Art beyond Borders

Published by Central European University Press

Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/44662.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/44662

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=1746138
The late 1940s are probably one of the key periods in the history of European culture. I mean several years, not just 1945, since the Sovietization of culture in Central Europe was not a single event, but a long process that took several years and did not develop at the same speed in all the countries of the new Eastern Bloc. In Romania, decisions about culture were taken quite quickly, in contrast to Czechoslovakia, which kept its multiparty democratic system until the communist coup d’etat in February 1948; this was only the beginning of the Sovietization of culture, although, paradoxically, a very hard line in cultural policy was introduced more or less at the time of Stalin’s death in March 1953. It should be added that the famous monument of the Leader, towering over the city of Prague, was built after his death. In Poland and Hungary, the process continued for much longer than in Romania and in different political frames of reference, even though communists seized uncontrolled power in both countries as early as 1945. Polish and Hungarian artists enjoyed a certain degree of freedom for some time and hoped—in vain, as soon became clear—not only that they would be able to keep their artistic liberties, but also, as is rarely remembered, that they would be allowed...
to contribute to the new reality. Soviet domination and the new political regime were, of course, imposed on the countries of Central Europe violently, but on the other hand, the communists very skillfully relied on the leftist and critical tendencies, strong among the intelligentsia in the 1930s. Many artists and intellectuals, both in Hungary and in Poland, accepted the new political system as a genuine promise to create a utopia, and not until the 1940s did the socialist realism imposed everywhere as the one officially recognized convention allowed in the public sphere largely undermine that hope. After the fall of Stalinism, during the time of the Thaw initiated by Khrushchev’s speech of early 1956, such hopes never reappeared in the artistic culture of the region. Besides, it should be remembered that in Czechoslovakia the Thaw came much later, and in Romania it came as late as the mid-1960s, while in Hungary, 1956 was the year of bloody atrocities after the Budapest Uprising. Only in Poland did the Thaw progress fairly rapidly in the late 1950s—more rapidly and deeply than in the USSR itself.

Regardless of the local differences, both before and after the imposition of socialist realism, modern art was a major point of reference all over Central Europe. The tradition of modern art, modernism, the avant-garde, etc. was understood in terms of different modes of representation and poetics, which historically often remained in conflict with one another, but stemmed from the same system of values whose foundation was internationalism, the international community, etc. The main conflict within modern art before World War II was that between autonomous and committed art, but both parties advocated an international artistic culture with its specific set of values. Outside modern art, its conflict with the conservative culture focused largely on nationalist values, next to, of course, the formal ones. It is important to keep in mind that modernism, to put it in the most general terms, was international. My line of reasoning in this article begins right at this point.

It should be remembered that the communist doctrine favored a similar system of values, at least on the literal, rhetorical level of its ideology. Matters became a little more complicated in practice when Stalin proclaimed “communism in one country,” while Trotsky preferred a “global revolution,” but in their rhetoric the communists never renounced their “internationalism.” Regardless of the practice of “real socialism,” writes Bo-
ris Groys, socialist realism was a utopia of the poststate and postnational culture. Such an ideology was international almost by definition, and as such it overlapped with the theory of modern art. The problem is, however, that when we take a good look at the visual arts and the architecture of socialist realism, we find in them very few, if any, traces of modernity and the international style. On the contrary, various methods were used to contextualize that artistic doctrine, adjust to the local background, refer to national heritage, etc. A popular slogan—part of a definition of socialist realism—claimed that as art, it was “socialist in content and national in form.” For modern artists, theorists, and critics, totally marginalized at that time, it was a double sin. Even though some avant-garde leftist groups adopted the socialist or, rather, communist utopia as a beacon for art, for many others it was unacceptable. The result was an interesting tension between the international rhetoric of communist ideology, and the national formula of communist art, to be seen primarily in the subject matter of paintings and architectural details. A more or less vigorous rejection of socialist realism in some Eastern Bloc countries after Stalin’s death seemed to provide a chance for a return of thinking about art in international terms. It paved the way for a revival of the modernist and avant-garde tradition understood as a remedy for the official party realism of the propaganda art of the regime.

Still, my point in this article is a bit challenging. I want to demonstrate that because of the political context—the isolation of artists for political reasons (the rejection of Stalinism did not bring about a lifting of the Iron Curtain for culture and art)—the unofficial inter- or transnational art exchange resulted in the nationalization of modernism in the Eastern Bloc countries. In other words, I want to prove that although modern art was of international origin, the political situation and cultural policies of the communist regimes in particular countries—sometimes “harder,” sometimes more “liberal,” but always xenophobic and conditioned by changing political factors—the transnational (as I have said, most unofficial) exchange nationalized that art, making its specific versions national in character.

