapek, "Co potkáváme," 83.

105 Čapek, "Tvář mrtvé strašná...," in *Nejskromnější umění*, 80.

106 Čapek, "A závěr," in *Nejskromnější umění,* 91.

107 Čapek, "A závěr," 91–92.

108 Pavla Pečinková, *Josef Čapek* (Prague: Galerie Zdeněk Sklenář, 2009), 60.

109 Josef Čapek, *Umění přírodních národů: stezky: dokumenty estetického tvoření* (Prague: Fr. Borový, 1938).

110 Josef Čapek, "Sochařství černochů" (1918), in *Moderní výtvarný výraz* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1958), 17.

111 Alena Pomajzlová, *Josef Čapek. Nejskromnější umění* (Prague: Obecní dům, 2003), 49. Pavla Pečinková suggested that the sources for Josef Čapek's interest in the "primitive" came partly from his brother's reading of, for example, Ernst Grosse, *Die Anfänge der Kunst* (Freiburg and Leipzig: Mohr, 1894); Yrjo Hirn, *The Origins of Art A Psychological and Sociological Enquiry* (London: Macmillan, 1900); Max Verworn, *Zur psychologie der primitiven Kunst* (Jena: Fischer, 1908); Moritz Hoernes, *Urgeschichte der bildenden Kunst in Europa* (Vienna: Holzhausen, 1898); Konrad Fiedler, *Schriften uber Kunst* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1896); Adolf Hilderbrand, *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (Strassburg: Heitz, 1901); cf. Pavla Pečinková, "Josef Čapek's Interpretation of Primitivism," *Estetika* 49 (2012): 71–108.

112 Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 44.

113 See for example Jack Flam, "Introduction," *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art: A Documentary History*, eds. Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1994); William Rubin, *'Primitivism' in 20th century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York: MoMA, 1984).

114 Wilhelm Worringer, "Entwicklungsgeschichtliches zur modernsten Kunst," *Im Kampf um die Kunst die Antwort auf den Protest deutscher Künstler* (Munich: R. Piper, 1911), Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1908).

115 Guillaume Apollinaire, "Exotisme et ethnographie," *Paris-Journal* (September 10, 1912); "Guillaume Apollinaire: Les peintres cubists," *Volné směry* 17 (1913): 203–205.

116 Arne Novák, "Řeč primitivů," *Volné směry* IX (1905): 52.

117 Novák, "Řeč primitivů," 60.

118 Emil Filla, "O ctnosti novoprimitivismu" *Volné směry* 15 (1911): 60–68.

119 Filla, "O ctnosti," 64.

120 Cf. Tomáš Winter, "The Group of Fine Artists and Primitivism in the Czech Lands," *Centropa* XI (2011): 19–33; Tomáš Winter, "Cannibals in Bohemia," *Umění* 57 (2009): 248–260.

121 Josef Borovička, "El Greco," *Umělecký měsíčník* 1 (1911): 67–73; Emil Filla, "El Greco," *Umělecký měsíčník* 1 (1911): 5–7, 74–78.

122 Naomi Hume, "Avant-Garde Anachronisms: Prague's Group of Fine Artists and Viennese Art Theory," *Slavic Review* 71 (2012): 539; Max Dvořák, "Über Greco und den Manierismus," in *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte: Studien zur Abendländischen Kunstentwicklung*, eds. Karl M. Swoboda and Johannes Wilde (Munich: R. Piper, 1924); cf. also Vojtěch Lahoda, *Emil Filla* (Prague: Academia, 2007).

123 Josef Čapek, "Celník Rousseau a neděle," *Nejskromnější umění*, 13–32.

124 Pečinková, *Josef Čapek*, 77.

125 Vojtěch Lahoda, "Civilismus, primitivismus a sociální tendence v malířství 20. a 30. let," in *Dějiny českého výtvarného umění IV, 1880–1938,* 315.

126 Penelope Curtis, "Oto Gutfreund and the Czech National Decorative Style," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 4, no. 1 (1987): 30–45.

127 Jaroslav Kvapil, "Hermann Bahr," quoted in Kurt Ifkovits, *Hermann Bahr – Jaroslav Kvapil. Briefe, Texte, Dokumente* (Berlin: Peter Land, 2007), 275.

128 Hermann Bahr, "Expressionism," in *Art In Theory*, 120.

129 Devětsil was not limited to Prague. The Brněnský Devětsil (Brno Devětsil) founded in 1923 only lasted for four years but made an important mark in Czech modern culture. The members included the graphic artist Zdeněk Rossman, the photographer Jaroslav Rössler, or one of the founders, the poet and film critic Artuš Černík. Its magazine *Pásmo* (Zone), the name of which was indeed inspired by Apollinaire, published poetry and prose by a number of Czech and international authors, articles on art, theatre, film and reproductions of works of art. Karel Teige also published frequent contributions here, reprinted his thoughts on new art for all. Jaroslav Bílek and Oleg Sus, "O vzniku brněnského Devětsilu," *Sborník prací Filosofické fakulty Brněnské university* (1966): 117–124; Jaromír Kubíček, *Pásmo 1924–1927, Index 1929–1939* (Brno: MZK, 2010); Miloš Bartoň et al., *Brno Devětsil and Multimedia Overlaps of the Artistic Avant-Garde* (Brno: Moravian Gallery, 2014).

130 On Devětsil, see for example, Rostislav Švácha, ed., *Děvětsil" Czech Avant-garde Art, Architecture and Design of the 1920s and 30s* (Oxford: Musem of Modern Art; London: London Design Museum, 1990); Derek Sayer, *Coasts of Bohemia. A Czech History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 209nn; Derek Sayer, *Prague, Capital of the Twentieth Century: A Surrealist History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 199nn.

131 Jiří Wolker and Karel Teige, "Proletářské umění," (1922) in *Dílo Jiřího Wolkera, II, Prósy* (Prague: V. Petr, 1924); translation from Zusi, "Tendentious modernism," 835. See the article for a detailed examination of the concept of "tendentious" in Teige's theory.

132 David Drozd, Tomáš Kačer and Don Sparling, eds., *Theatre Theory Reader: Prague School Writings* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2006).

133 On Teige for instance Rea Michalová, *Karel Teige: kapitán avantgardy* (Prague: Kant, 2016); Eric Dluhosh and Rostislav Švácha, *Karel Teige 1900–1951: L'Enfant terrible of the Czech Modernist Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999); Jessica E. Merrill, "High Modernism in Theory and Practice: Karel Teige and Tomáš Baťa," *Slavic Review* 76, no. 2 (2017): 428–454; Peter Zusi, "The Style of the Present: Karel Teige on Constructivism and Poetism," *Representations* 88 (2004): 102–124.

134 On the use of "lidové umění" by Teige and Čapek and Čapek's influence on Teige, see Zusi, "Tendentious modernism," 830–831.

135 Karel Teige, "Nové umění a lidová tvorba," *Červen* IV (1921): 151.

136 Teige, "Nové umění," 150.

137 Karel Teige, *Jarmark umění* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1964), 13. First published as *Jarmark umění* (Prague: Nakladatelství a galerie Živého umění F. J. Millera, 1935).

138 Teige, *Jarmark umění*, 44.

139 Teige, *Jarmark umění*, 48–49.

140 Teige, *Jarmark umění*, 50.

141 Teige, *Jarmark umění*, 51.

142 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art in Theory*, 544. Originally as Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6 (1939): 34–49.

143 Teige in a way preceded Walter Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Cf. Karel Srp, "Poetry in the Midst of the World: The Avant-Garde as Projectile," in *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930*, ed. Timothy O. Benson (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT, 2002), 117.

144 Teige, "Nové umění a lidová tvorba," 154.

145 Teige, "Nové umění proletářské," in *Revoluční sborník Devětsil* (Prague: Večernice V. Vortel, 1922), 5–18.

146 Teige, "Nové umění proletářské," 6.

147 Teige, "Nové umění proletářské," 6.

148 Teige, "Nové umění proletářské," 16. These critical remarks did concur with Greenberg's theorising of kitsch and its origins in the bourgeois society.

149 Teige, "Nové umění proletářské," 16.

150 Teige, "Nové umění proletářské," 10.

151 Teige, "Nové umění proletářské," 14.

152 Karel Teige, "Poetism," in *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910– 1930*, eds. Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács (Los Angeles: Los Angeles

County Museum of Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 579–582. Originally published as Karel Teige, "Poetismus," *Host* 3, no. 9–10 (1924): 197–204; Karel Teige, "Excerpts from Poetism manifesto," in *Between Worlds*, 593–601. Originally published as Karel Teige, "Manifest poetismu," *ReD* 1, No. 9 (1928): 317–335.

153 Teige, "Poetism," 594.
154 Teige, "Poetism," 579.
155 Teige, "Poetism," 560.
156 Zusi, "Tendentious modernism," 827.
157 Michal Plánka, *Sociální skupina*, 1.
158 Pravoslav Kotík, editorial, *Život* III (1923): 1–2.
159 Kotík, "Editorial," 1–2.
160 Kollwitz was known in the Czech lands from her participation in joint exhibitions of German artists. Her first solo exhibition opened in Prague in 1929.
161 Kotík, "editorial, 2.
162 Karel Holan, "K tendenci současného umění," *Život* IV (1924): 81.
163 Holan, "K tendenci," 81.
164 Holan, "K tendenci," 83.
165 At the same time, Teige was complementary of the first exhibition of the Social group, which he thought had "a very good, or truly supreme, quality." Karel Teige, "Pražské výstavy v jarním období," *Národní osvobození* (April 24, 1925), 5.
166 Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 88.
167 Fedinand Peroutka, "Proletářská kultura?" in *Boje o dnešek* (Prague: Fr. Borový, 1925), 186–196. Originally as Peroutka, "Proletářská kultura?" *Přítomnost* 8 (1924): 119–122. Ferdinand Peroutka, "Co jest lid?" in *Boje o dnešek,* 221–233. Originally as Peroutka, "Co jest lid?" *Přítomnost* 1 (1925): 802–804.
168 Peroutka, "Proletářská kultura?" 189.
169 Peroutka, "Proletářská kultura?" 189.
170 Peroutka, "Proletářská kultura?" 191.
171 Peroutka, "Proletářská kultura?" 191.

4 Identity

In 1919, a year after the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic, two journals, *Volné směry* and *Umělecký list* (The Artistic Gazette) published a debate on the origin of early medieval art and architecture in Bohemia and Moravia.[1] The basic question, which also appeared in the title of the polemical articles on this topic, was "West or East" and reflected the search for the origins of medieval architecture and its affiliation with either Eastern or Western paradigms in Czech art history. The basic question was, does early architecture in the Czech-speaking lands have its origins in Western or Eastern models?

The main cause of this particular debate was a book on early mediaeval architecture in Ravenna, which was published in 1916 and written by Vojtěch Birnbaum (1877–1934), Czech art historian and a former student of the Vienna School of Art History.[2] Birnbaum was concerned specifically with the question of origins, not only of the architecture of Ravenna, but, more generally, of the early medieval basilicas and rotundas in Bohemia. For him, the latter could be traced back to models in Western Europe, namely in Italy, France, and Germany.[3]

WWI delayed immediate discussions of the consequences of his main thesis, but the debate restarted in the setting of the newly-formed state. The topic was nothing new, though, because – as I have mentioned earlier – in Bohemia, the different arguments on the origin of early medieval art had already been addressed by a number of art historians of Czech or German origin in the late 19th century.[4] The more famous dispute, however, took place in Vienna in reaction to Josef Strzygowski's book *Orient oder Rom* (Orient or Rome), published in 1901, which criticised Wickhoff and Riegl's view that late Roman and Byzantine art was a continuation of classical Roman art.[5] Strzygowski also argued against their wider assumption that Near Eastern art was dependent on Greek and Roman culture.[6] Birnbaum, following his Viennese teachers, Riegl and Wickhoff, opposed Strzygowski's claims, arguing instead that early Christian architectural forms, and not only those of Ravenna, had originated in Rome. "Rome" was shorthand for Western Europe, and he was therefore contesting the idea that they owed anything to Eastern Europe or the "East." This opinion was not unilaterally accepted by all Czech scholars, however. In essence, Birnbaum's critics accused him of being too reliant on what they understood as the "German" thinking of Riegl and Wickhoff.[7]

Apart from the art historical consequences of the affiliation andEastern or Western origins of local art and architecture, the debate is also indicative of two wider concerns. First of all, the new state had to rethink its own position between the Western and Eastern spheres of influence as a result of the new political situation, which had

created new dynamics between the nation and its new political and cultural identity. Secondly, in a way similar to the discussions about mediaeval architecture, these issues of Western or Eastern orientation were widely discussed in relation to modern art, too. This chapter thus explores how the conscious creation of the new identity of the Czechoslovak nation and state after 1918 impacted the narratives of modern art. I am particularly interested in unpacking the ways in which these narratives were officially nationalised as a result of the changes in the political and artistic affiliations on the one hand, and modernised as part of the attempt to create a universal history of art on the other hand.

Czechoslovakia and the Czechoslovak Nation

The circumstances of the creation of Czechoslovakia in October 1918 and the existence of the interwar state had, for a long time, been related to the myth of a liberal and democratic republic, unique in Central Europe during this time. However, as many scholars have proven recently, Czechoslovakia inherited many structures, institutions, and processes from the Habsburg monarchy, but also was far from accommodating its ethnic minorities equally.[8] After the fall of the monarchy, it became a state with the largest proportion of ethnic minorities. As Rogers Brubaker pointed out, Czechoslovakia did not become a nation-state, as it is often thought, but a nationalising state.[9] Its core was created of Czechs and Slovaks, the "legitimate owners" of the state who had a Slavonic majority. This core, nevertheless, was still in a weak cultural, economic, and demographic position.[10] The state therefore had to strengthen it internally and externally.

Following the birth of Czechoslovakia, the initial discussions about the domestic composition of the state were marked by constant conflicts with the German and Magyar minorities in the proposed territories. They included attempts to establish German provinces within Bohemia and Moravia; a war between Romania and Hungary in 1919 that was fought, in part, over Slovakia; and the Treaty of Trianon of 1920, which ultimately redefined Hungarian borders and nurtured strong nationalistic sentiments in the region.[11] Tensions were also felt between the two majority national groups, the Czechs and the Slovaks, in which the latter soon found itself under-represented in the Parliament and the government, and increasingly called for more autonomy within the state.

After the war, geographical Subcarpathean Ruthenia, a mountainous region between Uzhgorod and Yasniya, also became a part of the Czechoslovak state [fig. 4.1]. With no historical name, the territory had been part of the Kingdom of Hungary. The majority of local inhabitants were the Rusyns (Rusíni in Czech), sometimes referred to as Ruthenians. The region joined Czechoslovakia as a result of negotiations that started in 1917 in the United States between Masaryk, President Wilson, and the Rusyn émigré Gregory Zhatkovich.[12] As a lawyer, Zhatkovich, who had lived in the United States for most of his life, helped to negotiate the postwar status of Ruthenia on behalf of the Rusyn-Americans. In Ruthenia itself, however, where there were substantial minorities of Hungarians, Jews, Romanians, and Germans, the inhabitants were split between a variety of allegiances in regards to the political marriage with Czechoslovakia. While some favoured the new union, others had preferred to join Hungary or Russia, as there had been historic links with both. The largely rural territory, nevertheless, remained under direct Czechoslovak governance until 1924 when the Rusyns gained representation (however small) in the national parliament, while the region did not become
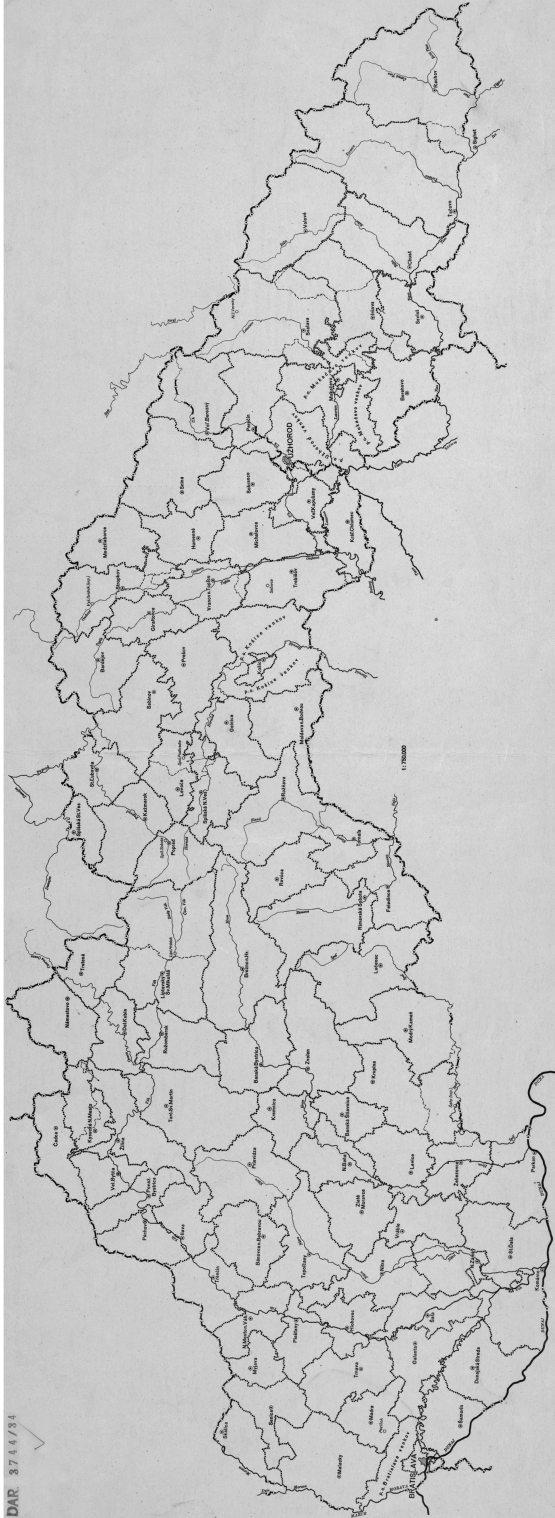
Figure 4.1 Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia – Administrative Map. The Moravian Library in Brno. Mpa-0131.302.

fully autonomous until 1938.[13] Similarly, the relationship between Prague and the alleged backwater region – as many saw the Subcarpathean Ruthenia – was far from straightforward. Already in 1920, the Czech government was on occasions accused of an imperialist approach to the territory by Hungarian revisionists, Rusyn Americans, and Rusyn intellectuals.[14]

Therefore, the first few years after the end of WWI saw an emergence of a completely new political – but also geographical, social, and cultural situation of Czechoslovakia. The two dominant Slavic nations of the Czechs and Slovaks were joined by a Polish and a Rusyn one, as well as the German and Hungarian minorities.[15] The sudden disintegration of Austria-Hungary, the fall of the Russian empire, and the continuing presence of powerful minorities in Czech and Slovak territories presented many problems: a new identity had to be created for the inhabitants, which would justify their post-war joint existence and secure their political claims.

Even though Czechoslovakia was not a single nation-state, its political and cultural elites presented it as such. After 1918, the press and politicians widely promoted the idea of the Czechoslovak people and the Czechoslovak language and attempted to prove the existence of a joint *Czechoslovak* history. To legitimise such a construct, it was necessary to (re-)create a common cultural history according to which the Czechs and Slovaks constituted a single entity, and the Great Moravian Empire of the 9th and 10th centuries had been the first historical state of both groups.[16] Czechoslovakia found itself in a situation typical for the early phase in the development of nation-states, which is marked by the search for the relics of political autonomy; recovery of the memory of the former independence, and reconnection with a mediaeval written language, which was undertaken by many politicians and scholars.[17]

At the same time, although it was a parliamentary democracy, Czechoslovakia inherited many conflicts and nationalistic problems from Austria-Hungary, in addition to producing new ones. With no prior historical tradition of political sovereignty, the Slovaks could only argue for their natural right to form a state on the basis of ethnic self-determination. The Czechoslovak political programme in many respects continued this situation, and the Slovak claim to autonomy on ethnic grounds was not recognised by the central government as it was believed that it would encourage Bohemian Germans to start placing similar demands.[18] On top of that, the Rusyns did not fit into the picture of a joint historic heritage of the Czechs and Slovaks, and remained a rural Eastern province distant from the industrialised West. Therefore, in this respect, the year 1918 did not bring such a radical restructuring of the domestic political and cultural layout, and the legacy of the ethnic and national tensions of the Habsburg monarchy continued in many aspects of life, including discussions about the ideological place of art and architecture in the national discourse. Nevertheless, it was the relationship between local art and the new state identity which was reassessed and applied both retrospectively and on contemporary artistic phenomena.

Czechoslovak Identity and Art History

The collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy brought about new possibilities for those that lead the debates on the nature of Czech art. In general, post-war academic scholars benefitted from the inherited institutional practices of Austria-Hungary, but they also faced new challenges related to the role of historical research in the new state. New academic, as well as political, institutions were created, and an immediate need occurred to fill

the new positions at universities and in government offices with experienced individuals.[19] As a result, many of those working in the departments of the new Czechoslovak state were historians and art historians, trained either in Prague or Vienna before WWI, adopting the methods of the Vienna School.[20] A pertinent example of this is the art historian Zdeněk Wirth, who had worked for the Central Commission for the Research and Protection of Monuments in Vienna with Riegl and Dvořák before WWI. He joined the new Ministry of National Education in 1918 after his service in the war, and his responsibilities included overseeing the protection of monuments and the administration of what was to become the national art collection by consolidating the holdings of the Picture Gallery and the Modern Gallery in the National Gallery after WWII.[21] Another influential art historian from the Vienna School circle, Vincenc Kramář, who was mentioned previously in relation to his promotion of Cubism in the Czech lands, was appointed as director of the Picture Gallery in 1919.[22]

In this context, it is important to recall where art history was practised in Czechoslovakia. The main centres of art historical practice in the interwar period had survived from before the war: the university in Prague kept its dual language division, and the Czech university became Univerzita Karlova (Charles University) in 1920.[23] It thus abandoned the title Karlo-Ferdinandova Univerzita (Charles-Ferdinand University), which had been used since the mid-17th century after the reforms of the Holy Roman Emperor and Bohemian king Ferdinand III. The Czech part of the university was also the location of a chair in art history from 1897, when Karel Chytil (1857–1934), an art historian with interests in mediaeval and renaissance art, and Bohumil Matějka (1867–1909) were appointed while an independent art history department was founded here in 1911.[24] The German University still continued to attract German-speaking students until its closure in 1939, but now became a minority institution. Despite the efforts of its leaders to move it to the predominantly German city of Liberec in Northern Bohemia, it remained in Prague and was gradually adopting a more and more nationalistic position, which culminated in the mid-1930s.[25]

Apart from the universities, the Academy of Fine Arts also saw an influx of scholars who were influenced by the Vienna School methods in the appointments of Antonín Matějček and V. V. Štech.[26] Both, as well as Jaromír Pečírka (1891–1966), also taught at the School of Applied Arts.[27] For this reason, the School became an important institution for Czech artists and the formulation of narratives of Czech art during this period, even though the School did not have university status. Apart from the art theorists, it was, for instance, Josef Čapek, Josef Gočár, and Pavel Janák who studied and/or taught here, shaping the direction of the School as well as of the modern visual language that was closely linked with the state's orientation. This was evident, for example, in Štech's involvement in the governmental selection committee responsible for Czechoslovak participation at international exhibitions, which I will discuss in more detail later. As a result, the School was frequently represented as a part of the official presentations of Czechoslovakia abroad, and it also pursued a national style which would come to represent the state's new identity.

It could be seen as an attempt to "Czechisize" the new state that Czech-speaking academic life expanded beyond Prague through the establishment of new institutions. In 1919, a new Czech university opened in Brno as the Masaryk University, and its own art history department was founded there in 1927. In Slovakia, the Univerzita Komenského (the Comenius University) was also set up in Bratislava in the same year, providing education in Slovak and Czech. As there was a lack of suitably educated

Slovak scholars to teach here, for the first few decades of its existence, the university employed a large number of Czech teachers, including the art historian František Žákavec (1878–1937).[28] Žákavec's main interests were in the 19th century Czech art of, for instance, Mánes, Aleš and the "Generation of the National Theatre," as well as in the contemporary art of Alfons Mucha and František Kupka. His studies put emphasis on establishing a definition of "Czechness" and tradition in art, and therefore represented a more nationalistically orientated history of art which seemingly opposed the approaches of the Vienna School followers.

After 1918, the Czech graduates of the University of Vienna came to occupy crucial positions in Czechoslovak institutions and brought the methods and ideas of their teachers to the cultural and political sphere of the new state. A clear summary of their understanding of the Vienna School and its legacy was provided in the 1909 obituary of Franz Wickhoff written by Vincenc Kramář, which in a way reads like a generational manifesto of those who identified with the theories of Wickhoff and Riegl.[29] Kramář, who also studied in Prague and Munich, had been a student at the Art History Institute in Vienna between 1900 and 1902.

Apart from being one of the first to explicitly use the umbrella term "Viennese School" to refer to this group of scholars, Kramář summarised the main characteristic points of the School's method. He outlined the basic theoretical and methodological approaches associated with the School, which he saw in, for example, the attention to genetic links between artworks and the idea of the universal development of art or the "objective" study of works of art. He saw the School's contribution to art history in its embrace of a synthetic view of art history that placed all works of art into a single universal and continuous artistic development. Kramář saw this universalistic view of art as the most important feature of the Vienna School, because of the way in which it effaced "state borders, national differences" and temporal distances.[30] Wickhoff and Riegl were named the "very founders of the Viennese art historical school which has nowadays adopted a leading position in its field."[31] Kramář's two subsequent articles, one on Max Dvořák and the other a review of Dvořák's book on the van Eycks, offered more general observations about the Vienna School, acknowledged Dvořák as a key representative of the "new science" (or scholarship) that originated in Vienna.[32]

For Kramář, the Vienna School could be recognised in its stress on a new, critical approach to artistic material and analytical attention to detail following Giovanni Morelli's method. The art historians focussed on, for example, the influence of both internal and external factors on the origins of the work or the genetic connection with […] the global development of art.[33] Kramář characterised the School as a progressive centre of scholarship that aimed at putting "an end to dilettantism and shallowness" in the study of art history, which had hitherto been overly preoccupied with iconography and purely factual information.[34] The School, Kramář argued, also brought all the efforts for a reform in art history together in a single comprehensive system of the study of art.[35] Such universality in the approach to art was meant as a reaction against the lack of rigour in art history. This translated for Kramář into an effort to "investigate artistic development in an objective way" similarly to the methods of Morelli, Karl Justi, or Heinrich Wölfflin.[36] The opposition between the "amateurish" approach of earlier scholars and the methodical and universal study of art anticipated some of the arguments that were raised in the debate between Birnbaum and his critics about Ravenna. For Kramář, one of the most important aspects of the Vienna School legacy was its replacement of amateurs with rigorous "scientists."

Kramář also pointed out that the Vienna School developed a synthetic view of art history that placed all works of art into a single universal and continuous line of development. Kramář saw this universalistic view of art as its most significant feature, for it effaced state borders and paid little attention to the idea of national differences.[37] This view of art's transnational history proved especially useful in the new political context after WWI. Birnbaum, Kramář, and other Czechs who had studied in Vienna were now faced with a new challenge presented by the creation of Czechoslovakia: the requirement that they map out the specific artistic history of their new national state.[38] While they focussed on emphasising the specificities of its artistic traditions, they also placed them into the context of the universal evolution of art, focussing in particular on the broader context of Western European art.

This attempt to resolve the apparent contradiction between the universalism of the Vienna School and the emphasis on the national character of local artistic practices was the product of a complex development that had been taking place in the politics and art history in Bohemia long before 1918.[39] As I mentioned in the introduction, from the 1870s onwards, art historians, historians, anthropologists, and art critics had attempted to define Czech art as the expression of a specific nation.[40] The nationalist discourse was particularly alive in the discussions about the ethnic origin of mediaeval art in Bohemia between German art historians based in Prague, like Woltmann and Grueber, and Czech ones, for instance, Kalousek and Zap.[41] Both camps tried to find what they saw as "characteristic" German or Czech features in painting, sculpture, and architecture as well as identify their authors as being either German or Czech, which would, in their view, determine the national affiliation of art in Bohemia.

Thus in the interwar period, the idea of the history of art as a transnational development, to which so many Czech art historians now subscribed, did not bring an end to this kind of nationalism in art history. Elsewhere in Europe, national identity kept many scholars similarly preoccupied. The origins of national styles, for instance, was the theme of the 13th International Congress of Art Historians held in Stockholm in 1933, where many contributors addressed the topic of a national character of art in various locations across Europe.[42] The surge of interest in nationalism in the thirties was indeed a product of the increasing political radicalisation and renewed emphasis of ethnic difference.

West or East: Affiliations of Czech and Czechoslovak Art

In Czechoslovakia, the debate about the national – as well as international – affiliation of Czech art, as well as Czech art history, lead to the series of polemical articles on the question "West or East," published in 1919. Even though this particular debate concerned mediaeval art, which is not the main topic of this book, it illustrates the extent of such discussions about the Eastern or Western affiliation of 'Czechoslovak' art. The main proponents still considered the key point of the debate to be based on the issue of national differences. However, the earlier concern with the ethnic and national character of art was now revised to include the wider geopolitical issue of Czech art's "Western" or "Eastern" orientation. For Birnbaum and his colleagues, if it was proven that early medieval architecture of Bohemia and Moravia had "Eastern" and therefore Slavic origins, it would threaten the carefully cultivated image of Czech culture as firmly situated in that of Western Europe. The affiliation of architecture in Bohemia with Ravenna would point to its Latin and Germanic (i.e., Western) origins. Birnbaum and his Czech peers therefore promoted this approach.

Two of Birnbaum's most outspoken critics were Florián Zapletal (1884–1969) and Jaroslav Nebeský (1892–1937). Zapletal, a freelance art historian, photographer and journalist, studied Czech and German in Prague and had also spent two semesters in Vienna.[43] He travelled extensively around Russia and Ukraine, examining local architecture. Nebeský was a graduate of art history in Prague, and, like Zapletal, had strong inclinations towards Pan-Slavism. He was interested in the historical legacy of the Czech nation and after the birth of Czechoslovakia, he argued passionately that art historians and artists, as well as the political class, should orient themselves towards the East.[44] By "East", he meant not only the Eastern regions of Czechoslovakia – Slovakia and Ruthenia – but also the wider Slavic realm, especially Russia.[45] On a political level, though, the relationship between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union was rather cold. As a member of the Little Entente with Romania and Yugoslavia aimed at preventing Hungarian resurgence, the Czechoslovak government discouraged attempts to establish official links with the Soviet Union and it was not until 1934 that the Czechoslovak government officially recognised it.[46]

Among the criticism of Birnbaum's essay on Ravenna was also the accusation that he had used an overtly "German method," which according to Zapletal, had come to dominate Czech art history. Indeed, the influences of German-speaking scholars on many Czech art historians were indisputable considering that the main centres where art history was studied in Central Europe were Vienna and Berlin. From the early 20th century onwards, other disciplines taught in Prague, were increasingly inclined towards ideas from France, Britain, and North America. This was the case of philosophy and the study of literature and linguistics (represented especially by the Prague School).

Czech art historians in Prague, however, continued to be influenced by the approaches of their Viennese teachers, although in a somewhat selective way.[47] They adhered to Wickhoff's positivism as well as the theory of genetic development of art that Riegl and Dvořák subscribed to in the early 1900s. Critical of this situation, Zapletal argued for the need to "break windows through the German walls which have isolated us from Europe and the rest of the world and condemned us to intellectual misery."[48]

More specifically, Zapletal criticised Birnbaum for subscribing to the idea of universal art. He described it as a search for generalised historical relations and links, as well as an immersion into "the psychological depths of the creative process," which the young generation of scholars combined with a meticulous study of detail.[49] Birnbaum's approach had turned out to be a failure, Zapletal maintained, because he had limited himself to merely German textual sources.[50] Instead, Zapletal called for "specifically Czech values" to be injected into research which should accordingly be written from a national point of view.[51] He envisaged this as being accomplished through attention to that art which for him was most Slavic in the history of the peoples of the Czechoslovak state: early medieval, or Byzantine art.[52]

Zapletal also recommended that in the light of the reorganised political borders, attention should be paid to the art of the new territories of Czechoslovakia and to the art history of non-Czech nations, the Slovaks and Rusyns especially. These regions, he pointed out, had been studied by German and Hungarian scholars, but this was "not from the viewpoint of our history, not from our national and state perspective but from a foreign one."[53] When Zapletal talked about "our" history and "our" perspective, he referred to a specifically Czech national position that should be adopted in their interpretation.

In reply, Birbaum pointed to the historic artistic connections between the Czechs and Germans. It was the exchange between these two cultures, he argued, that had shaped all other aspects of Czech culture and society and influenced current scholarship: "We do not have a cultural domain, not even a great cultural personality, that would not be under stronger or weaker […] German influence," he claimed.[54] This was an important change in the attitude of *some* Czech art historians towards acknowledgement of the importance of German and Austrian traditions, an opinion that openly recognised German presence and influence in Bohemia. Only some fifty years ago, such views – when pronounced by the German art historians Woltmann and Grueber – were strongly disputed by Czech nationalist writers. Now Birnbaum also endorsed the so-called "German" approach to art historical research on the one hand and justified the focus on Bohemia, in other words, the Westernmost regions of Czechoslovakia, on the other. Birnbaum's stance therefore represented a significant step forward in the recognition of the cultural and intellectual exchange between the two ethnic groups.

Birnbaum was nevertheless conscious of the fact that the accusation that he was using a *German* method was meant to cause offence to him, his teachers in Vienna and his colleagues who had studied in the German-speaking environment. In response, he talked about amateurs who favoured the "method of the pro-Eastern Viennese School which […] means a deep drop of German scientific thinking."[55] This was clearly meant as an attack on Zapletal's reliance on Strzygowski who, as Birnbaum claimed, argued that proof of the Eastern origins of early Christian architecture did exist, but in "some very far Eastern land no one has ever been to."[56] In respect of the new Czechoslovakia, Birnbaum connected this fabled land with the area around Uzhhorod (in the newly acquired Ruthenia) where, he emphasised in dismissive fashion, "maybe some of this Eastern art could be found."[57]

It is a sign how important this topic was for Czech art historians that Birnbaum reopened this discussion a few years later following a lecture Strzygowski delivered on the architecture of the Western Slavs at the Department of Slavic Philology at the Czech university in Prague in March 1924.[58] Strzygowski's main thesis was that early mediaeval architecture in wood and stone served as a vital stimulus for the later development of, for example, Baroque church architecture. He identified several types of wooden churches in the early Romanesque period, which were indigenous to Bohemia, and he argued that their floor plan could be detected in churches of a much earlier date. According to his argument, these wooden and, later, stone churches in Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia, and Sub-Carpathenian Ruthenia – or the territory of the then Czechoslovakia – had also had an influence on the development of the so-called high art.[59]

What was significant about these claims was Strzygowski's emphasis on the presence of local (i.e., Bohemian) vernacular influences and not of Byzantine, German, or Italian ones on early sacral architecture. Birnbaum summarised his objections to this thesis in an article published in the same year and these ranged from matters of fact to subjective personal attacks.[60] Pointing out Strzygowski's Austro-German nationality Birnbaum drew attention to the irony that he wrote on Czech (Slavic) architecture from a stance that would be more usually expected from Czech nationalist authors.[61] Birnbaum also criticised Strzygowski's reliance on the findings of Ferdinand Josef Lehner (1837–1914), a Czech-speaking art historian (despite his German name) whose work on the history of art in Bohemia had long been seen by Czech scholars as dilettantish.[62] Wirth, for instance, described Lehner as the last standing Romantic

whose writing could not be considered as art history in the rigorous sense, but as merely a compilation of materials with elementary terminology for beginners.[63]

Birnbaum's criticisms touched on another issue of a wider importance. Specifically, he classified the wooden churches at the centre of the polemical discussion as objects of vernacular art, a topic that had long preoccupied Vienna School art historians. The attitude of Birnbaum and his colleagues in Prague was very much shaped by the ideas that Riegl outlined in his *Volkskunst, Hausfleiß und Hausindustrie* from 1894.[64] Riegl maintained that folk art had always been exposed to the influences of international high art and was thus the product of cultural borrowings and exchange, and not the expression of a single, autochthonous vernacular culture.[65] Similarly, Birnbaum held that the design of wooden churches in Bohemia had been derived from stone architecture and consequently that, as with all folk art, local wooden architecture had taken its inspiration from high art. Folk art thus represented for him a belated appropriation of "pan-European art," disseminated to the people by the culture of the towns, churches, and castles.

This attitude towards vernacular art, understood as a conservative response to high art and a belated hybridisation or assimilation of the "pan-European" artistic practices, played an important role in the deployment of the concept of Czechoslovak art that appeared in the interwar period. It was often used by Czech sympathisers with the methods of the Vienna School to explain the roots of the art of the newly created state and its relation to Western European art both historic and contemporary.

Czechoslovakism

The foundation stone for the construction of the idea of the Czechoslovak nation and the policy of Czechoslovakism was the linguistic proximity of the Czech and Slovak languages.[66] Codified in the Constitution of 1920, Czechoslovakism emphasised the common political interests of the two groups. The Czechoslovak language, which came into existence in the Language Law from the same year, however, did not define the language as a single expression of the two ethnic groups, as is often believed, but rather was meant to reflect the existence of the new *Czechoslovak* nation, state, and institutions.[67] The use of a common denominator was motivated by the desire to communicate the idea of the Czechoslovak nation as clearly and simply as possible not only abroad but at home too.

Such attempts to simplify the presentation of the claims of the two ethnic and linguistic groups of the Czechs and Slovaks by joining them in a single unit were not a complete novelty and had first been made during the WWI. As early as 1915, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk had written a confidential memorandum, "Independent Bohemia", outlining his idea of the future composition of the new state. He declared that a post-war Bohemian state should consist of the Czech regions (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia) and that "to these would be added the Slovak districts of Northern Hungary […]" because "the Slovaks are Czechs, despite using their dialect as their literary language."[68]

As the social historian Ladislav Holý has remarked, during the WWI, the use of the idea of the Czechoslovak nation was "the conscious strategy of Czech and Slovak diplomats in their effort not to confuse the politicians of the Alliance, who were expected to be unfamiliar with the history and ethnic composition of Central Europe."[69] In addition to Masaryk's memorandum, the "Washington Declaration" of 18 October 1918 mentioned both the Czechoslovak nation as well as the entitlement of the Czechs to unification with their "Slovak brothers."[70] Likewise a declaration made in 1917

by exiled Czech members of parliament based in Paris called for "unification of all branches of the Czechoslovak nation in a democratic Czech state also containing the Slovak branch of the nation."[71] The Czechs and the Slovaks were therefore treated as a single group, identified either as Czechs, with the Slovaks merely being a sub-group, or as Czechoslovaks, in which, again, the Czechs were dominant.

Yet the idea of "Czechoslovakism" and of the Czechoslovak nation was not only a political neologism but was also used in a number of historical studies retrospectively. Many scholars started searching for historic evidence that might aid the task of uniting the separate histories of the Czechs and the Slovaks into one single narrative. An example of this mindful re-reading of history was Albert Pražák's book *Československý národ* (The Czechoslovak Nation) of 1925, written at a time of increasing resistance amongst Slovaks as well as Hungarians to the Czechoslovak idea.[72] Pražák (1880–1956) was a historian of Czech literature and, after the end of the WWI, a professor in Bratislava. He focussed on the links between Czech and Slovak literary works; although genuinely interested in Slovak literature, he also promoted the idea of a single Czechoslovak nation and identity.[73] In a chapter titled "The evidence for the title 'Czechoslovak nation'," for instance, Pražák claimed that historically, the Slovaks had also been called Czechs, Czechs or Slovaks, Czechoslovaks, and Czech Slavs.[74] In broader terms, the names of the Czechs and Slovaks meaning a single nation could appear in many forms: both as Czechoslovaks and Czechoslavs, which were for Pražák interchangeable.

Pražák produced numerous historical examples to support his idea of the common past and heritage of the Czechs, Moravians, and Slovaks. Particular importance was given to the proximity of their languages. The fact that the Czechs and Slovaks could understand each other meant for Pražák that the two groups were speaking just one language with different dialects. Likewise the visible similarities between the rural cultures of parts of Moravia and Slovakia, and the formal likeness of their material culture, offered proof, he argued, of the existence of "Czechoslovak national unity."[75] The research of ethnographers and historians he quoted provided enough evidence for him that for example at the turn of the century, there was "an organic link between Moravian Slovakia and [what was then] Hungarian Slovakia."[76] Pražák included examples of a number of literary and visual works by authors, many of whom I have already touched upon in Chapter 2. He claimed, for instance, that the dramas of Alois and Vilém Mrštík, and the paintings of Joža Uprka based around village scenes and events showed how ethnographic material of Moravian Slovakia had clear parallels in Slovak folk culture.[77]

The attempts to reassess the geography of national history and culture were made not only by politicians and historians, but also art historians, who likewise started studying national art in the light of the new political situation.[78] Zapletal's call for research into the art of the new political entity with the new geopolitical borders was answered by the publication of two books on "Czechoslovak art." Ironically though, it was written by those Czech followers of the Vienna School who maintained the "German" methods learnt at Vienna, and therefore the resultant work was rather different from what Zapletal had envisaged.

The Idea of Czechoslovak Art

Both *Československé umění* (Czechoslovak Art, 1926) and *Umění československého lidu* (The Art of the Czechoslovak People, 1928), were intended as introductory texts for a domestic audience as well as, in the case of the earlier volume, a foreign readership,

since *Československé umění* was also published in English, German, and French and contained summaries in many other languages [fig. 4.2]. Most of the authors of the books were from the circle of the Vienna School followers in Prague: *Československé umění* was compiled by Zdeněk Wirth with contributions by Birnbaum, Antonín Matějček and the archaeologist Josef Schránil (1883–1940).[79] They co-wrote the main text and provided commentary on the extensive visual material, focussing on areas of their expertise.

When Wirth became the chief conservator and protector of monuments of the new Czechoslovak state in 1918, the role gave him the opportunity to become involved in writing up relevant laws and gave him access to decision-making about historic buildings and museums.[80] He also authored a number of texts on monument protection in the new political context as well as on various aspects of art in Bohemia. After studying and working with Dvořák in Vienna and fighting in the war, Matějček moved to Prague to teach at the university, the School of Applied Arts and the Academy of Fine Arts and started publishing on mediaeval, 19th- and 20th-century art. Both Wirth and Matějček therefore occupied important and important positions from which they could exert influence over the direction of art history and monumental protection in Czechoslovakia.

According to Wirth, *Československé umění* became a programme statement and "in a way the expression of the opinions of one generation on the meaning of our art."[81]

Figure 4.2 A Costume from Čičmany. Photograph. From Zdeněk Wirth, *Umění československého lidu* (Prague: Vesmír, 1928).

Attention was given to "both the greatest periods in the history of Czechoslovak art: Gothic and Baroque, and the significant individuals characteristic for this development," and the individual contributions surveyed the so-called high art of present-day Czechoslovakia, from the early Middle Ages until the late 19th century.[82]

The authors were indeed mindful that the idea of Czechoslovak art was a political construct, for it featured not only in the title of the book but also was projected onto the past. Each section on a specific period referred to an aspect of "Czechoslovak" culture in one form or another. For example, when discussing mediaeval art, Birnbaum introduced the subject claiming that "the development of Romanesque sculpture in Czechoslovakia [sic] was closely connected […] with the development of monumental architecture."[83] Nevertheless, this is as far as notions of Czechoslovakism went and the subsequent analysis focussed mostly on works of art in Bohemia, especially in Prague, and, less frequently, in Moravia. This pattern of mentioning a "Czechoslovak" phenomenon and then discussing Czech examples only was characteristic of all the chapters and the approach of other contributors. The Baroque, for instance, was identified by Wirth as another peak in "the history of Czechoslovak art."[84] In Wirth's view, "in the last decade of the 17th century, Baroque in Czechoslovakia [sic] finds new forms of development" and Baroque architecture grew into one of the most valuable in Central Europe. Yet he documented this development by providing examples only from Prague, leaving out any monuments from Moravia and let alone Slovakia.[85] Missing are therefore references to for instance an extensive ecclesiastical architecture in the Moravian cities of Olomouc, Brno and the cities of Košice and Trnava in Slovakia.[86]

More generally, too, no works of art from Slovakia or Ruthenia appeared in this publication and even the extensive illustrated section did not include a single work from this part of the new state. As a result, the artistic development of Czechoslovakia was mostly equated with that of Prague or Bohemia. Indeed, Wirth, in fact, rationalised the geographical and ethnic limitations of the selection in his concluding paragraph where he claimed that the works of art were selected on the basis of their local (meaning national) origin and "their relationship to Czechoslovak national culture and history."[87] In other words, the art of Prague and larger Bohemian towns fitted the narrative of West-oriented Czechoslovak culture better. Constructed by art historians based in these urban centres, the so-called high art of Czechoslovakia consisted for them of a body of works of art selected on an exclusive ethnic basis. Importantly, the omissions of art from Slovakia or art by Bohemian Germans revealed a discrepancy with the established belief of their Viennese teachers. Where Riegl and Wickhoff would see art as a transnational phenomenon, their Czech followers selectively limited the transnationality to suit a politically influenced narrative of national art.[88]

The second text that explicitly used the notion of Czechoslovak art, *Umění československého lidu*, can be seen as a kind of antithesis to the earlier work in terms of its geographical focus. Compiled again by Wirth, with contributions by Matějček and Ladislav Lábek (1872–1970), an ethnographer from Plzeň, it addressed the vernacular art of the villages and the countryside.[89] Although this book did not have the same distribution in other languages, it contained summaries in French, German, English and Russian, and its message was equally important. The authors intended it as a critique of the view that vernacular art was identical with national art. They also argued that folk culture had been inspired by high art. At the same time, they did at least recognise that vernacular art had a place in the history of what they termed "Czechoslovak art," because, they stated, between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the

19th centuries, folk art had "adopted the role [...] of a cultural agent in the nation."[90] In other words, folk art did play the role of a national art, but only for a short while.