Part II · Moving Objects

Before I start discussing specific examples, which are supposed to illustrate my point, let me add one more general remark. In the West, too, modernism has been said to have its national versions, such as “French Informel,” “American Pop art,” or “Italian Arte Povera,” yet all those terms are rooted in the artistic geography and related to the country of origin. However, thanks to unlimited artistic exchange, they spread all over the world and became more and more disconnected from their national background as stylistic labels. In comparison, not only did the East not enjoy freedom of travel and intellectual exchange, what is more, the artistic culture of the Eastern Bloc was quite atomized—paradoxically perhaps the artistic exchange with the West was relatively more lively than that among the countries of the East. While the authorities obviously favored official exchange, they did everything to thwart unofficial exchange, since it would mean artists enjoying some degree of independence, which meant they could slip out of control and, it was feared, destabilize the whole system. Consequently, the mediation among the Eastern Bloc countries continued indirectly via the West, though there were some significant exceptions. One of them was an attempt in 1972 by Jarosław Kozłowski (an artist) and Andrzej Kostołowski (an art critic) to organize a network of artistic exchange, called the NET, regardless of the artists’ geographical provenance. In that—nomen est omen—“web,” one could find members from Hungary, the US, Czechoslovakia, the UK, Germany and Poland. However, the first exhibition of the NET artists, organized in Kozłowski’s private apartment, was confiscated by the police and he was subjected to an interrogation. Another event that should be mentioned in this context is an exhibition called The Mirror (1973), prepared by one of the most prominent art critics in Central Europe, László Beke. Beke was also harassed, while the venue, a former chapel of a church in Balatonboglár, Hungary, was immediately closed down, even though before that it had functioned fairly well as a very elitist gallery of Hungarian artists. This shows how afraid the authorities were of any international initiatives, particularly those establishing exchange among artists from the East.

Still, there is also the other aspect of the same issue, namely a kind of resistance of Eastern European artists against being qualified as “eastern.” A book by Klaus Groh, Aktuelle Kunst in Osteuropa, published in 1972, was, on the
one hand, enthusiastically welcomed, since it legitimized the work of many artists from the Eastern Bloc countries in the West, but on the other hand, it provoked some reservations, as artists from the East did not want to be put in a sort of ghetto. They pictured themselves among their colleagues from the West, associated with the global art scene free of any geographical and political divisions, rather than among other artists from the East, since the Eastern scene was considered to be generated artificially by politics.

To return to the main point of my paper—that is, a belief that the exhibitions of the Eastern European modernists, organized in some neighboring country, acquired a national identity—I want to make a reference to two shows: first, the *Argumenty*, organized by the Warsaw independent art gallery Krzywe Kolo in 1962, which, next to those of the Polish artists, included also works by a number of top artists from Czechoslovakia, associated with the local Informel, such as Jiří Balcar, Vladimir Boudník, Josef Istler, Jan Koblasa, Mikulaš Medek, Robert Piesen, and Aleš Veselý; and second, a 1972 exhibition of the most outstanding artists of the Hungarian avant-garde, associated with the local conceptualism, organized in the Warsaw Foksal Gallery, which showed the works of Tamás Szentjóby, Miklós Erdély, György Jovánovics, Endre Tót, László Lakner, and Gyula Pauer. My choice of the Polish exhibitions has been dictated by the fact that because of the relatively more liberal policy of the Polish authorities, they could actually take place. Moreover, since organizing such shows was hardly possible in the home countries of those artists, one may say that their exhibitions in Poland were the first presentations of the Czechoslovak Informel and Hungarian conceptualism as integrated trends, which does not mean, of course, that individual artists from the two groups did not display their works at home. Paradoxically, their collective shows were organized abroad.