The geographical frontiers of their interest remained the same, the state of Czechoslovakia, but now their attention was indeed turned to the regions east of Bohemia. The individual sections and illustrations examined the different aspects of vernacular art in these regions, such as architecture, interior decoration, ornament, pottery, minor sculpture, and traditional costume; their material, techniques, and sources of inspiration.

In his introductory paragraphs, Wirth explained the rationale behind covering the entire territory of the Czechoslovak state in the introduction where he claimed that the Eastern regions, industrially and culturally under-developed, had preserved vernacular art to a greater extent than the Western parts. There was a "different level of cultural maturity in the individual Czechoslovak lands until the mid-19th century and an uneven level of cultural progress."[91] Vernacular art in Bohemia had been lost, he argued, because it had become industrialised and urbanised, but a few pockets of regional vernacular art could still be found in Moravia alongside "large areas of living vernacular art in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia."[92] This could be understood as a justification of the narrative of the more economically, artistically and culturally progressive Bohemian West against the allegedly backward Slovak and Ruthenian East.

Czechoslovak Vernacular: A Critique

The fact that the group of Czech scholars that came out of the Vienna School decided to publish so extensively on vernacular art requires more detailed commentary. And while I have already explored the attitudes to the vernacular in Chapter 2, here I wish to emphasise that the new political environment embraced the phenomenon as an important agent in state-building which was directly linked with the official political direction of the state.

Following the creation of Czechoslovakia, many Czech designers, artists and art writers alike continued to develop ideas about the role of vernacular art in the modern nation that were set out before 1918 and applied them to the new political conditions. Resurgence in artistic and scholarly interest in the vernacular art and culture took place in the 1920s and apart from the scholarly attempts at using vernacular art as a common denominator of Czechoslovakism, they also materialised in attempts of various individuals and organisations to renew modern applied and decorative arts.[93] Design organisations such as Artěl, founded already in 1908, and Družstevní práce (The Cooperative works, 1922–1957) often implemented vernacular motives in the context of textiles, furniture, or toys.

The state also actively promoted the incorporation of vernacular motifs in its official Czechoslovak presentations at international exhibitions. For instance, the Czechoslovak pavilion for the Centennial exhibition in Rio de Janeiro in 1922 was designed by Pavel Janák with good use of vernacular decorativism visible in both the colour scheme and architectural details [fig. 4.3]. A symptomatic showcase of the persisting use of the vernacular which appeared in juxtaposition with avant-garde ideas was the 1925 Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes, or The international exhibition of modern decorative and industrial art, in Paris. It was clear from for instance Josef Hofmann's Austrian pavilion or Józef Czajkowski's Polish pavilion that vernacular motifs of the respective countries could indeed play the role

Figure 4.3 Pavel Janák, Czechoslovak pavilion, Rio de Janeiro, 1922. National Technical
Museum, Museum of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Prague, f. 85.

of universal visual reference.[94] Equally, the Czechoslovak building at the Exposition,
designed by Josef Gočár and constructed from concrete and glass, embraced the ver-
nacular and was praised in the French press as "reminiscent of one of those cute
national and folk buildings over the Vltava river" in Prague.[95] Gočár's decorativism,
which I discussed in relation to his and Janák's attempt to create a new national style
in the early 1920s could therefore be seen as a part of this widespread embrace of the
vernacular in modern art and architecture.

For many Czech art historians and art critics, however, the folk art movement was
an outlived phenomenon of the 19th century national revival. Matějček and Wirth in
particular had been sceptical of the use of folk motives in contemporary design and
visual art and fought against the application of folkloric forms to architecture and
art.[96] Rather than being the expression of the nation, folk art was, for Wirth as much
as for Riegl before him, the product of a particular class, that is, the peasantry or, as he
called it, "the small people of the villages."[97] Speaking with a metropolitan and rather
patronising attitude, Wirth argued already in 1910 that this class was defined by its
isolation, its relative self-sufficiency, but also by the influence of the patriarchal family
structure and its slow pace of life.

Consequently, for Wirth, the artistic practices of the peasantry were determined by
a rustic naivety and informed by the instincts of the primitive soul and traditions.[98]
Folk culture had declined with the rise of modern industry, better communications,
and changing living conditions, and its remnants could only be "seen in museums or
Slovak villages," he argued.[99] Importantly, he saw it as a historical document that
should have stayed as such, rather than be exploited in the form of ornaments and folk
motifs by the contemporary design industry.[100] Elsewhere, Wirth explicitly described

this commercial practice as an attempt to artificially create a national art and placed it as an antipode of modern art.[101]

Matějček expressed a similar scepticism about the fascination with vernacular art in contemporary art and design practice.[102] For him, there were important differences between high art and folk art in relation to their value and originality. High art consisted of independent, original works of art by great individuals, and these works were genetically interconnected. Vernacular art, on the other hand, in a more general sense – and in contrast to Riegl's belief, was the art of anonymous authors without an individual, personal will; it was a secondary and derivative art, incapable of creating new values.[103] Matějček articulated these views in a number of articles, perhaps most notably in "O vyschlém prameni," formulated already a year before the creation of the independent state. The title of the article translates as "On a Dried-Up Spring" and indicates his critical attitude to what had become of vernacular art and culture.

For Matějček, folk art was always derived from primary, higher forms of art, and it was this high art, which had produced the particular creative style of an epoch. This also explained why folk art could not be seen as the basis of a national art. He argued that vernacular art only flourished when there was a *lack* of Czech artists, and "when the nation as a whole was pushed away from cooperation in artistic culture and [… Czech art] was only local art. […] In this period without national art [the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries], the common people took the creative lead and nationalised the outcomes of the great international culture."[104] In other words, during times when there was a lack of what could be interpreted as original, national art authored by local artists, creators of folk art took inspiration from higher artistic forms coming from abroad and localised them into national art.

Matějček therefore did acknowledge the historical importance of folk art at a specific period in the past, but not in the present. He claimed that the nation had its own artistic geniuses who created new independent art, while folk art had declined and come to an end.[105] What is significant in these discussions is that, despite his alleged embrace of the idea of universal development of art, Matějček repeatedly referred to the existence of national art. He was preoccupied with who could create national art; where and what it looked like. He claimed that contemporary national art could be found not in the class that once produced vernacular art (i.e., among the peasants), but where "the power of the national spirit has its greatest creative tension, where a true artistic act is born," that is, in the stratum of consciously creative individuals.[106] He concurred with Riegl that folk art was the product of a conservative rural culture that was dying out and could not be saved.[107] And although Matějček as well as Wirth in *Umění československého lidu* recognised the role of folk art in the creative appropriation of the Baroque, and in the "regeneration of Germanised Prague" at the turn of the 18th and 19th century, they saw it as a phenomenon of the past, the originality and significance of which cannot be overestimated.[108]

Not all Czech art historians shared this critical view of vernacular art and its role in the national canon of the new state. Štech wrote his article, "Podstata lidového umění" (The Basis of Folk Art) as a critical reaction to Wirth's *Umění československého lidu*.[109] Štech drew attention to some of the general and undeclared assumptions of Wirth and his collaborators. He agreed with Wirth that folk art was a derivate of high art, and that as such, it was belated. What Wirth did not do is explain what folk art appropriates from urban art and how it links to the class structure. Štech also saw folk art as derivative, but argued that it had played a more active and creative role. The process of

appropriation, which he called rustication, was for him a transfer, reformulation, and reassessment of extraneous models that could be taken from abroad or from the culture of other social classes. Folk art therefore reused the ideas and motifs of the works of high art, adapting them creatively to the social contexts of the rural peasant class.[110]

Štech identified "a special, melodic sense in our folk art [that] connects the segment and matter and transfers each objective fact […] into a lyrical ornament."[111] Despite this slightly romanticised view of folk art as an active force, Štech also searched for links between the local and external stimuli that impacted on folk art. He envisaged that folk art was shaped by local tradition, and, simultaneously, by external influences, which included the art of a higher class and foreign artistic forms. Importantly, in contrast to Wirth and Matějček, he claimed openly that there indeed was a link between national identity and folk art. As a social phenomenon, folk art was, for Štech, a collective activity; as such it was expressive of the national culture.[112]

In order to provide evidence for his claims, Štech took a number of examples from Slovakia, where "so many independent regions are hardly accessible" and where many artefacts of "high" culture, such as that of the Romans or Magyars, had been preserved in his view.[113] Folk art, too, had been preserved in these regions; had a specific melodious and pictorial character, he argued, which distinguished it from that of the Magyars or Germans. Štech saw this as proof of the close relation between Slovak and Czech folk art and therefore as evidence of "Czechoslovak unity."[114]

Published in 1929, at a time of the continuing political and ethnic claims of the Hungarians over parts of the Slovak territory, Štech's article also argued that Slovak vernacular expression differed considerably from that of Hungary in order to disassociate the two cultures. Slovak art had "a different rhythm," "a different logic, a different imagination and different colour and melodic quality."[115] He thus gave folk art a strong political role, for Slovak folk art "more clearly retained the joint destinies" of the Czechs and Slovaks than any urban artistic practice, and contained, "the reasons of political divisions and unions […] the blood relation of the Czech and Slovak peoples[…]"[116]

This view of the Slovaks and their art was a conscious response to the current and historic political and cultural climate. Firstly, the close links between Slovaks and Czechs were pitched as a counter-argument to Hungarian claims of the Slovak culture and territories, stemming from several centuries of Hungarian rule over what used to be Upper Hungary. Secondly, it served as a validation for the existence of a joint Czechoslovak state in which the Czechs and Slovaks were seen as one nation. Indeed, even though Wirth and Matějček had been dismissive of folk art, they still acknowledged the existence of a joint Czech-Slovak cultural heritage, although at different levels of "cultural maturity." In their interpretation Bohemia possessed high art, easily identifiable with the artistic development of Western Europe, whereas Slovakia, Ruthenia, and certain rural regions of Moravia were rich in so-called low art, derived from high art models. Although mainstream Czech art history of this period was relatively free of explicitly racial rhetoric, it did construct its arguments on the basis of these ethnic and linguistic divisions.[117]

Discipline and Democracy in the East

The assumptions on the part of Wirth, Matějček, and others concerning the historical and cultural division of Czechoslovakia and the cultural and economic superiority of Bohemia over the eastern Slovak regions may be linked to the political and intellectual

histories of the two national groups. In the Habsburg monarchy, the lands of the Bohemian crown had always existed as a historical, although not autonomous, entity, while the Slovaks never achieved recognition of their status within Hungary.[118] The interwar economic advantage of the Czechs was further encouraged by an advanced national self-awareness that dated back to the 19th century. The Czech lands had therefore enjoyed better networks of national institutions, communication, transportation, and trade than Slovakia. And although the Austrian government granted some degree of autonomy to its minorities, allowing for the development of many specifically Czech cultural and political institutions, the Slovaks, ruled by the Hungarian administration in Budapest, were more restricted. Subjected to extensive magyarisation, the Slovaks were not given many opportunities to institutionalise their rising national awareness. Indeed, after the Treaty of Trianon of 1920, the interwar Hungarian government continued to lodge claims to the territories of Upper Hungary that formed the basis of Slovakia in the new Czechoslovak state.

The other issue that contributed to the somewhat patronising attitude of Czech scholars towards the Eastern regions was the lack of Slovak scholars who would take up positions in new regional and national institutions. Until 1918, Hungarians dominated what little art historical infrastructure existed in the region, with museums and galleries all mostly being run by Budapest-trained Hungarians.[119] The gap after their departure was therefore filled by Czech historians, art historians, and ethnographers who were also in most cases trained in Vienna. This phenomenon continued well into the middle of the century. Vladimír Wagner (1900–1955), a Czech art historian born in Vienna, who attended School in Budapest, then studied at the Universities of Brno and Prague, completing his university education under Birnbaum, could be used as an example. He became a professor at the Comenius University in Bratislava in 1947 and published the first survey of art in Slovakia.[120] Together with Václav Mencl (1905–1978), another Czech art historian and professor at the Comenius University, he established an office for monument protection in Slovakia.[121]

The situation in the easternmost region of Ruthenia was even more aggravated as regards to the hierarchical relationship of the local inhabitants with Czechs. The Czechoslovak authorities were often accused of subjecting the local inhabitants to mistreatment.[122] As I have mentioned before, such critical voices came mostly from Hungarian revisionists, Rusyn-Americans, and the Rusyn intelligentsia, as well as from several leftist Czech writers, including the writer and journalist Ivan Olbracht (1882–1952), S. K. Neumann, and the Czechoslovak Communist Party. They objected especially to the assimilation policies in Ruthenia and the Czechisation of the locals promoted by the Prague government. Olbracht, for instance, criticised the proliferation of Czech signs and language, Czech administration, and what he called agricultural colonies, claiming that "we can't avoid seeing the pattern. […]we cannot forget the Hungarian past in this land[…] Now the Czechs are starting the old game all over again."[123] And a year later in his book *Země bez jména* (The Land without a Name), in which he criticised the neglect of these territories by the Czechoslovak authorities, he emphatically criticised the colonial attitudes, concluding that "Czech masters colonise Sub-Carpatia."[124] The attitude to Ruthenia, and to an extent Slovakia can be therefore read as a form of cultural colonialism from the part of the Czechs. Not only did the central administration promote the Czechisation of the easternmost provinces of the state, but the region was, much more than Slovakia, portrayed as an exotic land of highlands where inhabitants lived a simple way of life.

In 1924, an exhibition of "Art and Life of Sub-Carpathian Russia" was organised in Prague, focussing on science, education and the so-called peasant art of this region. Organised by the educational section of the Municipal Council of the regional capital Uzhhorod, it consisted of displays of textiles, ceramics, sculptures, and paintings, for instance, as well as models of wooden churches. A lot of attention was given to ethnographic objects arranged according to the geographical regions of their origin "agreeing with the characteristic varieties of Sub-Carpathian Russian art."[125] The visual arts were understood as the key element of the Rusyn people, "it is in art that the spirit of the nation flourishes," the exhibition catalogue claimed, and such art, in the case of Ruthenia, was "the collective work of the countless male and female artists of the picturesque villages and mountains[…]"[126]

The catalogue continued with a detailed description of wooden churches. "[B]efore they are completely destroyed, we have to find a place in the history of art for this region as soon as possible,"[127] because "the ecclesial wooden buildings in Subcarpathian Ruthenia […] are interesting for their traces of Eastern and Western culture, both Latin and Byzantine."[128] Further, the author of the comment, Jiří Millautz, a representative of the local government, regretted that these churches were often replaced by new, Western-type Catholic churches.[129]

The exhibition was a result of collecting work by ethnographers and enthusiasts from Bohemia, including Millautz and Marie Tůmová, an expert in folk costumes, who in the early 1920s, tried to rediscover the lost "distant land" of the Slavs. Importantly, many were on a civilising mission, sustaining the stereotypes of the civilised world versus the backward periphery. The geographer Karel Matoušek, for example, published an extensive account of his travels of Ruthenia, adopting such a position:

> The Czech who came here after the coup is a man with a Western European education, an honest and efficient official, who easily understands the Rusyn people; he is[…] a real democrat. In his relationship to the local people, he is not a master or a commander, but an honest and friendly fellow citizen and adviser. We bring order, discipline, Western European democracy, and culture to this land of former oriental chaos and disorder.[130]

The oriental chaos was in part associated with the Hungarian rule before 1918. According to the author, prior to 1918, Hungarian authorities had tried to "morally and physically destroy the people that was condemned to vanish as a nation."[131] Yet it also drew on older tropes, and interest in the region dated back to the 19th century when the first "discoverers" from Bohemia searched for natural resources, indigenous people, and new opportunities. Already then was Ruthenia seen as a potential colony under Austrian protection to which the "Czechslavs" exported their culture, business, and where they exploited natural resources. In 1859, that is, before the Austro-Hungarian compromise, František Cyril Kampelík (1805–1872), a Czech physician and national revivalist, suggested Czech settlements in the Eastern part of the monarchy as part of cultural and economic ambitions for Czech expansion and an alternative to economically motivated emigration to America:

> […] instead of expensive and dangerous relocation to faraway America, the rich and poor inhabitants from Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia, being perfect craftsmen and wise farmers should find neat, industrial, pleasant, towns and new

settlements in the scarcely inhabited yet fertile lands of the Austrian monarchy under the protection of the Imperial and Royal government, so that they escape from terrible impoverishment [...][132]

The Czechoslovak involvement in Ruthenia included the financing of new infrastructure, such as administrative buildings, banks, schools, and hospitals, but also, for instance, markings of hiking trails by the Czechoslovak tourist club in the mountains and establishment of Czech districts in large cities.[133] It also extended attention to cultural heritage and architecture, which included the preservation of local buildings; their removal, or the construction of new ones.

As a part of the attempt of the central authorities to preserve Rusyn heritage, several local wooden churches were moved to locations across Bohemia and Moravia in the late 1920s and 1930s. Supervised by Wirth, who was responsible for the protection of monuments at the Ministry of National Education at the time, the transport of about ten churches was an attempt to preserve them and make them into a touristic site in a more accessible location [fig. 4.4].

As an example, one of the most prominent churches, St Michael, ended in the Kinsky gardens in Prague and was supposed to become a part of a larger open-air museum of rural buildings from across Czechoslovakia.[134] This never came to fruition because of protests against the removal of local heritage and the imminence of WWII. The transportation of churches was soon seen as cultural exploitation, because they were taken out of their original cultural and historical environment to serve less as churches and more as touristic attractions.

The removal of architecture was accompanied by new projects from a number of Czech architects who were involved in regenerating the easternmost region of Czechoslovakia. Many of them could treat the territory as a tabula rasa to test out

Figure 4.4 Wooden church, Jasina. Postcard. Author's collection.

their ideas of the international style. Using the modern forms in the large cities could thus be seen as a clear break with the monarchic past and a hope for a "better future in the liberal and democratic republic of Czechoslovakia."[135] For instance, Josef Gočár designed a post office (1930) and a Baťa department store (1928–1930) in Uzhhorod. Baťa's buildings were often considered to be flagships of modernism because they appeared as the first (and sometimes the only) examples of modernist architecture in many towns across Czechoslovakia. Having its own Baťa store was a sign of embracing a modern way of life and consumerism, and having them as far away as Ruthenia was part of the modernising achievement of Czechoslovaks. Apart from Gočár, several other Prague-based architects contributed to the regeneration of the region. Jaroslav Fragner, for example, designed a children's hospital in the town of Mukachevo (1926–1928) while František Krupka built the provincial parliament building in Uzhhorod (1936) [fig. 4.5]. There were also whole new residential neighbourhoods built in the large cities, such as the Masaryk estate in Khust and the Czech estate in Mukachevo.[136]

Czech politicians, art historians, architects, and ethnographers therefore took advantage of the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918 to expand their cultural and political hegemony eastwards. Cultural colonisation could be seen as another sign of independence, and the Western status of the new state.[137] Yet the relationship seems to be more complex than a simple division between the colonised East versus the colonising West. The local inhabitants, being of Slavic origin, retained, in the eyes of many, lost Slavonic links that could, in the eyes of some, enable them to serve as a mediator with Russia. The common ethnic origin also meant that artistic links could also be forged, especially by means of folk art. At the same time, however, the alleged inferiority of peasant art, which the Prague-based scholars promoted, could be used to reconfirm the superior position of Western, higher artistic forms associated with Bohemia and Prague.

Much of this attitude could be seen as a legacy of the Austrian Hungarian approach to regions outside of the monarchy's centre. Riegl, for instance, speaking from the imperial metropolitan perspective, compared Austria to a watchtower at the gates of the East, safeguarding the monarchy from the Ottoman Empire and Russia.

Figure 4.5 František Krupka, Council Building, Uzhhorod, 1936. Postcard. Author's collection.

The Prague-based Czech public figures and scholars, including the Vienna School students, applied a similar orientalising attitude to the alleged outback of Slovakia and Ruthenia where Prague played the role of their protector and civilisation bearer.

Towards the end of the 1920s and in the 1930s, the region was subjected to more scholarly interest. Ethnographers and historians, often based in Prague or elsewhere in Bohemia and Moravia, wrote publications focussing on the ancient crafts, traditions and people of Ruthenia. Zapletal, who promoted the study of eastern regions of Czechoslovakia and eastern links of mediaeval architecture, significantly contributed to the exploration of this region through his photographs and studies.[138]

Conclusion

The establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918 consisting of Slavic and non-Slavic ethnic groups required a formulation of a new national identity that could be used both internally and externally. The modern "Czechoslovak identity" was devised to provide a justification for the union of Czechs and Slovaks, and to construct a sense of a Slavic majority in order to compete with the territorial and political demands of Germans and Hungarians.

The new geo-political landscape also helped to construct a new narrative of art that operated within the same ideology. The notion of "Czechoslovak art" was applied to cover a broad range of historic and contemporary art of the geographical territory of the new state. In this new landscape, the easternmost part of Czechoslovakia, Ruthenia, was placed on the geographical, political, and cultural margins, taken from Prague's perspective. Although the new minorities of Czechoslovakia were acknowledged, they had an unequal place alongside the Czechs, and less so the Slovaks. Art writing can be seen as somewhat complicit in the construction of the vision of the economically and culturally advanced Western parts of Czechoslovakia versus the less developed and more primitive East, where East in the popular, as well as political, imagination often started somewhere outside of Brno. The enduring image of Slovakia (as well as Ruthenia) as enrooted in vernacular culture, and hence understood as backward; was built on the historical stereotypes about the noble Czech versus the Slovak peasant established in the Habsburg Monarchy.[139] The identity of the new state and nation was thereby strengthened by the artistic discourses that reiterated the narrative of a single Czechoslovak identity, while these nationalistic narratives were consistently modernised by art writers who incorporated Czechoslovak art into the universal history of art, which was understood as being Western.

Notes

1 Jaro Nebeský, "Západ nebo východ?" *Umělecký list* no. 1 (1919): 121–122; Florian Zapletal, "Západ nebo východ?" *Umělecký lis*t no. 1 (1919): 147–151; Vojtěch Birnbaum, "Západ nebo východ?" *Zprávy Volných směrů* (1919): 49–53.
2 Vojtěch Birnbaum, *Ravennská architektura* (Prague: Česká akademie císaře Františka Josefa pro vědy, slovesnost a umění, 1916 and 1921).
3 Vojtěch Birnbaum, "Stavební povaha nestarších českých bazilik," *Časopis společnosti přátel starožitností českých*, no. 27 (1919): 1–22; Birnbaum, "K otázce našich rotund," *Památky archeologické*, no. 35 (1927): 167–185.
4 On the German view, see for example Alfred Woltmann and Karl Woermann, *Geschichte der Malerei. Die Malerei des Alterthums* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1879) and *Geschichte*

der Malerei. Die Malerei der Renaissance (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1882). It was also published in English as: *History of Painting. Ancient Early Christian and Mediaeval*, vol. I., ed. By Sidney Colvin (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880); Woltmann and Woermann, *History of Painting. The Painting of the Renascence*, vol. II., trans. Clara Bell (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1887); Alfred Woltmann, *Zur Geschichte der böhmischen Miniaturmalerei* (Stuttgart: Spemann, 1877); Bernhard Grueber, *Die Kunst des Mittelalters in Böhmen. Nach den Bestehenden Denkmalen Geschildert*, vol. IV, (Wien: Karl Gerold's Sohn, 1871–1879); Ernst Wernicke, "Meister Beneš von Laun ein Deutscher," *Anzeiger der Kunde der deutschen Vorzeit,* no. 5 (1881): 141–144. On the Czech view, e.g. Jan Herain, "Beneš Lounský, jinak Benedikt Reta z Pístova, královský kamenník a jeho rod," *Památky archeologické* XIV (1887–89): 497–504, and 563–566; Karel B. Mádl, "Matyáš Rejsek a Beneš z Loun. Listy z české gotiky," *Světozor* XV, no. 31–35 (1881); Antonín Baum, "Jak píší historii umění českého," *Památky. Listy pro archeologii a historii* IX (1871/1873): 365–382; Baum, "Jak se píše historie umění českého," *Památky. Listy pro archeologii a historii* VI (1871): 241–248.

 5 Alois Riegl, *Die spätromische Kunstindustrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn*, vol. I (Vienna: K.K. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1901); Franz Wickhoff and Wilhelm Ritter von Hartel, *Die Wiener Genesis* (Prague, Vienna: Tempsky; Leipzig: Freytag, 1895).

 6 Josef Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom? Beiträge zur Geschichte der Spätantiken und Frühchristlichen Kunst* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1900).

 7 Nebeský, "Západ nebo východ," 121; Zapletal, "Západ nebo východ?" 149.

 8 For example Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře První republiky* I-III (Prague: Libri, 2000–2003); Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle. The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1914–1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Rudolf Kučera, ed., *Identity v českých zemích 19. a 20. století: hledání a proměny* (Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2012); Kateřina Čapková, *Czechs, Germans, Jews? National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2012); Mary Heimann, *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1947* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2008); Mark Cornwall and R. J. W. Evans, eds., *Czechoslovakia in Nationalist and Fascist Europe*, *1918–1948* (London: British Academy, 2007); Jaroslav Kučera, *Minderheit im Nationalstaat: die Sprachenfrage in den tschechisch-deutschen Beziehungen 1918–1938* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1999).

 9 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6.

10 Brubaker, *Nationalism*, 5.

11 Jan Rychlík, "Czech-Slovak Relations, 1918–1939," in *Czechoslovakia in Nationalist and Fascist Europe*, *1918–1948*, ed. Mark Cornwall and R. J. W. Evans (London: British Academy, 2007), 14–15.

12 For example Stanislav Holubec, "'We bring order, discipline, Western European democracy and culture to this land of former oriental chaos and disorder.' Czech Perceptions of Sub-Carpathian Rus and its Modernization in the 1920s," in *Mastery and Lost Illusions. Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe*, eds. Włodzimierz Borodziej, Stanislav Holubec and Joachim von Puttkamer (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag GmbH, 2014), 225.

13 Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře První republiky (1918–1938): Díl první. Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918–1929)* (Prague: Libri, 2000), 245.

14 Geoffrey Brown, "Blaming the bourgeoisie: the Czech Left-Wing Response to Perceived Czech Imperialism in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, 1931–1935," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 46 (2012): 71.

15 Cf. Andrzej Szczerski, *Modernizacje. Sztuka i architektura w nowych państwach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej 1918–1939* (Łódź: Muzeum Sztuki, 2010), 311–315.

16 Rychlík, "Czech-Slovak Relations," 15.

17 Miroslav Hroch, *The Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

18 Rychlík, 'Czech-Slovak Relations," 14–15.

19 Kárník, *České země*, 180.

20 Marta Filipová, "Between East and West. The Vienna School and the Idea of Czechoslovak Art," *The Journal of Art Historiography* 8 (2013). http://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/filipova.pdf; Matthew Rampley, *The Vienna School of Art History* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2013), 54–55; Rudolf Chadraba, "Vídeňská škola a český dějepis umění," in *Kapitoly z českého dějepisu umění II. Dvacáté století*, ed. Rudolf Chadraba (Prague: Odeon, 1987), 9–70.

21 Jiří Roháček and Kristina Uhlíková, eds., *Zdeněk Wirth pohledem dnešní doby* (Prague: Ústav dějin umění Akademie věd ČR, 2011), 14; Jan Skřivánek, "Ministerstvo kultury a Národní galerie v období první republiky,"(MA thesis, Masaryk University Brno, 2007), 7.

22 Josef Krása, "Vincenc Kramář," in *Kapitoly* II, 118–125, Jana Claverie, *Vincenc Kramář : un théoricien et collectionneur du cubisme à Prague (*Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2002); Vojtěch Lahoda and Olga Uhrová, *Vincenc Kramář: From the Old Masters to Picasso* (Prague: National Gallery in Prague, 2000).

23 Act no. 135 Coll., on the relations of Prague universities of 19 February 1920.

24 Klement Benda, "Rozmach oboru v devadesátých letech," in *Kapitoly II*, 197 (197–212).

25 Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře první republiky (1918–1938): Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918–1929)* (Praha: Libri, 2000), 185–186.

26 Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, 102 and Kotalík, Jiří. *Almanach Akademie vytvarného umění k 180. vyročí založení (1799–1979)* (Prague: AVU and National Gallery in Prague, 1979), 25.

27 "Historie a současnost," *Vysoká škola uměleckoprůmyslová*. http://www.vsup.cz.

28 Kárník, *České země*, 183. Luboš Hlaváček, "František Žákavec," in *Kapitoly* II, 139–142, for example, František Žákavec, *Chrám znovuzrození. O budovatelích a budově Národního divadla v Praze* (Prague: Štenc, 1918); František Žákavec, *Dílo Josefa Mánesa II. Lid československý* (Prague: Štenc, 1923); František Žákavec, *Dílo Dušana Jurkoviče: kus dějin československé architektury* (Prague: Vesmín, 1929).

29 Vincenc Kramář, "Franz Wickhoff," *Volné směry* 12 (1909): 211–214. Translated into English as Vincenc Kramář, "Obituary of Franz Wickhoff" by Marta Filipová in *Journal of Art Historiography*, 8, 2013. https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/kramar.pdf

30 Kramář, "Franz Wickhoff," 211.

31 Kramář, "Franz Wickhoff," 211.

32 Vincenc Kramář, "Max Dvořák," *Přehled* 8 (1909–1910): 52–53, 75–76; Vincenc Kramář, "O vídeňské škole dějin umění," *Volné směry* 14 (1910): 41–43, 75–78, 110–112, 170–174, 209–210.

33 Kramář, "Franz Wickhoff," 211.

34 Kramář, "Franz Wickhoff," 211.

35 Kramář, "O vídeňské škole dějin umění," 110.

36 Kramář, "Franz Wickhoff," 211.

37 Kramář, "Franz Wickhoff," 211.

38 Ján Bakoš, "From Universalism to Nationalism. Transformation of Vienna School Ideas in Central Europe," in *Die Kunsthistoriographien in Ostmitteleuropa und der nationale Diskurs*. eds. Robert Born, Alena Janatková and Adam Labuda (Berlin: Mann Verlag, 2004), 86.

39 Bakoš, "From Universalism," Margaret Olin, "Alois Riegl: The Late Roman Empire in the Late Habsburg Empire", in *The Habsburg Legacy, National Legacy in Historical Perspective*, eds. Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994); Matthew Rampley, "Art History and the Politics of Empire: Rethinking the Vienna School," *Art Bulletin* 91, no. 4 (2009): 447–463.

40 Otto M. Urban, "The Beginnings of Modern Art History and Art Criticism in the Czech Lands," *Centropa. A Journal of Central European Architecture and Related Arts* 5, no. 1 (2005): 40–48; Marta Filipová, "The Construction of a National Identity in Czech Art History," *Centropa* 8, no. 3 (2008): 257–271; Milena Bartlová, "Creating Borders: the Uses of Art Histories in Central Europe," *Ars* 40, no. 2 (2007): 129–133.

41 Jindřich Vybíral, "What Is 'Czech' in Art in Bohemia? Alfred Woltmann and Defensive Mechanisms of Czech Artistic Historiography," *Kunstchronik* LIX, no. 1 (2006): 1–7.

42 Thomas daCosta Kaufmann, *Towards a Geography of Art* (Chicago, IL and Bristol: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 83.

43 Kristina Glacová, "Florian Zapletal historik umění(?)," in *Život a dílo. Sborník příspěvků z konference Muzea Komenského v Přerově, p. o. 18.–19. října 2005*, ed. František Hýbl (Přerov: Muzeum Komenského v Přerově, 2006), 157.

44 For example Jaroslav Nebeský, "Krise západnictví," *Umělecký list* 2, no. 1–2 (1920): 29–36.

45 Nebeský, "Krise západnictví," 35.

46 Václav Král, *Spojenectví československo-sovětské v evropské politice 1935–39* (Prague: Academia, 1970); Antonín Klimek and Eduard Kubů, *Československá zahraniční politika 1918–1938: kapitoly z dějin mezinárodních vztahů* (Prague: Institut pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku, 1995).

47 Kárník, *České země*, 182.

48 Zapletal, "Západ," 113.

49 Zapletal, "Západ," 149.

50 Zapletal, "Západ," 149.

51 Zapletal, "Západ," 149.

52 Zapletal, "Západ," 147.

53 Zapletal, "Západ," 149.

54 Birnbaum, "Západ,", 52.

55 Birnbaum, "Západ," 51.

56 Birnbaum, "Západ," 52.

57 Birnbaum, "Západ," 52.

58 Published as Josef Strzygowski, "Der vorromanische Kirchenbau der Westslawen," *Slavia. Časopis pro slovanskou filologii* 3 (1924–1925): 392–446.

59 Strzygowski, "Der vorromanische Kirchenbau," 466.

60 Birnbaum, "Nový názor na počátky české křesťanské architektury," *Obzor* 4 (1925): 1–11.

61 Birnbaum, "Nový názor," 1.

62 Zdeněk Wirth, "Ferdinand J. Lehner," *Památky archeologické* 26 (1914): 69–71.

63 Wirth, "Ferdinand J. Lehner," 69.

64 The key text in this regard is Alois Riegl, *Volkskunst, Hausfleiß und Hausindustrie* (Berlin: Siemens, 1894).

65 Georg Vasold, "Riegl, Strzygowski and the Development of Art," *Journal of Art Historiography,* no. 5 (2011), 111.

66 Jiří Kocian, "The Czechs versus the Slovaks: Bilateral Relations, 1944–1948," in *Czechoslovakia*, ed. Cornwall and Evans, 208.

67 Ondřej Bartoš, "Jazykové právo v první ČSR" (Master's thesis, Masaryk University Brno, 2011), 38.

68 Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, "Independent Bohemia," in *Masaryk in England*, ed. Robert William Seton-Watson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), 125.

69 Ladislav Holý, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation. National Identity and the Post-Communist Social Transformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 95.

70 Masaryk, "Independent Bohemia," 116–124; "The Washington Declaration," *Virtual Archive of Central European History*, Cornell University. http://dspace.library.cornell.edu/bitstream/1813/2139/1/Founding_of_Czechoslovakia_1918-1924.pdf. Accessed on March 12, 2013.

71 Quoted in Holý, *The Little Czech*, 95. It can also be noted that the French title of the Czechoslovak National Council, the Paris-based exile government during the First World War, was "Conseil National des Pays Tchèques," where, again, "Tchèques" stood for both Czech and Slovak. Although this body of politicians attempted to create a new political entity, they wished to prevent any fears of balkanisation of Central Europe that the Allies might have had.

72 Albert Pražák, *Československý národ* (Prague: Akademie, 1925).

73 František Kutnar and Ladislav Marek, *Přehledné dějiny českého a slovenského dějepisectví. Od počátků národní kultury až do sklonku třicátých let 20.století* (Prague: Lidové noviny, 1997), 891–892.

74 Pražák, *Československý národ*, 14.

75 Pražák, *Československý národ*, 11.

76 Pražák, *Československý národ*, 11.

77 Pražák cites e.g. Pavol Blaho, "Slováci a čestina," *Hlas* 4 (1903), 293; Ján Botto, *Slovenská čítanka* (Prague: Moravsko-slezská Beseda, 1911), 84. Pražák also included 17 pages of quotations from historical documents and speeches referring to the concepts of "Czechoslovak nation," "Czechoslovaks," or "Czech Slavs" spanning the beginning of the 8th century and 1925.

78 Cf. Bartlová, "Creating Borders," 129–133.

79 Small contributions to the descriptions of the visual material were made František Žákavec, J. Alsner, Rudolf Hlubinka, František Xaver Jiřík, K. Kühn.

80 Kristina Uhlíková, "Zdeněk Wirth, český historik umění a organizátor památkové péče," in *Zdeněk Wirth pohledem dnešní doby*, eds. Jiří Roháček and Kristina Uhlíková (Prague: Artefactum and ÚDU AV ČR, 2011), 14–15.

81 Zdeněk Wirth, ed., *Československé umění* (Prague: Vesmír, 1926), 32.

82 Wirth, "Výklad k obrazům," *Československé umění*, 32.

83 "Československé umění," in Wirth, *Československé umění*, 7.

84 Wirth, "Výklad k obrazům," *Československé umění*, 32.

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88 Filipová, "Between East and West," 5, Milena Bartlová, "Continuity and Discontinuity in the Czech Legacy of the Vienna School of Art History," *Journal of Art Historiography* no. 8 (2013). https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/bartlovc3a1.pdf.

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90 Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, 24.

91 Wirth, *Umění československého lidu*, 11. Ruthenia had already been focus of a number of ethnographic studies – cf. Renáta Tyršová, *Svéráz v zemích československých* (Plzeň: Český deník, 1918); Amalie Kožmínová, *Podkarpatská Rus. Práce a život lidu po stránce kulturní, hospodářské a národopisné* (Prague: Kobosil, 1922).

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98 Wirth, "Lidové a moderní umění," 10.

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127 Jiří Millautz, "Dřevěná architektura od Užoka po Jasiny," in *Katalog výstavy*, 70.

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130 Karel Matoušek, *Podkarpatská Rus* (Prague: Česká grafická unie, 1924), 89. English translation taken from Holubec, *Mastery*, 248.

131 Holubec, *Mastery*, 248.

132 František Cyril Kampelík, *Průmyslné návrhy jakby zámožní a chudí občané z Čech, Moravy, Slezka i Slovenska, jsouce dokonalí řemeslníci a rozumní rolníci, místo útratného, nebezpečného stěhování se do daleké Ameriky, raději vzorná, průmyslná, pěkná města, nebo nové osady na řidko zaliděných úrodných končinách rakouské říše pod ochranou c.k. vlády zakládati měli, aby před hrozivým zchudnutím a svízelem ještě včas ubíhajícím, jakož i potomkům jejich dobře se vedlo* (Hradec Králové: Nákladem spisovatelovým, 1859), 105.

133 Holubec, *Mastery*, 234

134 Ivan Malý and Jan Pohunek, "Kostelík sv. Michala v Kinského zahradě a idea československého muzea v přírodě," *Dějiny a současost* (2014): 38–40.

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138 Florian Zapletal, Dřevěné kostelíky v Zakarpatí (Prague: Karpatia, 2015); Zapletal, *Města a vesnice Zakarpatí = Towns and villages in the Carpatians* (Uzhhorod: Vydavnyctvo Oleksandry Harkuši, Karpatia, 2016).
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5   Traditions

In his essay from 1924 entitled "O tradici a tvoření kolektivním" (On Tradition and Collective Work), Josef Čapek turned to the question of tradition in the new context of postwar Czechoslovakia, when new avant-garde groups and views of art were emerging in quick succession. "Tradition," he asserted, "is often seen as a troubling question related to the *national* aspect of art; collective creative work is often seen as a troubling question related to the *social* aspect of art (emphasis mine)."[1] He placed against each other what he saw as the two main tendencies in Czech art: conservative and anarchist when he claimed that "tradition often becomes a battle cry of the older generation, collectivity of artistic work becomes a battle cry of the younger one."[2] Representatives of the former group, he argued, indulged in following the various –isms of the past, professed nationalism and sympathised with the political right. The latter group of revolutionary artists, whose politics were close to radical socialism and the extreme left, favoured collectivity. Yet in a critical tone, Čapek described them as a handful of radical friends who would meet up to agree about which of the latest –isms they should follow.

Čapek divided the Czech art scene in this seemingly simplistic way and claimed that just two opposites existed – one of conservative nationalism and one of radical avant-gardism. He was critical of both because, for him, they represented not artistic but political stances. Moreover, they were not so easily limited to a single category – a work of art seen today as conservative, for example, could become an inspirational piece for the leftist avant-garde of the future. At the same time, there was always a vast array of parallel artistic trends at any one time, and therefore it was impossible to claim what the latest and most influential one could be.[3] Čapek suggested that various artistic tendencies can coincide as well as influence each other, and thus captured well the complexity and diversity of the Czech artistic scene in the 1920s and later in the 1930s.

Significantly, too, Čapek's text epitomised the continued interest in the role of tradition in Czech art. Tradition was a phenomenon that many modern Czech artists and art critics, often unwittingly, kept coming back to. There were different reasons for this and they will be explored in this chapter. For many authors, tradition was synonymous with a regressive tendency which was related to older generations and conservative politics. They identified with the view that tradition is often understood as a phenomenon that connects history with the present, and therefore becomes a significant opposite to progress and change. Yet not all Czech art critics and art historians in interwar Czechoslovakia considered traditions as being purely static. In relation to art forms, tradition was given a multitude of meanings, which ranged from

the sustenance of historicist expression to seeing it as being linked with the artistic practices of a specific social class or gender. This chapter unpicks the seeming contradictions in approaching the notion of tradition in interwar art writing and claims that traditions had an important place in formulating not only the notion of modern Czech identity, but also that of modern Czech art.

Traditions and the War

Much of the embrace of, or turn to, those "traditional" forms of expression that Josef Čapek had in mind took place during the war and shortly after, when artists started searching for new securities, values, and beliefs. Already in 1915, Čapek complained that "if the war lasts for another two years, [the painters] Beneš and Nejedlý will end up [looking] like Brožík, Schwaiger, and Panuška."[4] Vincenc Beneš (1883–1979) and Otakar Nejedlý (1883–1957) were painters whose work – according to Čapek – started diverting from pre-war abstraction [fig. 5.1]. During the war, they started adopting more and more conservative and traditional forms of expression close to neo-Classicism. Čapek associated them with Brožík, Schwaiger, and Panuška who were members of the older generation of Czech painters and also considered by him to be conservative: Václav Brožík and Hanuš Schwaiger (1854–1912) were realist and academic painters, while Jaroslav Panuška (1872–1958) turned away from the symbolism and decadence of his earlier career to landscape painting. Čapek feared that the war was turning painters into conservatives who preferred uncontroversial subjects like landscapes and still lifes.

An alternative interpretation of the development of Czech art during the war was offered by the art critic Václav Nebeský. Later on, between 1924 and 1938, he lived
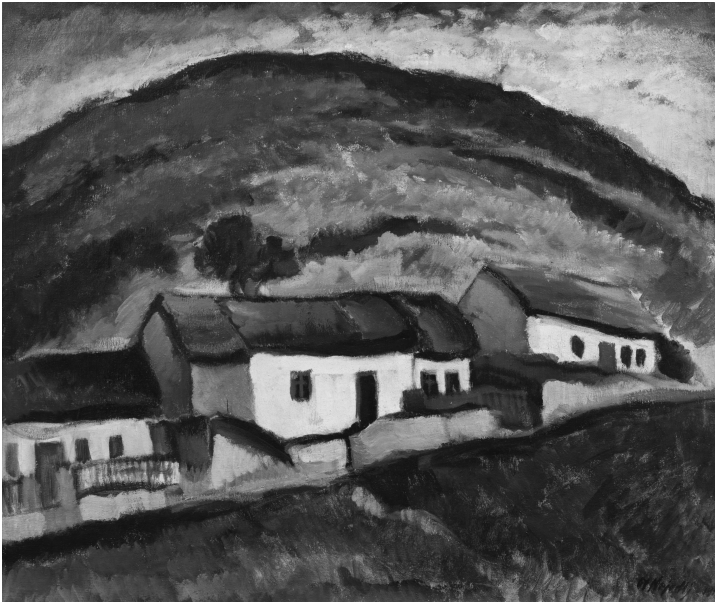
Figure 5.1 Otakar Nejedlý, Černošice, 1915. Oil on canvas. Gallery of Modern Art Roudnice nad Labem. O 283.

in Paris and published numerous important artistic observations of Czech and French art; articles on contemporary exhibitions, artists, and art theory, especially in the journals *Tribuna* (The Tribune) and *Život*. Nebeský pointed out that traditionally, it was the people in Bohemia, not the institution of a gallery or a museum, who decided on the success of artists, as was clear from the examples of Mánes and Aleš, the oft-cited pair of 19th century artists.[5] Furthermore, at times, the social undercurrent driving Czech artistic practice was as strong as to disrupt unity in style. That explained, in his view, the turn towards art during WWI that would be seen as more Czech in the sense that it embraced more closely the attempt to express national identity. He identified two diverse ways of expressing this: the first was the art that had what he called a national, inner base (that some called a soul in the Hegelian sense), but was still international. Nebeský most probably referred here to the artists of the group Tvrdošíjní that emerged during the war and officially came to existence in 1918. The group formed around Josef Čapek and consisted of, for example, the painters Václav Špála, Rudolf Kremička, and Jan Zrzavý, together with the architect Vlastislav Hofman. Their work tried to reconnect with pre-war Cubism while developing a more Classicist visual language. According to Nebeský, even though he did not offer any concrete names, these artists "retained a balance between the internal and external situation" and created permanent values and foundations for future art.[6]

The second tendency of Czech art to come out of WWI was, according to Nebeský, a more explicit manifestation of local traditions, featuring, for instance, vernacular ornament in architecture while representing a national and aesthetic sentimentalism. Here, he most probably had in mind Janák's and Gočár's attempts of reviving Slavic vernacular language in architecture after 1918 in "the short-lived period of colourful decorative architecture." It turned out, Nebeský claimed, that "it was impossible to build a [new] style using means of a single national and aesthetic sentimentalism."[7] Despite his criticism, Nebeský acknowledged the turn towards traditions during the war that affected artists in different ways.