Let me begin with the former case. Even though the authorities did a lot to make independent international contacts between Polish and Czechoslovak artists difficult, they did not work in total isolation from one another. Poles, Czechs and Slovaks met on the occasion of the *Argumenty* exhibition arranged in 1962 in Warsaw by the Krzywe Kolo Gallery. In a sense, it was a summit meeting of the artists of the modernist Thaw of both countries, organized—as must be stressed here—by the artists and art critics themselves.³

Part II · Moving Objects

In fact, it was one of the first episodes in a whole series of joint exhibitions of artists from the neighboring countries (arranged mostly in Poland), which remained independent and went beyond the limits set by the official cultural policies. Such meetings were organized in a very specific, genuinely partisan way. According to Mahulena Nešlehová, František Šmejkal, curator of the Czechoslovak part of the exhibition, brought the paintings to Warsaw “illegally,” which probably means that he did it without all the necessary permits, far from the eyes of the customs control. The idea of the joint show came from Marian Bogusz, director of the Krzywe Koło Gallery, who would go to Prague quite often, after he had met the Prague artists for the first time in 1945, on his way home from the Nazi concentration camp in Mauthausen. What is really paradoxical, though, is not the fact that the works of art were smuggled into Poland, but that the Argumenty show provided the first occasion to define the specific identity of the Czech Informel by Šmejkal, whose efforts, highly appreciated by Nešlehová, the most outstanding expert in the field, have been relevant until today. Šmejkal actually began his essay with a remark that the exhibition had been organized to recognize the characteristics of the national schools in abstract painting. What was characteristic of the Czech art of that time was the heritage of surrealism, continuing until the early 1950s, with a rich repertoire of its fantasies, imaginings, and symbols.

On the other hand, the isolation of Czech culture from the global artistic trends as a result of the political developments in the late 1940s contributed to the specific local conditions: the Czech Informel did not come into being, like the Polish one, as a result of contacts with the West, but stemmed from the vernacular tradition of surrealism. Šmejkal does not address the question whether the Polish influence, through Marian Bogusz and the Krzywe Kolo Gallery, played any role at all, but it must be remembered that at that time Poland was no doubt a kind of gate to modernity, that is, to the West. It was easy for the Czech artists to reach for Polish art journals, such as Przegląd Artystyczny and then Projekt, not so much because of the similarity of the language, but simply because they could find them in the Czech libraries as publica-

---

4 Mahulena Nešlehová, Poselství jiného výrazu. Pojetí "informelu" v českém umění 50. a první poloviny 60. let (Praha: Base/ARTetFACT, 1997), 239.
tions coming from a brotherly socialist country. In fact, they became an important source of information, next to mutual visits, which allowed artists to broaden their knowledge and exchange experience. What is significant for me, however, is not who knew what about the art of the neighbors, but what was the significance of the border barriers and how they were reflected in the perception and status of art. In this example of a kind of confrontation of Polish and Czechoslovak art, we can see how the international origin of modern art was nationalized, and—perhaps in the first place—how a transnational exhibition was used to define the national character of modern art. In other words, transnational art exchange, with a comparative bias, contributed in a back to front way to the recognition of a national character of that art.

The exhibition of the Hungarian conceptual artists in the Warsaw Foksal Gallery ten years later, in 1972, took place under different circumstances and had a slightly different character. It was not a joint exhibition of Polish and Hungarian art, but a show of the latter one. Indeed, the Foksal Gallery did not specialize in organizing “national presentations” of modern art, but showed the works of international artists regardless of their origin; both from the East and the West, from Europe as well as other continents. In that specific case, however, the idea was to present a group of artists from Budapest that was coherent in terms of their social contacts and pursuits, not very big but fairly active. The artists of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde had had their joint presentations before in Budapest, though always as a specific element of some larger context. Still, their exhibitions took place under hardly comfortable conditions, mostly in a partisan atmosphere, very different from whatever was going on at the same time in Poland. I remember that when I visited Budapest for the first time to take a look at contemporary Hungarian art, more or less in that period, I was surprised to discover that there were no independent galleries in town. Such conditions favored the integration of local artists and were one of the reasons why they had their exhibition in Warsaw. That, however, was not the first exhibition of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde in Poland—the first one was organized by János Brendel, émigré and a sort of ambassador of Hungarian culture, my long-time colleague in the Department of Art History of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He did

6 Nešlehová, Povelství jiného výrazu, 55, 241–42.
Part II · Moving Objects

d this in 1970 in Poznań, in an official art gallery *par excellence*, and that was no doubt the first show of that group of artists abroad. The Warsaw exhibition that opened two years later was, however, much more coherent in terms of a specific artistic doctrine; much more closely related to the paradigm of the conceptual art than to some general idea of the avant-garde. What is more, just like in the case of the *Argumenty* show and the Czechoslovak Informel, the Hungarians were the top artists of their kind—a strong and well-defined representation of art of a given country. Besides, to take into consideration the status of the art on display, both shows nationalized the international traditions of modernism: either modernism, as in the case of the Informel, or the neo-avant-garde, as in the case of conceptual art. Yet the latter, the Hungarian exhibition, was not a comparative confrontation. Contrary to the *Argumenty*, its structure did not foreground a transnational relation, which, paradoxically again, might have augmented its “national” character.