Many other critics and artists of the younger generation did not have much time for the allegedly regressive work, as the painter, photographer, graphic artist, poet, and member of Devětsil Jindřich Štýrský (1899–1942) documented with his harsh commentary on the same two artists five years after the war. In his view,

> […] painters à la Nejedlý and Beneš and hordes of others fight against the modernity that is sweeping over them like an avalanche; in vain; they lack the strength to find a solid and suitable place for themselves and their work in the present time – they are quite useless parasites. A photo is a more perfect narrator than they are.[8]

While there was a lot of criticism of the mechanical copying of pre-existing artistic models, the war in fact pushed many commentators to reflect not only on traditions, but also on the notion of national art and its relation to contemporary production. Many of these sentiments were expressed in the articles of the journal *Život a mythus* (Life and Myth), published by Umělecká beseda, a patriotic artistic organisation which openly embraced traditions, Czech heritage, and the countryside. This versatile organisation had many of its members reject modernism. *Život a mythus* was established in 1914, and was edited by Jaroslav Jareš (1886–1967), a painter who was influenced by Slavic mysticism; and Bohumil Mathesius (1888–1952), a poet and literary critic who was oriented on Russian literature and culture. The journal did not have a long

lifespan, ending only after six issues in the same year, and its content to a large extent reflected the anxieties of the imminent war, which was seen as a direct threat to the future of Czech national culture. Similarly to the direction of Umělecká beseda, the contributors to *Život a mythus* embraced Czech nationalism, Slavic mysticism, and Russian influences, which was reflected in the articles and works of arts reproduced here. The journal's conservative stance can be illustrated by the fact that it often criticised contemporary artists for being too enthusiastic about Formalism and for embracing a Picasso-style Cubism. "All over Europe and America we see that there are people as pathetic as Mr. Čapek, Kubín, Špála, Kubišta, or even more so," they claimed, for instance.[9] The so-called pathetic character of their work was, for them, linked to their uncritical acceptance of French modern art.

One of the targets of this criticism was Josef Čapek. Apart from his reflections on traditions, he had pondered about the heightened nationalism during the war in two essays, written already at the end of the conflict.[10] In 1918, he examined the meaning of the so-called Czechness in art; the international influences on Czech art, and the possible reconciliation of the two.[11] He offered a few sarcastic comments on the appearance of new patriotic brands during the war, such as the shoe polish Komenský, or the Jiří of Poděbrady moustache wax, recalling the names of the 17th century Protestant pedagogue and philosopher, and the 15th century king of Bohemia respectively.[12] Underlying these remarks was sharp criticism of what Čapek presented as an empty self-satisfaction with Czech traditionalism; the dismissal of any new artistic expressions, and tendency for the passive copying of older works of art by, for example, Aleš or Mánes that started appearing already before the war.

As an alternative, Čapek called for an international approach and outlook of what he saw as *new art,* which would, importantly, not defy previous traditions. He explicitly acknowledged the existence of "underlying and permanent" qualities of the national character that were inevitably contained in all of the works of what he described as truly national culture. They, however, did not have to be explicitly visible in works of art. For Čapek, the idea of the Czechness of art was an empty and shifty notion because it was prone to subjective interpretation. He claimed that "the colourfulness of painter X was once taken for the pure expression of a Czech (or Slavonic) soul, that adores bright, sharp colours, while the same article saw the greyish subdued quality of the painter Y as the expression of the Czech (or Slavonic) melancholy and sorrow."[13] In this respect, Čapek expressed similar views to art writers before the war in that he asked for modern art to be aware of the national traditions in addition to that of the contemporary international context. However, from quite early on, he had been warning with his articles against too rigid a reliance on the past, and the creation of what could be called a reactionary and patriotic modernism.

Tradition in Art History

The place of tradition within the notion of Czech modern art was therefore discussed during the war, as well as immediately after its end, by a variety of authors and from a number of angles. Czech art historians were especially involved in examining the relationship between traditions and modern Czech art. Two of them, Vincenc Kramář and V. V. Štech, serve as examples of two diverse views of the relevance and topicality of the concept of tradition in their present day. Moreover, both were also politically active in the interwar period, and therefore their views of the relationship between

tradition and modern culture influenced many of the contemporary cultural policies of state institutions. Kramář was active at the Picture Gallery while Štech was involved in the Ministry of Education. And while the former actively promoted international art, especially Cubism, and saw its possibilities for an internationally competitive Czech art, the latter openly called for artists to return to their land and its traditions, which he saw as being formative for the idea of national art.

In an article on the nature of art education in the new state, for example, Štech – who also taught at the School of Applied Arts – criticised individualism in art, which he saw as being detrimental to contemporary art. "Too much individuality has caused loss of rhythm and loss of measure […] the effort to differ, the fever for being distinctive, paralyses contemporary art."[14] Referring to the academic education of the new generation of artists, Štech saw a solution in "at least a partial return to copying the old as well as new works of art […] so that they can absorb some of the completed findings of the previous generations by which they could nourish a sense of tradition in them."[15]

Štech believed that art that was not based on traditional skills and technical knowledge, that was acquired at academies, led to artistic arbitrariness. He warned that "there is an increasing number of twenty-something revolutionaries of art […] who start their artistic career with negation, destruction, denial of the old and hectic invention of the new, creating empty forms."[16] Artists, by which he especially meant the forming avant-garde, who created art without a patron or commission may be free to an extent, but they were also socially useless. For that reason, Štech claimed that artists should return to being "non-individualistic members of society;" they should return to averageness, traditional skills, and artistic commissions.[17] In his theoretical writing, he supported the idea of collectivity in art and design, which he also translated into the support of collective design organisations in Czechoslovakia, such as Svaz československého díla (the Association of the Czechoslovak Werkbund), and Artěl. Štech was a founding member of Artěl, which focussed on designing objects for everyday life and originally also aimed to produce them following the Wiener Werkstätte model.[18] For lack of financial means, however, Artěl did not end up manufacturing its objects and remained focussed on the design process of interiors, household equipment, toys, textiles, and so on.

Štech therefore represented a more conservative viewpoint when it came to the relation of contemporary art and artists to local traditions and conditions. In an article on national art published in 1916, he defined traits specific to Czech art. He saw decorative and ornamental qualities, rhythm, and movement of line and colour to be central to Czech art.[19] They materialised especially in the so-called Czech "patriotic" art that started emerging from the end of the 18th century.[20] Such art did not bring benefit to an individual but the whole nation. In other words, its collectivity was not only the creative process but also in its purpose. As such, Štech noted critically that, while it was not necessarily of high artistic merit, it was culturally significant. Štech found examples of this patriotic art in the work of the two constants in Czech art that many of his colleagues and predecessors used as examples of what they interpreted as authentic Czechness: Josef Mánes and Mikoláš Aleš. The two artists can therefore be also taken for a kind of tradition in Czech art as they provided a permanent point of reference for a diversity of art writers.

While Štech's views might be seen as being rather conventional, some of them, especially the belief in the existence of a national, or what he called a "patriotic" art, were

shared by more progressive art critics and art historians – though not as openly. Kramář can be seen as an example of just that. Often related to modernist and internationally orientated views of art, his attitude to the relationship between Czech art and external and internal stimuli differed profoundly from Štech's. Kramář not only more openly acknowledged the importance of international artistic exchanges; he also promoted individualism. Yet his key treatise on Cubism, published in 1921, which contained a thorough examination of the work of Picasso and Braque from before the war, included a reflection on their reception in the Czech context. He was particularly interested in the national canon of Czech art and its relationship with the international context.[21]

It is in this context that Kramář provided a striking analysis of tradition and Czech national art, the latter of which I have examined in Chapter 1. Like many others, Kramář believed that Czech artists needed to be informed by the art of "the leading world spirits," but they should approach them in a Czech way.[22] Artists can do that naturally by being born, belonging to a nation, or belonging to a race, Kramář claimed. However, he pointed out that many of the traits often regarded as being racially unique were in fact acquired cultural values. "It is simply necessary for artists to live the life of their nation, to know its contemporary and ancient culture, to concentrate [in their work] on the most original and valuable [achievements] that the nation ever created, felt and thought."[23]

Czech artists should be aware of traditions, not only in the form of folk art but, more importantly, in a deeper, more spiritual form on which they can build. Even though local artists were informed by international trends, he held that they did not have to lose their "Czechness;" art which is of a world standard could still be Czech if it was created by "intelligent Czech artists who are grounded in our life and tradition."[24] Kramář also offered a definition of this Czechness of art, which was not contained in its resemblance of old masters, but rather in the spirit and rhythm that brought them to life. Even paintings that were linked with French Cubism could be more Czech than those copying those artists who were habitually linked to the Czech national canon.[25] Similarly to Josef Čapek, he argued that Czech art could not be created by the mere repetition of external and formal artistic features:

> It is not enough to look at the external appearance of paintings of some of our masters and speedily deduce a formula freshened up by some modern additions. We need intelligent artists who are able to experience, feel and think deeply over our tradition in its entirety and who can contemplate the nature of our contemporary and historical national life.[26]

It is clear that traditions played an important role here. A good national artist, Kramář argued in a way that was not too different from Štech; needed to be familiar with the traditions he came from, and was required to be able to reassess and apply them under his own specific conditions.[27]

Kramář consequently expressed the belief that Czech artists had to be aware of the historical, as well as modern, contexts of their work, both regionally and internationally. In this case, in this connection, Kramář gave an example of an exhibition of the work of Josef Mánes and his "pure idealism and relentless artistic discipline," which could be passed onto contemporary artists and audiences like, for example, the music of Bedřich Smetana.[28] Even though Kramář was sceptical about a passive adoption of features *resembling* Mánes, he too acknowledged the artist's key place in the history of

Czech art and his impact on modern art. Time and time again, Mánes (alongside Aleš) featured in the writing of many contemporary art historians and art critics, including Dvořák, Štech, and Šalda, who all emphasised his role in the national art canon and his importance for modern art.[29] Yet what is also important in Kramář's ideas about Czech modern art is the way he managed to nationalise Cubism in the way that effectively combined an awareness of international artistic development with a thoughtful approach to local traditions.

Slavic Traditions and Alfons Mucha

Kramář's interest in Cubism stemmed from his close links with the French art world, to which many Czech artists were also inclined. Therefore, the question of the extent to which the exchange with French art, or indeed with any other art, preoccupied many writers. Vlastimil Rada's article "Cestou pravdy" (On the route of truth) in the 1921 volume of *Život* is a good example of a critical stance towards abstract tendencies in Czech art and the orientation of many Czech artists towards French art. Rada, a painter and graphic artist, also suggested how the relationship between the past and present could be approached and he provided an alternative to Kramář:

> So far, our modern art has revelled in solving the formal problems constructed by France, and as a result, we have judged ourselves by French standards. […] The future of our art is nevertheless not in solving the so-called worldwide (i.e. French) formal problems; our visual arts will take up a significant position in the world once they are able to deal with Czech formal problems, once we start judging ourselves by ourselves.[30]

At the same time, Rada refused traditionalism as practiced in the 19th century, which, according to him, had survived in some form until his days.

> […] the second-hand paintings that […] are executed as a superficial imitation of our best national painters cannot be the basis of our artistic development. Similarly we do not need expeditions into mythical Old-Slavic prehistory to understand our ancient national character; our Czech myth lies in our presence […].[31]

Rada's criticism of the evocation of ancient Slavonic history could be related to the work of a number of Czech artists of the interwar period, but especially to that of Alfons Mucha, a graphic artist and painter who was born in southern Moravia and studied painting in Munich. After several commercially successful years in Paris, where he most famously worked for Sarah Bernhardt, he spent a few years in the United States before coming back to Bohemia to reconnect with Czech art and culture. In the early 1920s, he continued working on a grand series of twenty large-scale canvases, The Slav Epic, on the history and mythology of the Slavs and the Czechs, which he started in 1912 [fig. 5.2].[32] Mucha handed the completed cycle over to the Republic of Czechoslovakia in 1928 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic. The work and the discussions that surrounded its handover and content can be seen as indicative of a number of questions, especially the divide between internationalism and local patriotism, which contemporary artists, art critics, and art historians of the time were concerned about.

Figure 5.2 Alfons Mucha, The Slavs in their Original Homeland, 1912. Egg tempera on canvas. Prague City Gallery. M 400.

The strong pro-Slavic message in Mucha's work was controversial for some, especially as the idea of Slavic unity lost its original appeal as a result of WWI, in which many Slavic groups had fought against each other. Even great defenders of the Pan-Slavic ideology, such as František Žákavec, criticised the "empty adoption" of superficial qualities and stereotypes associated with the Slavs, which, he argued, made Mucha's work more decorative than "Slavic."[33] These stereotypes included the artist's depiction of round female faces and national costumes, as well as the use of what he described as Slavic "soft" and sweet colours.[34]

Already in the early interwar period, Mucha held a precarious position in Czech art, with many criticising his decorative graphic work, as well as historicising paintings which they saw as full of pathos. It therefore immediately became a contentious issue when Mucha indicated that, as a personal gift to the nation and as an expression of his feelings towards it, the Slav Epic was to be placed in a purpose-built pavilion constructed, and paid for, by the city of Prague.[35] Just as the Slav Epic was presented to the Czechoslovak government, critics started to ask about the future purpose and location of the cycle. Josef Čapek, for instance, noted that Mucha's monumental work, despite the artist's best intentions, did not have the artistic merits for which it would be worth building a brand new museum, which Mucha wanted for his work.[36] Čapek pointed out that the work in its enormous size became a rather embarrassing gift for the City of Prague.

Čapek's opinion on the lack of artistic qualities of the Epic was reiterated, sometimes in stronger words, by many contemporary critics after the first exhibition of

the Epic in 1928 and at the time of Mucha's death. For example, the painter Viktor Nikodém (1885–1958) claimed in *Národní osvobození* (National Liberation), a newspaper supportive of the Castle, that Mucha's attempt to celebrate the nation's history in the Slav Epic was an anachronism, which lacked artistic qualities.[37] Pavel Kropáček (1915–1943), a Czech art historian, ascribed Mucha's failure to the artist's schematic approach and his personal belief that he was capable of creating monumental, historical paintings.[38] The Slav Epic was, in his opinion, "an evident mistake, an unnecessary mistake" which only harmed the art for which Mucha should be remembered – his Art Nouveau designs. Quite aptly, the author also noted that the Slav Epic should not be assessed for its aesthetic qualities, but rather as an interesting historical document of some significance.[39]

Harsher reactions came from more radical authors, represented in the first place by Karel Teige, who saw the *Slav Epic* as a continuation of conservative reactionary Romanticism, which he associated with the capitalist, bourgeois culture.[40] Romanticism was, for him, the last of the uniform styles in the traditional sense of the concept, and, at the same time, "the beginning of a deep split which disposes of the existing stylistic unity."[41] As a style of the ruling class, Teige associated it especially with the French Restoration period and the July Monarchy of the second quarter of the 19th century. For Teige, such art stood in contrast to official, bourgeois art, represented by the academicism and commercial kitsch that had developed from the first two Romanticisms.

In this dialectic Marxist interpretation, first presented as a lecture in 1935 and published a year later, Teige divided art into "non-art," which he associated with capitalist, bourgeois culture, and popular kitsch, or sub-art. He further subdivided "non-art" into so-called intimate art – which had no aspirations, ideological content, or motivation, which was the bourgeois art for the bourgeoisie – and academic art. This was bourgeois art for the people. Among the official and servile painters of the "strongest bourgeois banality" Teige placed artists such as the Austrian painter Hans Makart, or the French painters Horace Vernet and Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier. The Czechs included a diversity of artists including the previously discussed Brožík, Hynais, and Mucha with his Slav Epic.[42] For Teige, bourgeois culture and society preferred academic and commercial kitsch, which preserved the institutional status quo, traditions, and conservative academic values in art.

Part of the issue that the Western-oriented avant-garde had with the Epic, as I mentioned earlier, was the fact that Mucha subscribed to the idea of Slavic unity and Russian links. Even though the completion of the Epic predated the first ideological breakup in the Czechoslovak communist party in 1929, when Klement Gottwald – the future president of Czechoslovakia after 1948 – ceased power, many started having mixed feelings about the direction that the Soviet Union was taking. Mucha expressed his wish to remain above politics and at the opening of the first exhibition in 1928, he claimed he wanted to remain apolitical. "In all the paintings I tried to avoid anything that could remind of the harsh disputes and of the spilt blood."[43] Yet throughout the Slav Epic, he made several references to the common origins of the Slav peoples, and the frequent allusions to the Eastern Slavs of Russia could be interpreted as his identification with the ideology of Pan-Slavic unity under Russian leadership. Mucha's endorsement of Pan-Slavism at the beginning of the 20th century nevertheless failed to reflect the complex changes that had taken place in recent decades in the relationships between various Slavic peoples, and between the Czechs and the Austro-Germans.[44]

   The idea of cooperation between the Slavs, however, did not completely disappear in the 20th century. It was revived as Neo-Slavism; promoted primarily by the politician and future prime minister of Czechoslovakia, Karel Kramář, who called for a more equal federation of Slavic states in place of the older Pan-Slavic idea based on Russian hegemony and leadership.[45] At the beginning of the century, Kramář's idea of "a rapprochement between Russia and Austria-Hungary against German expansion" also aimed to meet the threat posed by the potential creation of Pan-Germanic or Pan-Latin unities in Europe.[46] A number of Slavic congresses where these issues were discussed were held across Slavic Europe, including one organised in Prague during 1908, the same year that Bosnia and Hercegovina were formally annexed by Austria.[47] Yet neither this nor any of the subsequent congresses brought any concrete political resolutions, apart from a somewhat ambiguous agreement on a joint effort to fight German and Magyar dominance.[48] As a conservative nationalist, Kramář was one of the main initiators of the Slavic congresses who nevertheless envisaged Slavic cultural cooperation as taking place *under* the auspices of the Habsburg monarchy, and, as he stated in 1908, "we do not wish to topple thrones or to destroy states and empires."[49] In fact, Mucha's approach to the Slavic idea can be seen as being in line with Kramář's moderate efforts for cultural cooperation within Austria-Hungary.

   Indeed, Slavic sentiments survived even into the new state created in 1918; they also took the form of a number of joint events, including exhibitions with other Slavic groups, and, most prominently, the congresses of Sokol, the Czech organisation promoting sport, health, and Czech national identity.[50] Just like many other organisations and clubs during the interwar years, Sokol's nationalism intensified in the late 1920s. Although it rejected direct political affiliations with the communists or fascists, as an organisation based on ethnic nationalism, it promoted Czechoslovakism.[51] The tradition of pro-Slavic enthusiasm therefore survived WWI, and continued with a different dynamic in interwar Czechoslovakia.

Censorship and Reactionism

Czech artists, art critics, and art historians of all political affiliations were deeply concerned with the relationship between the modern and the past, whether in the form of artistic traditions, ideological beliefs, or remnants of ethnic conflict. As much as Sokol, an organisation that dated back to 1862 continued its patriotic programme into the interwar period, the state which was in 1918 built on new democratic principles carried many legacies of the previous political, social, and cultural structures that inevitably influenced contemporary practices and thinking.[52] What also became prominent was the increasing polarisation of the political and cultural spectrum into left and right, which had similar foundations in the pre-war divisions.

   In 1928, the same year that Mucha presented the Slav Epic, several other events took place around Czechoslovakia that reflected this multifaceted nature of the state and its culture. The Exhibition of Contemporary Culture in Brno celebrated the greatest achievements of the new state over the past decade, and, importantly, was held in the second largest city of the republic, indicating the rapid modernisation of the provinces [fig. 5.3].[53] Also, the first international symposium on the so-called "popular arts" was co-organised by the French art historian Henri Focillon in Prague, re-establishing folk art as another important national tradition.[54] Yet what is less known but pertinent to the question of the dynamics between what was
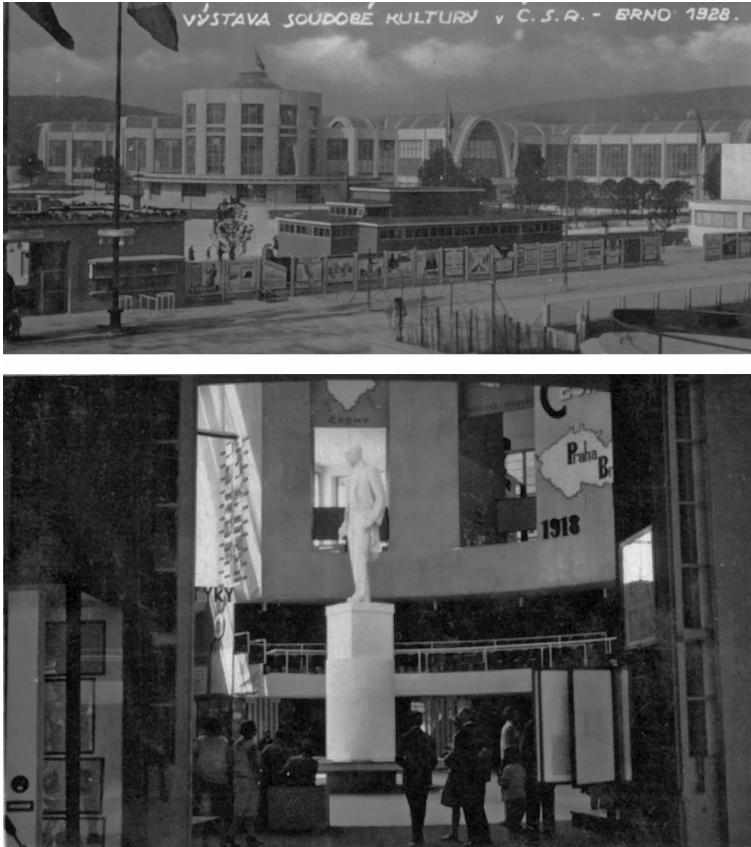
Figure 5.3 The Exhibition of Contemporary Culture, Brno, 1928. Postcards. Author's collection.

conceived as tradition and modernism was the establishment of the so-called Artistic Council by the Mánes Association. The episode serves as an interesting example of several issues: how politicised the landscape of art and art criticism was at the time; what the official direction for art was supposed to be, and what the relationship to art considered as traditional was.

The official purpose of the Council was to "indiscriminately protect cultural possessions against […] interference from amateur and political circles, to tackle sluggishness in cultural matters and serve as a guardian against reaction," which allegedly affected Czechoslovak art and the entire "national culture."[55] Its declaration was signed by sixty seven artists, including the pro-communist writer and music historian, Zdeněk Nejedlý; the playwright, journalist, and poet Jiří Mahen; the writer Helena Malířová, but also the leftist theatre directors E. F. Burian and Jindřich Honzl, and the naivist painter and illustrator Josef Lada. What stands out in the proclamation is the eagerness of these modern artists, as they called themselves, to protect *national culture* – the existence of which they clearly believed in.

Most of the signatories were of leftist political convictions, which was a fact that met with criticism that was also aimed at the very establishment of the Council and

its aims. It came from many corners, including other artistic organisations, such as Umělecká beseda. For instance, one of its members, the literary critic and poet Miroslav Rutte, a frequent contributor to *Národní listy*, accused the Council of creating personal and political cliques in the Mánes circle in an emphatically titled article, "Zneužitá idea" (A Misused Idea).[56] Another feuilleton in the same paper criticised the Council for its political bias in favour of the leftists: "all is allowed for the left in comparison with the right."[57] In this regard, such condemnation is interesting, for it came from the political right and complained about the political and artistic climate to be inclined too much to the left. The author, Viktor Dyk (1877–1931), chair of Umělecká beseda, was critical of the fact that the Council comprised the members of the former Proletkult, and of individuals that "organised hunts on those who cannot identify with the views of the president and methods of Dr Beneš," that is, with the current political leadership.[58] Dyk was one of those hunted, he thought, for his views that were more nationalist than those of the others.

It is probably not a coincidence that the Council was founded exactly ten years after the establishment of Czechoslovakia. The anniversary provided an opportunity for reflection of the political, cultural, and social development of the state. At the same time, during those ten years, it became clear that Czechoslovakia inherited many practices from Austria-Hungary. These included increasing bureaucracy, suppression of free speech and censorship of the press associated with the ministry of the interior and the ministry of justice.[59] Moreover, a large body of Austrian laws governing censorship, intellectual property, and creative production was retained in the Czechoslovak system until the early 1930s.[60]

As regards censorship and the regulation of the press, for example, publications like artistic journals were regulated by the Press Act passed under Austria-Hungary which remained in place during the interwar years. It gave power to state authorities to confiscate articles they thought were unsuitable for publication if they were believed to contain libel and defamation.[61] Censorship of the press applied to the left, too, and it especially affected which publications were deemed to be communist – newspapers like *Rudé právo* and *Rudý večerník* (The Red Evening Standard) were often printed with blank spaces where articles had been removed. Similar interventions were carried out against artistic journals. In 1928 and 1929, the avant-garde journals *Výtvarné snahy* (Artistic Efforts) and *Revue Devětsilu* or *ReD* (Devětsil Revue), for instance, had texts and photographs about unemployment and living conditions in Ruthenia removed. Instead, the article appeared with large blank areas of the missing reports [fig. 5.4].

Combating censorship was one of the tasks of the Artistic Council, which was also supposed to defend progress and fight conservative, traditionalist tendencies in the arts; yet no accurate definition of what progressive art actually meant was offered. Stanislav Nikolau (1878–1950), a strongly nationalistic writer, who, from 1932 was also a chair of the Czech fascist movement, Vlajka (Flag), provided his own interpretation of the reactionary tendencies in the daily *Národní politika* (National Politics), which was close to Karel Kramář's small party of the Czechoslovak National Democrats. He claimed, with a large degree of sarcasm that "the people have already been walking past new monuments, new buildings, new paintings, shaking their heads, and when they make even the slightest noise, they are told that they knew nothing, they had bad taste, they did not understand what progress in art meant."[62] According to Nikolau, any protests were labelled reactionary. For Nikolau, innovations in the name of
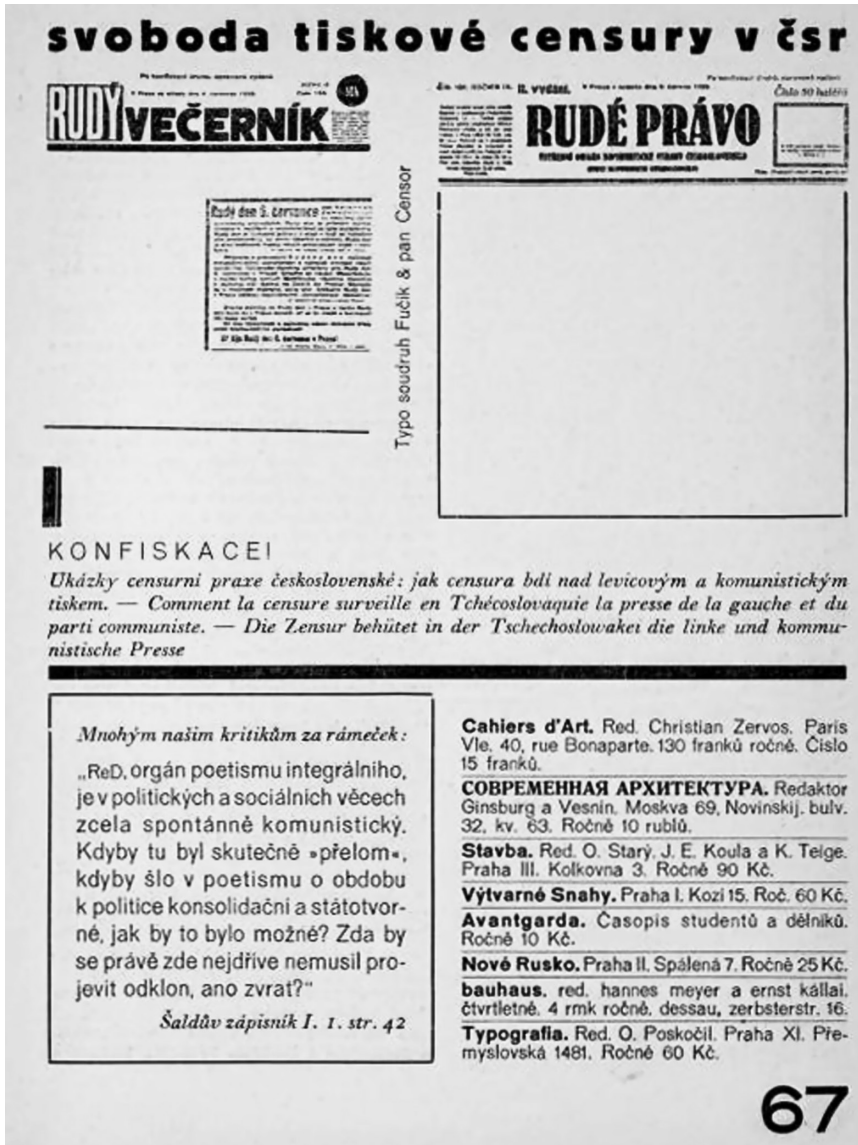
Figure 5.4 Example of censorship from *ReD* II. (1928): 67. Author's collection.

progress were often mistakenly seen as the greatest modernity and were often rushed, too experimental and they were too haphazard.

The criticism of the Artistic Council and censorship was a reflection of the increasing polarisation of the Czech cultural (as well as of the wider political) scene in the late 1920s. One of the main questions behind these frictions was about the direction of art and politics and their mutual relationship: representatives of left and right argued whether they should be oriented towards the West or the East; how or whether nationalism should be incorporated in art and in what ways should democracy be displayed through art.

From quite early on in the short lifespan of the republic, both the left and the right started radicalising their views.[63] The reactionary tendencies of the right had a wide spectrum and impact on the views of Czech art. On the extreme right, there were the Czech fascists who formally grouped in Národní obec fašistická (the National Fascist Community) in 1926, and defined their main enemies as being Jews, socialists, communists, and the Castle. Combined with the pre-existing Czech prejudice against Germans, Magyars, and Poles, the Fascist Community also favoured "an idiosyncratic notion of Pan-Slavism."[64]

More important in terms of prominence and impact however, were the nationalist and conservative tendencies of Karel Kramář, who continued to incline towards the Russian sphere of influence and pro-Slavic politics. His co-member in the National Democrats, Dyk – another member of Vlajka – promoted ever more radical nationalism against Masaryk's pan-Europeanism and world citizenship.[65] Representatives of the Catholic political sphere, especially the poet and journalist Jaroslav Durych (1886–1962), also started nationalising their discourse in the 1920s, demanding the refocussing of Czech national representation on Catholic martyrs and symbols.[66] This included activities such as the repeated attempts to reinstall the Marian column on the Old Town's Square, which had been destroyed shortly after Czechoslovakia was declared in 1918, as to many Czechs it represented a Catholic symbol of Habsburg dominance.[67] These attempts to revive Catholicism were in clear opposition to Masaryk's (and therefore state) religious preferences. As I mentioned earlier, Masaryk supported the reformist thinking related to the mediaeval preacher Jan Hus and the 17th century Czech brethren. He believed that liberal Protestantism had produced democracy, and that the two should stand hand in hand.[68] This led to the promotion of the Hus cult, proclaimed in, for instance, the use of the Hussite slogan "Truth prevails" on the presidential flag, and to the establishment of the Czechoslovak Church. The new Church, founded in 1920, tried to incorporate the teachings of Czech religious figures like Hus and Komenský and become more accessible to common people in its doctrines and dogmas.[69]

Many Catholics in Czechoslovakia, however, fought vehemently against the prejudice surviving from the 19th century that "to be Czech was to be born modern, and to be modern was to be secular."[70] A number of churches, often using modern architectural language, appeared in Prague during the interwar period. Jože Plečnik's Church of the Sacred Heart in Prague's neighbourhood Vinohrady can be seen as an example of the Catholic Church's embrace of modernity by means of architecture.[71] The foundation stone was laid on the day of the state foundation anniversary, 28 October 1928, signalling the Catholics' embrace of Czechoslovak statehood and Czech nationalism. In an attempt to connect with the local community and traditions, the church attempted to become a testament to the "high degree of cultural maturity" of the Czech nation.[72] This also reflected in Plečnik's decision to only use Czech building materials, and to use references to a Slavonic colour scheme in combination with the tradition of local Cubist architecture and that of national style. The design itself was inspired by a Roman basilica and traditional Catholic architecture, yet the use of decorative, colourful details created clear links with modernist architectonic language.

These attempts, in this case related to an institution usually deemed as conservative, can thus be taken as an example of the creative use of tradition which was combined with modernist language. The Catholic Church's endeavour to embrace modernity indicates that reactionary tendencies in the construction of modern Czech art could therefore not be simply associated with political and cultural conservativism.

Exhibiting Contemporary Culture in 1928

Apart from the reflections on cultural achievements in *Volné směry's* questionnaire, the ten-year anniversary of the state's independence in 1928 also saw the staging of a number of exhibitions that overviewed the arts of the last decade or decades. Most of the commemorative events were in line with the official state vision of Czechoslovakia as being a modern and democratic state. They not only attempted to cement the state's new identity, but also tried to create new traditions and culture. One of the most spectacular events to celebrate the first decade of Czechoslovakia was the Exhibition of Contemporary Culture in Brno. The city of Brno was, at this time, still building its own identity, which in many ways was in line with the state's vision of progress and democracy. The exhibition was thus carefully planned to fit into the character of Brno not only as a modern city, but also as a modernist one, which took a clear break from its Habsburg heritage. Interwar Brno indeed underwent a radical transformation, especially in its architectonic landscape, becoming an important hub of functionalism and internationalism. And while it is most famous for Mies van der Rohe's Villa Tugendhat, commissioned in 1928 and completed in late 1930, there were numerous other modernist structures in the city centre and residential neighbourhoods that sprung up in the late 1920s and 1930s.[73] These included buildings by leading Czech, Jewish, Austrian, and German architects, such as Bohuslav Fuchs's Avion hotel (1928) or the municipal spa (completed in 1930), Ernst Wiesner's crematorium (completed in 1930), and Josef Kranz's Era café (1929).[74]

The exhibition embraced this philosophy by both the content on display and the architecture of the grounds. By showcasing practical solutions to contemporary problems like housing and hygiene, Brno and other post-1918 exhibitions were more attuned to their modern environments. The exhibition organisers in Brno also turned their backs on narrowly national and ethnographic objectives known from the 19th century Prague exhibitions in their efforts to reinterpret the past, and thereby shape the future. In so doing, they sought to secure a place in the contemporary European (i.e., West European) political and cultural context. For Brno, and, by extension, Czechoslovakia as a whole, this entailed trying to prove their political and cultural re-orientation by breaking free from the legacy of dissension between Czechs and Germans that characterised the earlier exhibitions. The Germans were thus not excluded from the 1928 Exhibition – on the contrary, they took an active part as both organisers and exhibitors.

This was prominent, for instance, in the displays that included the participation of German schools, companies, or individuals. One of the most prominent was the pavilion of the Association of German Artists *Werkbund*. Founded in Liberec in 1926, this group paralleled German and Austrian associations established in 1907 and 1912, respectively. The exhibition catalogue emphasised the fact that Czechs and Germans now effortlessly lived and worked side by side. Both branches of the organisation survived the war and the 1918 revolution because "elementary cultural ideals are independent of changing political circumstances."[75] In Brno, the *Werkbund* presented these ideals through traditional techniques of craft making and displays of what was regarded as "high quality" objects that were "true to [their] material, formal beauty, and functionality." The exhibits, however, emphasised the distinctiveness of German culture in the Czechoslovak state – "the great German artists and architects […] active in our lands in such an excellent way."[76] The exhibition catalogue supported this

assertion, citing these craftsmen were further proof that "our [German] nation is a substantial participant in our [Czechoslovak] state."[77] The presented art and culture were therefore still ethnically defined, yet they were seen as an inherent part of a larger political project.

Part of the whole exhibition project was also a display of Czechoslovak art of the last decade, which, according to the guide, aimed to show that the scale and breadth of artists, works, and art literature corresponded with those in "other European, especially Western countries."[78] Yet there was a degree of conservativism that Václav Rabas, author of the catalogue entry on this section, acknowledged. He pointed to the presence of conservative work with established values and traditions next to progressive work that searched for new directions which "corresponded with the spiritual and material life of human society."[79]

The idea of progress in art and its relation to tradition was also picked up by Jaromír Pečírka, an art historian and co-author of the art section catalogue. There was a number of artistic directions with contradictory artistic views which differentiated between generations but also within them, he claimed.[80] Moreover, the progressive art on show contained a joint spirit which was based on a common tradition and an effort to create original, new art that reflected contemporary life and its content.[81] Contemporary artists whose works were displayed in the exhibition included Emil Filla, Karel Holan, and Vincenc Beneš, to name just a few mentioned in this book. Pečírka argued that they continued the practice of their pre-war predecessors who had combined knowledge of the development of world art with local tradition, "[…] even today we witness here two directions of progressive work, in which western orientation with local tradition complement each other to create a new, authentic art form."[82] The new, modern art that was exhibited here was therefore framed as being rooted in the tradition of pre-war artistic practice as well as informed of international developments.

This display, however, had to be limited and selective. Because of the alleged physical restrictions in exhibition space, the presentation focussed on examples of what was classified as "the work of the most mature artists, representatives of certain artistic directions."[83] In reality, these certain directions meant that while there was a sizeable number of German artists displayed here, very few artists from Slovakia were represented. Fritz Kausek, a German painter who also worked for the Modern Gallery in Prague, pointed out in relation to German art at the exhibition that "today a strong, promising [artistic] life of an impressive quality is growing in all parts of the republic."[84] The strong artistic life, nevertheless, seemed to be linked with the urban centres of the Western parts of Czechoslovakia, as I discussed in the previous chapter. And although German art was represented, the final picture the exhibition gave was far from comprehensive.

The Brno exhibition and its efforts to establish a notion of the city and the state as modern and progressive yet aware of its traditions, however selected, should also be read in the context of other displays of art, both at home and abroad around this time. Czechoslovakia made a frequent appearance at expositions and fairs abroad, most of them overseen by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Trade. Already in 1922, for instance, Czechoslovakia took part in Rio de Janeiro's centennial exhibition with a pavilion built by Pavel Janák with a facade decorated by folk motives.[85] This was followed by many other smaller or larger sections and pavilions at, for example, the previously mentioned International Exhibition of Modern Decorative

and Industrial Arts in Paris (1925), the International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Milan (1927), the Expo in Brussels (1935), and the world's fair in New York (1939), where the pavilion never opened in its entirety due to the Nazi invasion and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia.

The state had a clear vested interest in presenting Czechoslovakia around the world as being a modern and progressive country, and for a number of years, V. V. Štech acted as an advisor on Czechoslovak participation on behalf of the Ministry of Education, working with more or less the same team and ideas. The Czechoslovak exhibits shared similar features to send out a unified message about the modern orientation of the new state: apart from industrial products such as turbines, airplane, and car parts, they often contained a centrally placed bust of the President T. G. Masaryk; a selection of works of modern art, and design objects such as furniture, textiles, glass, or kitchen utensils. Yet an important part of these displays was also vernacular art, represented by a variety of objects including native costumes. Their function was to point to local peasant traditions that constituted the roots of the new nation.[86]

The question of what constituted Czech modern art and its relation to traditions also concerned a number of institutions responsible for the display of art. Their progressive or conservative orientation therefore inevitably contributed to the construction of the very concept of Czech art. A key institution in Bohemia was the Modern Gallery which had two separate sections focussed on Czech and German contemporary art. Yet especially the Czech part, which was governed by a board that included nationalistically oriented politicians, such as Karel Kramář, built a collection that posited Czech national identity at its centre.[87] The collection showed works of art dating back to the 19th century, and, as a result, contemporary art, especially that of younger artists, was rather marginal. In contrast, the German section did concentrate on contemporary art. This included pre-war purchases of works by the German members of the Osma group, Willy Nowak and Friedrich Feigl, and an interwar focus on international art acquired at exhibitions in Prague, as well as in Austria and Germany. In 1923, works by Emil Nolde, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Kathe Kollwitz, and Edvard Munch were bought, while the painter Emil Orlik, the symbolist August Brömse, and the architect Josef Hoffmann were the most represented artists in the German part of the Gallery.[88]

Even though a few art historians (Matějček, Mádl, Štech) joined the museum board of the Czech section after the war, Karel Kramář continued to dominate the exhibition programme and promoted a retrospective and nationalistic character of the gallery. In his own words, "[…] the Czech nation […] that used to be deliberately portrayed as inferior, as incapable of competing with Germans in Bohemia and Austria in what the most typical genius of the nation: science and art."[89] He thus maintained the rhetoric of the nationalistic ethnic struggle, characteristic of pre-war art history and politics.

The Gallery's nationalistic orientation therefore continued into the interwar period and in its purchasing policy, it usually avoided the avant-garde and most modern art. Especially younger artists and art critics often criticised the institution for ignoring certain Czech artists, whom they considered key for the formation of modern Czech art. They included the Cubist Bohumil Kubišta and other Czech painters of the Osma group.[90] In the case of Kubišta, an opportunity to purchase or accept the donation of his paintings arose in 1920 and again in 1929, but the Gallery dismissed them due to the apparent lack of Slavic, and specifically Czech character.[91] As the Czech writer and journalist Vilém Nikodém noted, "it is obvious that the Modern Gallery avoids

purchasing modern paintings and sculptures which are radically distant from realism and naturalism."[92] According to the catalogue from 1926, the most represented artists were Mikoláš Aleš, Josef Mánes, and Josef Václav Myslbek.[93] It was not until the mid-1930s that a few works by Devětsil artists were acquired. The exposition also featured very little art that could be seen as more radical – even after rehanging in 1926, the Expressionist and Cubist section contained artists such as the landscapist Antonín Slavíček or the symbolist Max Švabinský, while the postwar section featured, for instance, the painters Uprka and Antonín Hudeček.[94]

The Gallery's limited scope invited a lot of criticism from Czech art historians. In an article from 1927 on reactionary tendencies in contemporary culture, Vincenc Kramář identified three main negative forces of ordinary life: backwardness, conservativism, and reactionism that also penetrated the field of art.[95] He related them to the practices of the Modern Gallery, which he saw as failing its original purpose of collecting and exhibiting contemporary young art.[96] The institution, its acquisition policy and management, were also harshly criticised by leftist intellectuals, including Teige and Neumann.[97] They, like Vincenc Kramář, argued for the Gallery to become part of state property. The writer and owner of the Aventinum publishing house focussed on contemporary authors, Otakar Štorch Marien (1897–1974), went even further. He claimed emphatically that "the cultural conditions in the Modern Gallery would make one vomit."[98] As the main institution of *modern* art, especially young artists and authors saw the Gallery as a failure, which, rather than contemporary and modern art, promoted Karel Kramář's conservativism; for many of its critics, the Modern Gallery simply did not meet its declared purpose. It did play an important role in shaping the landscape of art in Czechoslovakia as it helped to establish a canon of national art, which consisted mainly of artists of Czech origin linked to the older generation of artists whose art was devoid of too radical ideas.

Limits of the Avant-garde

With its purchase and display policy, the Modern Gallery encouraged a generational split in Czech art by promoting the older – in its view more trusted – generation against the younger one, whether represented by individuals or the numerous artistic groups. Apart from the association with the conservative circle around Karel Kramář, this fragmentation of the young artistic scene could have been the reason for the reluctance of the Gallery to engage with such art. When Čapek criticised the collective tendency in contemporary art, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, he also hinted at the rapid and continuous turnover in the different artistic groups, artistic tendencies and the many so-called –isms. Devětsil, Constructivism, Functionalism, Poetism, Purism, Artificialism; later the Surrealist Group, and many others coincided at times, reincarnated ideas into a new form, or functioned as each other's rejection and rejection of the past.

Such awareness of the fragmentation of the local artistic scene was common to many art writers. In this connection, Teige in his "Manifest poetismu" reflected on the last four or five years of his Poetism project, which I have discussed already in Chapter 3. At a time of fading –isms and of stagnation and tasteless eclecticism, Teige argued, "Poetism was proclaimed [in Prague], the gates of which we wanted to throw open to all the healthy breezes of the world."[99] Poetism thus became part of the international movement and moment, and, at the same time, carried on the tradition of opening up to the outside world. On the one hand, Teige embraced the legacy of Neumann's

"Otevřená okna" manifesto by referring to throwing open the gates. He proclaimed that "our predecessors opened a window on Europe. […] we decided it was time to abandon provincial and regional horizons and nationality […] we repudiated the heritage of Czech painting."[100] Yet Teige clearly placed "Otevřená okna" into the past and related it to the previous generation, which, in his view, had turned away from the historicism, academicism, and many other –isms of the 19th century. Conscious of the fragmentation of the contemporary art scene, he also argued that today there was no predominant –ism, only *new art*.[101] Artists, as Teige saw it, had integrated themselves into the collective European creative production and international art.

Yet, while the various groups and individuals associated with the avant-garde shared many ideas and beliefs, especially the urge to break with the past, clashes over various matters were not uncommon between them. As I suggested above, the avant-garde was far from a uniform body with shared political and artistic convictions. With distinctive and strong personalities, artists differed especially in their views of the nature of art and its role in the wider political culture of Czechoslovakia. A lively exchange between Teige, Štýrský, and several others about the political engagement of art serves as a good example of such diversity of opinions, and of how artists viewed their generational affiliations. Importantly, too, it highlighted a discord in the views about whether art can, or indeed should, be political.

"Our generation is falling apart," Štýrský started this discussion in his text from 1929 titled "Koutek generace" (The Generation's Corner), in which he disputed the very concept of *generation*, which was a concept that Czech art criticism and art history used rather too often.[102] "We need to put an end to the misconception about generation so that the nitwits who built a cosy den for themselves could rejoice in spiritual pleasures, that is in their invisibility," he argued.[103] Not naming anyone in particular, Štýrský objected to those who, in his view, prostituted themselves by "sitting on two chairs." This meant that they were affiliated with more than one artistic group or quickly changed their allegiance, making Karel Teige an undeclared target.

Štýrský's article focussed mainly on poetry and had several follow-ups in which he reacted to criticism expressed mainly by Teige to his original text.[104] The dispute quickly turned to the question about the limitations of the revolutionary role of artists and art, and the extent to which art can be political. According to Štýrský, "both past and present days teach us that the most mature revolutionaries, politicians, sociologists, and economists who play an important role in our lives, were in fact the greatest reactionaries in art. We can also say that poets have been completely indifferent to state, society, and class-related revolutions."[105] In his view, a true artist always stood aside political machinations and celebrated heroes of the revolution as much as heroes of the contra-revolution.

As the discussion progressed in further articles, it also became ever more personal. Štýrský accused Teige that he used the article as an excuse to "empty his gallbladder full of personal spite."[106] And while he acknowledged that Teige was indeed responsible for some "achievements in modern culture in the Czechoslovak Republic," his own work was nothing more than "a compilation of foreign knowledge, foreign theories, foreign artistic methods, foreign work." There was a disparity in Teige according to Štýrský. The artist cried out loud a lot, but in reality, was one of the tamest artists. Nowadays, Teige was only "his own, failed caricature."[107]

Indeed, Teige fiercely refuted these accusations, calling Štýrský's views "an embarrassing mixture of unheard-of naivety and misguided megalomania."[108] He reiterated

the proclamations of *ReD* and the *Levá Fronta* (Left Front), a weekly published by the leftist organisation of the same name that focussed on the intellectual life of the left and fought against bourgeois ideologues.[109] In response to Štýrský, Teige suggested that Štýrský's views would be appreciated by Czechs of a specific political conviction, especially the literary critic Miroslav Rutte; the journalist and theatre critic Josef Kodíček, and the writer and journalist Ferdinand Peroutka, "who had always held such opinions about us."[110] These three formed a group of pragmatically minded authors who called for an absolute autonomy of a work of art and demanded art to be apolitical.[111]

Štýrský, in Teige's view, also wanted art to avoid political and social issues. Believing in a direct link between bourgeois convictions and disinterest in political issues, Teige indirectly suggested that, as a result, Štýrský and the other pragmatists were sympathetic to bourgeois ideas. It was impossible for modern, progressive art, and artists to be uninterested in political, social, and economic issues, "modern architecture is unthinkable without a clear economic and social standpoint: its Marxist orientation, socialist relation to programmes (of, for example, living, family life, urbanism) is the condition of its modern quality sine qua non."[112] In this interpretation, modernism and progressivism were of a leftist, Marxist character, and Teige saw himself as a representative of the revolutionary, radical, and modernist left.

At the heart of the dispute was the question as to who represented the avant-garde in Czechoslovakia, and who subscribed to more commercial, bourgeois, traditional tendencies. In many respects, the split was reminiscent of the Artistic Council's defence of progress against reactionism because it artificially inflated and simplified political and artistic views into just two opposites. Josef Hora, a leftist poet and literary critic, objected to such rigid categorisation, claiming that "this is a true nonsense because art has nothing to do with parties."[113] In fact, Teige and Hora entered in a similarly personal dispute following the crisis in the Communist party of 1929 when pro-Stalinist sympathisers joined it. Many members, including Hora, left the party in protest against the direction it took under Klement Gottwald. Gottwald, the future prime minister and eventually president of Czechoslovakia after WWII, associated the party more closely with Bolshevism, the International and the Soviet Union.[114] Teige originally defended Gottwald's leadership, while Hora became his opponent.[115] For Teige's critics, including Hora, this was proof that Teige seemed to always adjust to the latest trends, whether it was in art or politics.

Partly in response to this dispute, Teige initiated the establishment of the Left Front with the intention to mobilise the cultural left who embraced modernism and whose work was – in his view – influenced by "modern spirit."[116] These came from a wide range of disciplines: architects, writers, journalists, painters, sculptors, photographers, theatre and film directors, publishers, lawyers, historians, and sociologists.[117] Teige was later joined by none other than his once rival Štýrský, as well as the female painter Toyen, the art critic Šalda, and others. Similarly to Devětsil, the Left Front's branch was also founded in Brno with a comparable programme that rejected any traces of academicism, and aesthetic and idealistic fallacies.[118] Subsequently it expanded to other cities, including Uzhhorod in Ruthenia.

It is no small contradiction that the Left Front proclaimed itself to be apolitical. This was true only in the sense that it was not directly affiliated with any political party. Yet it subscribed to revolutionary ideas of the political left and connected with the "international intellectual community" in a protest against the "ruling and

collapsing liberalist culture, its traditions, its anachronisms, academies, aesthetics, and morals."[119] The members, who initially listed, for instance, F. X. Šalda, Josef Chochol, Toyen, Štýrský, and Jaroslav Seifert, also stood out against "bourgeois intellectuals, provincial ideologists and falsifiers of the working class aristocracy," as the statement in the *Left Front* weekly, established in 1930, claimed.[120] Moreover, the organisation Left Front aimed at linking modern cultural production with the audiences who should actively participate in it, in order to counter cultural reactionism. Importantly, the proclamation also pointed out that the artistic and literary avant-garde did not necessarily share the same leftist convictions across its spectrum. Some of those using the avant-garde language may still conspire with the spirit of bourgeois decadence and intellectual decline. "There is a bourgeois socialist left too, but that is a matter of the bourgeois camp."[121] This left, however, was linked with the state and the ruling class and therefore not sympathetic to the working class and those that saw themselves as true socialists.

As Cabada and Benedikt recently pointed out, whoever did not subscribe to the Left Front was likely to be labelled unprogressive, unproductive, and right-wing by its associates.[122] The Left Front also grew more radical and dogmatic over a short period of time. It associated itself ever more closely with the communist party, especially following the 1930 conference on revolutionary proletarian literature held in Kharkov, then the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Even though aimed primarily at writers and their role as proponents of the revolution, the speeches and resolutions applied to all representatives of the avant-garde. Many leftist hard-liners at the conference who saw themselves as progressive revolutionary intellectuals criticised those labelled Trockyists, reformists, defenders of Proletkult, formalists, and "social fascists," a title given to Hora.[123]

The Left Front, following the lead of the Communist party, therefore took a decisive move towards Bolshevism, for which it was met with substantial opposition from many sides. For instance, an anonymous commentator in *Lidové noviny*, reacting to the establishment of the Brno offshoot of the organisation, suggested with a large degree of criticism that the Left Front's proclamations were full of empty phrases that did not translate into real actions.[124] Importantly, the author suggested that calls for removing "aesthetic and idealistic fallacies" had now established a kind of norm by repeating the same demands over several decades. They inevitably created a new tradition of radical rejections of reactionary culture.

It can therefore be said that the avant-garde in interwar Czechoslovakia is often portrayed in the way Teige imagined it at the time. As a powerful voice in many organisations and publications, he established a clear link between the Marxist orientation and strong political stance in art and life.[125] However, the left at the time covered a large pool of ideas, some of which were indeed connected with the establishment, the bourgeoisie, and the political power structures, making the concept of the avant-garde much broader. At the same time, contemporary debates like these show that even Teige was sometimes accused of a conservativism of sorts, and of creating a tradition of rejection of what he defined as conservativism, and a tradition of adjustment to the latest artistic trends.

The reinventions, rejections, and revivals of traditions, whether pronounced by the avant-garde or its critics, extended beyond the relatively small circle of the radical artists. One of the most powerful reactions to tradition was related to the question of gender and the established notion of women's art. The strong belief that

women were mostly suited to create ornamental designs, whether in the auspices of folk art or suburban art, persisted among art historians and art critics in the post-war period in their link with decorative and applied arts. Because of Masaryk's support of women's emancipation and rights, women's organisations and female artists received a lot of official backing from the government and state-run institutions.[126] For that reason, female artists paradoxically found themselves rejected by many leftist artists and art critics for their association with mainstream bourgeois culture. The work of many of them also did not fit the image of the radical, non-conformist avant-garde.

The persistent stereotypical association of women with inclinations to decorativism and ornament was supported by the promotion of such narratives on the domestic, as well as the international stage. For instance, at the 1925 international exhibition of decorative arts in Paris, women were represented in an unusually large number, yet their work was mostly limited to the applied arts. The art historian Karel Herain (1890–1953) authored a publication related to the exhibition in which he commented on the role of women in the history of Czech art. Emphasising their role in vernacular art and art of the people, he claimed that even though their embroideries, folk costumes, egg decoration designs, and pottery "are now displayed in museum cases, the works still have their retroactive value."[127] Ten years later, in 1935, such views were still common among art writers. The ethnographer Drahomíra Stránská (1899–1964), for instance, claimed that women were "not only the guardians of traditional production and traditional forms," but also that they were responsible for the creation of whole new artistic and applied arts fields, such as embroidery.[128] Stránská voiced these ideas in *Sborník Kruhu výtvarných umělkyň* (Circle of Female Artists Anthology), published at the occasion of an exhibition of the Circle of Female Artists in the Municipal House. She thus saw women as most competent in handiwork – here they "take an active and full part to the extent that they provide leadership in some fields."[129]

Apart from the tendency to decorativism and handiwork, many Czech art critics of the interwar period still held female artists as being linked to conservativism, mannerism, and a derivative approach, thereby retaining a clear distinction between male and female art.[130] In 1919, the second exhibition of the artistic section of the Ústřední spolek českých žen (Central Association of Czech Women) took place in the Municipal House and prompted a number of comments on its content, as well as the position of women in contemporary art. Karel Čapek, for instance, stated with regret that the exhibited works lacked femininity that would differentiate them from the male counterparts, "I do not mean that women's art should differ too much from men's art; however I am surprised that we do not see distinctive individuals in whom we could welcome artistic feminism."[131] More than a criticism of women's art per se, Čapek meant this as a commentary on the lack of originality in the work.

The same exhibition and a similar observation provoked the art critic Nebeský to ponder about the role of women in art in more general terms. In his view, female artists never "turned the world upside down," they were never in need to revolt, build new worlds and adopt a future-oriented direction.[132] As they had been preoccupied with more practical things, they hardly ever had the opportunity to find time for "something as impractical as art."[133] And while a woman cannot match a man and his artistic genius, she can excel in "decoration or applied arts in which she has […] successfully competed with men."[134] Women, Nebeský continued, tend to create more

universal art, they are "conservative out of fear that human life may lose balance. But one cannot be conservative in art."[135]

Such belief in genetic and gender determinism related to the production of art and design survived in the writing of many of these interwar authors.[136] Nebeský was clear where he saw a woman's place. "A woman is not built to be a revolutionary," and her primary task is to be a good mother, he continued. "She was not born to be an artist, she was born to be a work of art." In the end, Nebeský concluded that women are best in the fields where art can be performed through their body and soul "without the need to turn the creative thought into an object: dance and theatre," as well as decorative and applied arts.[137]

Yet such views of the artistic abilities of women were not limited to male authors. Reviewing the state of contemporary women's production, the art historian Hana Volavková criticised her male counterparts for requesting that women include some kind of femininity in their work. "Boundaries between women's art and men's art cannot be easily demarcated. There are only male and female artists who create art using their views that fall within this or that artistic movement."[138] Yet she also noted that "natural conservativism always prevented women from taking the leading rank. […] Conservativism is therefore a bond that links older women's art with the newer, our [Czech] art with international, and it can be probably considered the only real feature of female artistic production."[139] Volavková continued with a comment that before the war, women tended to prefer the less progressive locations to study art like Munich, or if they went to Paris, they sought more conservative teachers. Despite this, she held, they sometimes managed to develop the conservative ideas in new ways, for instance in watercolour painting. These opinions saw women artists as continuing the traditions of decorativism and conservativism.

Naturally, not all female artists could be easily slotted into these generalised categories. An oft-cited example of a non-conformist artist who broke the gender stereotypes and traditions is Toyen, born Marie Čermínová, a Communist sympathiser and a surrealist who was first a member of Devětsil, and in 1934 had helped to found the Skupina surrealistů (The Surrealist Group) [fig. 5.5]. Her work frequently contained images close to surrealism and explicit sexual references. Her illustrations, collages, and paintings depicted dreamlike images, which combined real objects with imaginary worlds and situations.[140] Jindřich Štýrský often worked alongside her and together they formulated the so-called Artificialism project, the theory of which was outlined in *ReD*. Artificialism developed some ideas of Poetism, embraced "maximum imagination," and stood out against the tradition of Cubism that was, in their view, still too reliant on reality.[141]

Toyen acquired a gender-neutral identity and thus conformed to a pattern of other interwar artists who worked with gender deception or androgyny, such as Claude Cahun and Rrose Sélavy, aka Marcel Duchamp. Her decision to dispose of traditional femininity through her adopted name, masculine appearance, and sexually explicit work can be read as a disruption to the masculine world of modernism.[142] For many, this meant that Toyen's androgynous existence complied with the avant-garde's belief in a classless society and creativity that goes beyond a single individual.[143] At the same time, however, one can argue that the fact she broke out of the tradition of Czech female artists, who were reduced to associations with feminine decorativism, and allied herself with the tradition of male modernity may be understood as her acknowledging the male dominance of the avant-garde world.
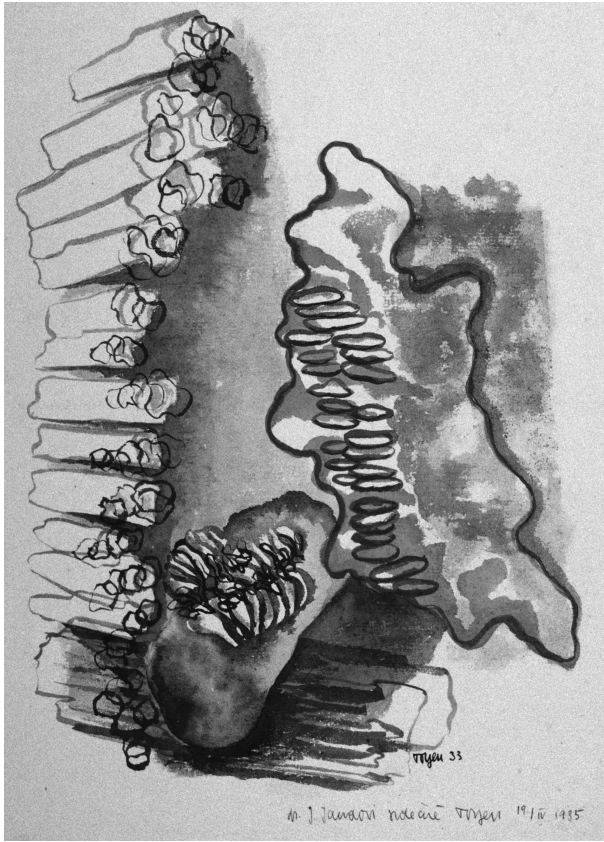
Figure 5.5 Toyen, Composition, 1933. Paper, watercolour, ink. Gallery of Modern Art Roudnice
nad Labem. K 330.

The End of the Avant-garde

Toyen was a member of the Surrealist Group together with Štýrský and a number of
others.[144] Its foundation in 1934 was preceded by the first large exhibition of Surrealism
in Prague two years earlier in the Mánes pavilion which included works by Hans Arp,
Dalí, Ernst, Miró, as well as Toyen, Štýrský, and the female sculptor Hana Wichterlová
and by Vítězslav Nezval's (1900–1958) translation of Breton's Surrealist Manifesto four
years earlier.[145] Breton was in intimate contact with the Group since about a year earlier
and it was in Prague that he launched his project to internationalise the Surrealist move-
ment. However, despite his belief in the universality of the movement, Breton described
the city as the "magic capital of old Europe" with "legendary charms" embedded in its
past.[146] He therefore treated Prague as a special place with its own charm, poetism, and
genius loci, one might say, with a particular tradition. These references, nevertheless, can
be interpreted not as contradicting the claims of the Czech avant-garde, especially Teige,
to reject "the historic legacy of local values."[147] Instead, I see them as being partly in line
with Surrealism's interest in the magical and the unusual, and partly as an indicator that
cultural specificity indeed had a place in the thinking of some authors.

Breton and many other Surrealists also shared the same political convictions with the Czech representatives. The Czech group subscribed to dialectic materialism and closely cooperated with the Communist party, an affiliation that Nezval announced in a letter to the Communist Party in March 1934.[148] However, as the radicalism of both the right and the left intensified across Europe in the mid-1930s, the left associated with the Czechoslovak Communists opted for the authoritative route set out in the Soviet Union, deepening the difference within the leftist circle of artists, art critics, and writers. S. K. Neumann confronted the avant-garde in Czechoslovakia in his reaction to André Gide's *Return from the Soviet Union* of 1936. Gide harshly criticised the reality of political trials and persecutions of artists.[149] Neumann's *Anti-Gide*, published a year later as a critical reaction to Gide's book, contained attacks on Surrealism which the author labelled as a decadent bourgeois movement.[150] He condemned Teige and the avant-garde for only mechanically repeating Marxist quotations, for their Trockyism and for not being connected with the proletariat, now seen more than before as the cradle for the future Communist revolution.[151] Neumann in fact welcomed the trials and the direction of the Soviets towards a more autocratic government.

In his response to Neumann, Teige compared the Marxist rejection of the avant-garde to the suppression of modern art in Nazi Germany.[152] He accused the "artistic pensioners and conservators of faded beauties," especially Neumann, of trying to compare the Surrealism of Štýrský and Toyen to degenerate art (Entartete Kunst), and of using the measures of "Hitlerian, Soviet as well as Czechoslovak reactionary Kulturträgers (bearers of culture)."[153]

Teige often voiced his critical views of what he saw as being reactionary tendencies across the political spectrum. "The positive relation to objective reality, which everyone who admires the atrocious and pompous splendour of academic master paintings requires, is nothing else than a desire for art to return to superficial subjects if possible, full of pathos and drama; of Socialist Realism," Teige continued.[154] He placed Surrealism in sharp contrast with such expressions of "limited, castrated, utilitarian, and prosaic, anti-lyrical reality."[155] And he continued with his criticism in an essay entitled *Surrealistické stanovisko* (A Statement on Surrealism) of 1938, "no more than by the Fascist tendencies, the Czech cultural life is burdened today by the colourless opportunism; and the danger of cultural stagnation is no more visible than the threats of cultural reaction."[156] In his view, the Communist left was turning to reactionary thinking and reactionary art, while also growing distant from the original ideas of proletarian art, which were set out in the twenties.

Disillusioned with the Soviet version of Communism and its growing oppression of the avant-garde, many Czech artists intensified their relationship with the French art world. Yet soon, these links were disrupted by events that preceded the imminent war. In September 1938, the British and the French signed the Munich Pact with Germany, in which they agreed to cede the border areas of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland with a large German population to Hitler's Reich. The occupation of Czechoslovakia by Germany followed in early 1939, and the country was split into two parts. The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia became an autonomous territory under German administration, while the independent Slovak Republic was turned into a client state of Nazi Germany.

As a result, nationalism and conservative sentiments intensified in all aspects of political and cultural life, and this translated into the renewed interest in traditions. In 1939, for instance, the Catholic priest and politician Bohumil Stašek (1886–1948)

implied that in the times of endangered nationhood the country needed a firm sense of national traditions and values instead of cosmopolitanism, which undermined the sense of national identity:

> […] we will stand up decisively against those ideologies of secret and public organisations and movements that have for decades been trying to decompose the nation, undermine the Christian principles and poisoned national life. […] This is the ideological programme, aim and the tasks of the Cultural Council of the National Partnership that strives to build new national culture.[157]

Even though Stašek, a member of the Czechoslovak People's Party, had always been a defender of traditionalist and patriotic ideas, his views reflected a more general turn to such sentiments in the late 1930s and during WWII in Czechoslovakia. In an anti-Nazi sermon delivered in August 1939 for which he was imprisoned, he repeated explicitly that contemporary hardship of the nation was a result of the loss of national sense when he imagined the voice of the Czech motherland saying:

> […] my sons and daughters often despised their simple mother, her traditions, morals, piousness, national costumes and songs. They followed foreign models, foreign examples and foreign people. They did not want to be Czech but European and international! […] and that is how they prepared their own death.[158]

In such interpretations of most recent historic events, internationalism was placed against true Czechness. There was an essential difference with the earlier fears of what threatened Czech modern art expressed by the Artistic Council in 1928. Mindful of possible dangers to national culture in the future, the Council saw its mission as protecting art against reactionary tendencies in art, in order to ensure "the future does not condemn us that when endangered we failed to react."[159] The divide into political left and right, however, does not explain this shift. Stašek was indeed talking from the position of conservative nationalism and the Council was an organisation of leftist individuals. Yet a disenchantment with the state of modern art became typical across the political spectrum at this time. A number of artists associated at least at some point of their career with the left started revising the notion of modern art. Neumann was not the only one who saw Formalist art as suspicious and unsuitable for the direction that art in Czechoslovakia should take. In 1938, Nezval, who also supported the Stalinists, dispersed the Surrealist Group – for him, it started adopting political opinions which he considered to be wrong and dangerous. The dissolution, however, was not accepted by many of the Group members, including Teige and Toyen.

   The demise of the Surrealist Group was not the only casualty of the imminent war that put an end to the rich and diverse artistic scene of interwar Czechoslovakia. These events were preceded by Masaryk's death in 1937, who was followed by Karel Čapek (1938), Mucha (1939), Štýrský, Josef Čapek (1945), and many others. The war and the communist coup in 1948 terminated not only many lives, but many of the abstract tendencies that Czech artists and art critics had adopted. Filla and Kramář, for instance, became cautiously flirtatious with Socialist Realism during and after the war, and after its end, tried to reconcile Formalism with the requirements of Socialist Realism.[160]

Neumann's claim that the avant-garde, even though often based on Marxist ideology, grew distant from the proletariat therefore forecasted the direction of Czech art and art criticism after WWII. The people as a collective body were placed in the centre of the attention of the Communist party. Yet, as Neumann suggested much earlier in his essay "Umělci a lid" from 1900, which I have mentioned in Chapter 3, ordinary people were not capable of understanding complex ideas, including abstraction, and therefore new forms of art had to be constructed for them. Such a reductionist approach to art was following the official line of the communist government after 1948. The Communist leaders, especially Gottwald, officially sanctioned anti-intellectualism and the so-called people's artists who used the language of Socialist Realism, and rejected Formalism.

The foundations for the development in art and art criticism after WWII, including a return to nationalism, embrace of collectivism, admiration of vernacular culture and traditions, as well as a move away from cosmopolitan modernism towards proletarian internationalism, were therefore laid out in the interwar period. Before the beginning of WWII, attempts to turn attention to social topics; celebration of the art of the working classes, or the incorporation of elements of folk culture in contemporary work played an important role in art critics' and art historians' formulations of Czech art. Similarly, critics associated the avant-garde with bourgeois ideologies and intellectual elitism already in the 1930s.[161] Such practice was quickly picked up by those promoting what they believed to be comprehensible art, or, in other words, the art of Socialist Realism.

Conclusion

In accounts on the interwar modern art, both written at the time and recently, tradition has often been related to reactionary artistic tendencies, and as such, was rejected. Especially in the interwar period, such position was commonly associated with individuals seen as progressive artists, art historians, and art critics associated with the left and with the Czech avant-garde. Yet as the various discussions and disputes about the place of tradition in the narrative of modern Czech art during the interwar period show, the notion entertained the minds of many of them and was not just restricted to a simple denunciation of all things traditional.

To put it in simplified terms, the authors advocating progress commonly read tradition as being stagnant and passive. It was indeed seen as a conservative set of values and beliefs that were understood as preventing progress, or, at least, as being in opposition to progress. Such views of traditions and traditional values in art became more common in the heightened nationalism of the late 1930s, which is apparent from the return to what was described as traditional values and national culture.

Yet national culture was a concept used much more commonly across the political spectrum and not only in the later days of Czechoslovakia. There were those, for example Vincenc Kramář, for whom traditions could play a more dynamic role in reminding artists of their roots on which they could build new art that could be both modern and Czech. Tradition understood in this way was active and capable of development alongside modern art, and it was not necessarily preventing the progress and modernity of art; instead, it nationalised the modernist language. The question that Czech artists and art writers kept coming back to was therefore about the foundations and points of reference for Czech modern art. The concerns about the relationship

between tradition, nation, and modernism continued to shape the discussions of the nature of Czech art.

The construction of the narrative of modern Czech art was thus tightly linked to considerations and reconsiderations of the place that tradition held in the process of formulating the national culture. For a vast majority of Czech art writers, this culture inevitably formed the basis of modern art as a more or less prominent feature together with international stimuli.

Notes

1 Josef Čapek, "O tradici a tvoření kolektivním," in *Moderní výtvarný výraz* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1958), 98.
2 Čapek, "O tradici," 98.
3 Čapek, "O tradici," 104.
4 Josef Čapek's letter to S. K. Neumann (1915), in Lamač, *Osma a Skupina výtvarných umělců 1907–1917* (Prague: Odeon, 1988), 194.
5 Václav Nebeský, "Sociální pozadí našeho uměleckého života II," *Tribuna* 5, no. 230 (October 9, 1920): 1–2.
6 Nebeský, "Sociální pozadí," 1.
7 Nebeský, "Sociální pozadí," 2.
8 Jindřich Štýrský, "Obraz," *Disk* no. 1 (1923): 1–2; reprinted as "Picture," in *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930*, eds. Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 366.
9 Quoted from Rudolf Matys, *V umění volnost: kapitoly z dějin Umělecké besedy* (Prague: Academia, 2003), 134.
10 Josef Čapek, "Pro mnohé uši," (1918) *Novoročenka* 2, reprinted in Josef Čapek, *Moderní výtvarný výraz* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1958), 49–56; Josef Čapek, "Co bych nechtěl míti řečeno jen sám za sebe," *Červen* (1918), reprinted in Josef Čapek, *Moderní výraz*, 60. 57–61.
11 Čapek, "Co bych nechtěl," 60.
12 Čapek, "Co bych nechtěl," 58.
13 Čapek, "Co bych nechtěl," 60.
14 V. V. Štech, "Výchova umělců," *Volné směry* XXI (1921–1922): 51.
15 Štech, "Výchova umělců," 55.
16 Štech, "Výchova umělců," 51.
17 Štech, "Výchova umělců," 51.
18 Jiří Fronek, ed., *Artěl: umění pro všední den 1908–1935* (Prague: Uměleckoprůmyslové muzeum and Arbor Vitae, 2009); Jiří Fronek, ed., *Tschechischer Kubismus im Alltag* (Prague: Uměleckoprůmyslové museum; Leipzig: GRASSI - Museum für Angewandte Kunst, 2011); Karolína Dolanská, *České moderní a současné umění 1890–2010* (Prague: Národní galerie, 2010).
19 V. V. Štech, "O národním umění," in *Včera. Výbor z článků z r. 1910–1920* (Prague: Štenc, 1921), 204–221.
20 Štech, "O národním umění," 210.
21 Vincenc Kramář, *Kubismus* (Brno: Moravsko-slezská revue, 1921).
22 Kramář, *Kubismus*, 104.
23 Kramář, *Kubismus*, 104.
24 Kramář, *Kubismus*, 107.
25 Kramář, *Kubismus*, 106.
26 Kramář, *Kubismus*, 105.
27 Kramář, *Kubismus*, 105
28 Kramář, *Kubismus*, 104.
29 Max Dvořák, "Von Mánes zu Švabinsky," *Die Graphischen Künste* XXVII (1904): 29–52 and in Czech as Max Dvořák, "Od Mánesa ke Švabinskému," *Volné směry* XIV (1910):

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Conclusion

"In times of the nation's subjugation and grief, in times of historic reversals, we always looked back to check what route we had taken."[1] With these opening words, the painter Emil Filla commented on the exhibition "Czech Tradition in the 19th Century" as well as on the current political situation in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The creation of this political entity, alongside the independent Slovak Republic in March 1939, was preceded by the Munich Agreement of September 1938 that stripped Czechoslovakia of its Sudetenland borders in favour of Nazi Germany. These events and the subsequent start of WWII in September 1939 brought an end to the short life of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Indeed, Filla was aware of the changing political climate when he declared that "in such difficult moments, we ask about the meaning of our art, about our domestic tradition and about the Czechness of the emotion and expression."[2] The painter who in the interwar period had embraced Cubism now openly discussed the importance of domestic artistic traditions, and accepted the existence of national art. In his article, he identified the peak of artistic "Czechness" in two historic instances: in the late Gothic art of the 14th and beginning of the 15th century, and in the painting of the national revival since the end of the 19th century. Despite several ruptures, he saw a continuity in this second tradition of Czechness, which, in his view, had carried on right up until his days. Filla also admitted that the Czech spirit and the Czech tradition of art were very specific yet elusive concepts, which were in his words "impossible to describe and express."[3] Despite this evasive caveat, he recognized what he called a "provable" Czechness in the work of, for example, the composer Bedřich Smetana, and the artist Mikoláš Aleš. Some works of other Czech artists, for instance, J. V. Myslbek, Antonín Slavíček, and Joža Uprka, he believed contained features of a purely Czech character.

Filla's article was published in the 1938–40 issue of *Volné směry*, alongside other texts on the notion of tradition in Czech art, authored by the art historian Jaromír Pečírka and the painter Václav Špála.[4] The issue also included a reprint of F. X. Šalda's contemplations on national art from 1903, which I discussed in Chapter 1.[5] The publication of these patriotic sentiments, which deliberately nationalised local modernism, is understandable in the light of the overall rise of nationalism in Europe in the 1930s, and the particular situation that the Czech lands were experiencing after 1938. Yet as for instance Šalda's musings from much earlier in the century indicate, references to the existence of national art and domestic traditions had not appeared out of nowhere. They had been a frequent occurrence in the thinking of Czech art writers throughout the period examined here.

The individual debates scrutinised in this book also indicate what was important for the political construction of a nation-state, and how art fitted into this process. Ultimately, art writers were looking to strike a balance between constructing the narratives for art that was modern while retaining a notion of it having national traditions. They therefore engaged, whether consciously or not, in the process of creating what I have called *nationalised modernism* and *modernised nationalism*. On the one hand, authors who believed in the continued existence of national art tried to update it in the light of the experience of modernity and modernism. Examples of this were experiments with vernacular modernism or Mucha's historicist visual language, as well as the theoretical attempts to place these in the broader history of modern art. On the other hand, modernism was often adopted as a universal language in which specifically Czech features could be traced because works were created within local (Czech) circumstances and traditions. A typical case of such narrative-making was Vincenc Kramář's analysis of Cubism, in which he identified what he thought were specifically Czech features.

In this complex interplay and interaction between modernism and nationalism, I emphasised that, instead of one master narrative that would present a coherent and uniform idea about Czech modern art, there was a plurality of narratives that questioned what was modern about Czech art, and what was Czech about modern art. Despite their diversity, they point to several shared concerns that the authors had in relation to the construction of Czech modern art. Foremost, it was their almost constant attention to the phenomenon of the nation and its place within the understanding of modern art. At the same time, awareness of the differentiation of society as urban and rural, as well as its class and gender distinctions played an important role in finding the place of modern art in the changing geographical, social, and political landscape of the Czech lands. In the period of such radical change in the emancipation of the Czech people, it also turned out to be crucial to keep a stable point of reference in the nation's roots, traditions, and their active role in shaping new Czech art.

Modern Nation

The experience of modernity in the Czech lands between the late 19th century and the beginning of WWII – which consisted of the interaction between the drives for industrialisation, capitalism, and secularisation and ongoing nationalist concerns – created specific conditions for how modern art was located in modern Czech society. Indeed, the political changes that saw the emancipation of Czechs in the creation of the new state of Czechoslovakia had an inevitable effect on many aspects of artistic life, including the establishment of new institutions and opportunities, as well as the mental geography of what constituted Czech art.

Throughout the period in question, debates about Czech modern art revolved not only around its attempts to establish a relationship with the international artistic context, they kept returning to the question of its relation to Czech modern society, nation, and, eventually, state. Underlying these concerns were discussions about what nation and state were and who constituted it. They also animated commentators far beyond the world of art writing.

I have explored these issues in relation to two aspects in particular – the ethnic composition of the nation and its class structure. They were both actively, and often

jointly, addressed by art writers concerned with the notion of modern Czech art. Many of the narratives of modern Czech art, it turns out, were derived from the belief that Czech art was intimately linked with the Czech nation and its core: the Czech people. For many, the nation was identical with the people – an anonymous, predominantly working class people. Such claims promoted the association between national art and people's, or popular art, which was believed to be the product of the specific class of either peasants or urban workers.

Beyond the Metropolis

As regards the art of the peasantry, local vernacular art was often associated with the remnants of a pre-modern ethnic culture on which a modern nation can be built.[6] Art that incorporated its pre-modern folk influences could therefore be understood as a kind of primordial national art. It did not need to clash with modernity and modernism, rather, it could have the power to revive or enrich modern art. Such attempts were made across the visual arts – in architecture, sculpture, painting, and design, where artists made a conscious decision to apply formal features of vernacular art to create a new visual language. The successes of these efforts were varied, for what many art historians and art critics saw as a misuse of vernacular culture in contemporary design, especially around the turn of the century.

Yet vernacular art was also given a new role which was not just limited to the romanticised revival of peasant art and culture that contained aspects of the 19th century national movement. As national and regional consciousness intensified in provincial centres, local art groups, museums, and other institutions that often functioned as a Czech equivalent to the already established German bodies were established across the Czech lands. As the example of Hodonín and its specific place between regionalism and modernism showed, these locations proved that modernism was not just a metropolitan occurrence; it also had its regional variants.

However, with the emergence of the new state of Czechoslovakia, vernacular culture received yet another layer of meaning and importance. As new regions became part of the Czechoslovak state, the art and architecture of these geographical locations was incorporated into the notion of Czech (or rather Czechoslovak) art. Many art writers followed the official construct of Czechoslovak identity, prioritising the Czechs. As a consequence, they emphasised a superior place for the Czech art of the western regions, as opposed to the vernacular, and allegedly belated, art of the eastern areas. For a long time after joining the historic Czech lands, Ruthenia and Slovakia were considered to be underdeveloped, unmodern, and peripheral; in contrast, the Czech parts – especially Prague – were seen as being Western and modern. Art historians, historians, as well as politicians noticed that the peasant culture of the newly acquired Eastern regions of Slovakia and Ruthenia could play an important role of the backward regions, thereby emphasising the more modern and Western character of Prague and the Czech parts, and, at the same time, providing the Czechs with the opportunity to expand their political and cultural influence eastwards. I therefore emphasised that the construction of Czech modernity and modernism was partly based on the geographical and ethnic recomposition that affected the understanding of the composition of the nation and its art.

Modern Traditions

From the late 19th century, Czech modern art was formulated as a series of negotiations between various parties. Ideas of what it should look like were formed especially from 1895 by a number of individuals and art groups. WWI served as an important breaking point, not only politically, but also in many other ways. After 1918 the collapse of the monarchy and the weak position of traditional institutions like the Catholic Church opened the door (or windows, to paraphrase S. K. Neumann) to an easier embrace of modernism and avant-garde experimentation in interwar Czechoslovakia. This took place through the adoption of a new artistic language, experimenting with new forms in various media, the introduction of international artists and exhibition efforts, as well as by means of proclamations in manifestos and reflections on recent artistic developments in various publications. However, attention to national art which many critics related to 19th century nationalism, did not disappear overnight. Many critics, including F. X. Šalda and both of the Čapek brothers, actively commented on the state of Czech art and believed in its relation to nationhood, the homeland, and national identity. Inherent, unquestionable Czechness of art, however, did not feature as the main argument in the work of these authors as it had done in the work of their predecessors in the second half of the 19th century. Increasingly, authors started accepting the idea that art could remain Czech despite its adoption of international influences.

Equally, I turned attention to the fact that the inclination to cosmopolitanism which modern artists and the avant-garde practised, did not blankly reject the idea of tradition in art. It may have revised it, but similarly to the notion of national art, it did not dispose of it. Many of the art critics who often promoted modernism also retained a degree of conservative views surrounding the many issues related to art. Even Karel Teige, one of the most prominent representatives of the avant-garde, was (with a certain degree of creative licence) labelled a traditionalist at a certain point for his constant repetition of the same demands in different artistic groupings.

In this way, many ideas about modern art were replicated and reinvented to establish or retain traditions. At the same time, these traditions were often adapted to the new political, social, and cultural circumstances. The Catholic Church, for instance, incorporated the language of modernism in order to update the architecture of its churches and the understanding of its institution as being capable of modernisation. Slavonic references, which appeared in the architecture of churches and other buildings, whether to a Pan-Slavic unity or to folk heritage, became a popular reference, yet not always widely successful, as Mucha's Slav Epic exemplified.

Art and Class

One issue that is often neglected in the studies of Central European art and art writing is the social landscape, or rather, the awareness of it. As I have emphasised, the peasantry continued to occupy the imagination of those who wanted to employ their culture to establish a connection between the (often imagined) *past* and the present, and renew modern art. At the same time, it was the urban working classes that received attention for their potential involvement in shaping the *future* of the nation, state, and culture.

Already before WWI, the urban working class, or the proletariat, started playing an important, although not necessarily active role in shaping the notion of Czech art.

It influenced the work of modern artists as a subject, or a potential recipient of the art, as well as an inspiration for the renewal of modern art. Increasingly, awareness of class division can be detected especially in the writing (and practice) of those linked with the political left between the wars, for instance S. K. Neumann, or the Čapek brothers, as well as Karel Teige. As a uniform body of workers, the proletariat also provided a notion of universality, free of national and ethnic restrictions, and therefore fitted well into the programme of international modernism.

The main feature of people's art, whether urban or rural, that many commentators emphasised, was its anonymity and collectivity, to which many, especially avant-garde, artists aspired. It also provided a desired alternative to what was viewed as being too individualistic an art movement. Modernist artists, critics, and historians, for instance Teige and Josef Čapek, came to view such art, which they considered high art, as too removed from the everyday life and, especially in the case of Teige, associated with the elitism of the bourgeoisie.

The critics preferred the collective nature of what they called proletarian art. The tension between individualism and collectivism in art was therefore a topic that many artists and art writers addressed in this period. On the one hand, there was the individualistic art, seen by leftist critics as conservative and traditionalist, and on the other hand, there was collective art, associated with progressivism and radicalism. However, as I pointed out, these categories had no universal or exclusive validity – a number of artists who were regarded as progressive may have joined one or a number of collective artistic groups with similar views, but they often remained strong individuals in their verbal and visual expressions. The number of artistic platforms, such as art groups, clubs, and journals that kept appearing and disappearing during this period indicates that collectivity had its limits.

Critical Voices

Despite the ideal collectivity of artistic production, it was individuals in the first place that formulated the narratives about Czech modern art. In contrast to the common emphasis of the fact that modern art was articulated by the avant-garde and leftist modernists, attempts to construct modern Czech art came from all sides of the political spectrum. And, apart from artists, art critics, and art historians, there was a wide swathe of those who had participated in this process, including journalists, literary critics, historians, and politicians. Political agendas of parties of all convictions, like the Young Czechs or the Pragmatists before WWI and the Social Democrats, National Socialists or Communists as well as individuals, such as Karel Kramář and Masaryk, frequently echoed in the narratives constructed about Czech art. And, in the absence of a state or national institution which would establish a canon of Czech national art through its collection, it is especially important to pay attention to the individual voices who participated in the construction of such processes.

The main agents that reflected on the nature of Czech modern art were indeed art writers, who published in artistic journals, as well as national and regional newspapers; who wrote monographs, pamphlets, and books of collected essays. Their expertise, however, did not lie solely in art criticism and art history, but was often comprised of a much wider pool of interests, including history, literature, politics, and theatre. They often organised exhibitions which set out their views of what Czech art meant within the wider historical and international context. Confrontations with artists from

abroad, or their presentation in individual shows, often provided important impulse for discussions about local art. Furthermore – possibly even as much as political differences – the various clashes between the generations significantly impacted on the understanding of Czech modern art. Yet, as I have emphasised, such differences were accompanied by horizontal disputes among members of the same generation based on clashing political opinions or worldviews. In this respect, I stressed that especially the avant-garde was far from a single, uniform body with shared political and artistic convictions. With distinctive and strong personalities, artists differed especially in their views of the nature of art and its role in the wider political culture of Czechoslovakia.

Regardless of their differing political persuasion, there was one aspect that most of these agents who constructed the narratives of modern art in the Czech-speaking lands shared. They, after all, were in many respects a homogeneous group which consisted of educated, middle and upper class men, often referred to as the intelligentsia. As I aimed to show, there were indeed female art writers and artists, but their position and influence were in many ways limited. The most powerful and active participants in formulating the political and artistic narratives could therefore be seen as an artistic and cultural elite, even though many would not have liked to see themselves as such.

Modernity, History, Politics

In the search to answer the initial question about the ways in which art could help and negotiate a nation's modern identity, I focussed primarily on the active role of art writers in shaping the identity of both nation and state through the narratives that they created. On the basis of the various narratives constructed about Czech art, I have shown that there was no single notion of Czech modern art at the time. The concept was constructed as a discussion, or often a clash, between various sides which were all products of modernity: nationalism and internationalism, individualism and collectivity, male and female spheres, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, as well as high and low culture in terms of art. The question of which of these were most constructive and effective for modern art has preoccupied art writers and interpreters across the broader landscape of modernism throughout the period in question.

Finally, it was not my aim to claim that Czech modernism has until now been misunderstood, but rather, to point out the limits of its habitual portrayal reduced to the avant-garde and its programme. Indeed, the avant-garde's universal and international orientation has fit well into the widely promoted narrative of an onward, progressive trajectory of the Czech (and the imagined Czechoslovak) nation and state. Yet as I tried to make clear throughout this book, many Czech art theorists, critics, and art historians often constructed their narratives of modernism *within* the framework of the nation, and the project of nationalism and state formation. During the period which saw the emancipation of the Czechs within the Habsburg Empire, and the eventual creation of their independent state, concerns with what Filla termed "our art," "domestic tradition" and "Czechness" were often commonplace in the reflections of the authors on modern art. It was therefore the interplay between the attempt to be modern, and, at the same time, retain a sense of national tradition that was key for the construction of narratives of Czech modern art during this period. Understanding of this interaction and its foundations thus expands the notion of modernism to include tendencies that were not necessarily radical and experimental, but responded to the facets of modernity in close relationship to nation formation.

Notes

1 Emil Filla, "Na okraj výstavy 'Česká tradice v 19. století'. Pokus o revisi," *Volné směry* 35 (1938–1940): 4.
2 Filla, "Na okraj výstavy," 4.
3 Filla, "Na okraj výstavy," 5.
4 Jaromír Pečírka, "Tradice v českém výtvarném umění," *Volné směry* 35 (1938–1940): 61–62; Václav Špála, "Něco o tradici v umění," *Volné směry* 35 (1938–1940): 62–64.
5 F. X. Šalda, "Nová krása – její genese a charakter," in *Boje o zítřek: meditace a rapsodie* (Prague: Volné směry, 1905), 84–110.
6 Anthony Smith, "History, Modernity and Nationalism," in *Representing the Nation: A Reader: Histories, Heritage and Museums*, ed. David Boswell (London: Routledge, 1999), 52.

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