The problem of the nationalization of modern art of an international origin and in fact international character in the countries ruled by the communists came to the surface even more distinctly whenever artists of particular countries had their shows organized in the West. Such exhibitions were quite numerous and most of them took place under the banner of “contemporary art from this or that country,” which meant that their Western reception contributed to the *nationalization* of those historical-artistic processes as well. To illustrate the phenomenon, I will point to the activity of Richard Demarco from Edinburgh, who actually did a lot to popularize Central European modern art in the world, that is, in the West. Perhaps unwillingly, Demarco also favored the national approach, and the artists from behind the Iron Curtain often participated in the annual festivals which he organized. To avoid boring you with a list of examples and so as to concentrate on the processes, I will mention only one of Demarco’s exhibitions, *Romanian Art Today* (1971). The works of the avant-garde artists who took part in the event, including Horia Bernea, Ion Bitzan, Alexandru Cicurencu, Ion Alin Gheorghiu, Octav Grigorescu, Viorel Marginean, Serban Epure, Pavel Lluc, Ovidiu Maiotec, Paul Neagu, Ion Pacea, Diet Sayler, Vladimir Setran, Radu Stoica, Radu Dragomirescu, the Signal Group, Theodora Moisescu Stendl, and

---

17. Nationalizing Modernism

Ion Stendl, literally had very little to do with the context, that is, Romania of the early 1970s. Even though it was a very interesting moment in the history of Romanian art, related to several years of comparative liberty and distinct signs of change in Romanian cultural policy, the local artists of the period did not (contrary to the Hungarians) make any attempts at the explicit criticism of the regime and situated (or wished to situate) their art in a much wider frame of reference. The exhibition was extremely heterogeneous, and it would be difficult to draw from it any coherent conclusions as regards any common artistic ideas, which was the case for both Warsaw shows. In his brief foreword to the catalog, Richard Demarco did not even try to do so. Another critic, Anna Christina Anastasiu-Condiescu, sought in it a fairly enigmatic essentialization of Romanian culture and its alleged preference for the absurd, rather than any specific artistic activity. The longest text included in the catalog—and the most penetrating attempt to characterize the artists whose works were shown in Edinburgh—was written by Cordelia Oliver, yet even there one can find strongly essentialist statements. In short, the Romanian origin was the only common characteristic of all the artists who took part in the exhibition. What is more, not all of them came from contemporary Romania, with its political problems, social tensions, and artistic variety, but from Romania in the strictly geographical sense of the word. Neither Demarco nor Oliver saw any problem in that, or they did not want to write about it, which would imply that the Romanian censors had very long hands, reaching all the way to the Edinburgh festival. Thus, instead of any analysis of art and the historical context of the rise of the Romanian neo-avant-garde, the critics tried to find in the works of contemporary Romanian artists some kind of national essence, attempting to nationalize contemporary Romanian art. I do not believe that the artists whose works were displayed at the Demarco Gallery were very happy about that, agreeing to an obvious consequence of the exhibition: assigning their art to the country of their origin or, more precisely, to the abstract essence of the latter. Still, they wanted to show their works in the West, since that gave them a chance to break out of the national ghetto, and there were not too many offers available. The nationalization of the avant-garde was the price of its appearance in the West.

9 Romanian Art Today, no pagination.
There is no doubt that the year 1989 changed a lot, not only in Eastern Europe. I think that the transformations in our part of the continent and the fall of the authoritarian regimes in South America and South Africa have contributed to what I would call the rise of post-totalitarian or post-authoritarian studies, very different from the popular and booming post-colonial ones. In other words, it is an attempt to deal with something more general than the postcommunist condition—a condition that could provisionally be called postauthoritarian. Moreover, and this may be a crucial problem, the year 1989 very deeply remodeled the perception of the world, from binary, operating with clear-cut oppositions, to pluralistic and multidimensional. What seems to me important now is how much the model of the artistic international and transnational exchange has changed so far. Apparently, in our part of Europe the process of the nationalization of modern and postmodern art has come to an end, and a new situation has created frames for very different processes in that respect.

In general, there is no doubt that since 1989, in reflections on contemporary artistic culture, categories such as “Eastern Europe,” the “Eastern Bloc,” or even the politically more neutral “Central Europe” have been dropped. In other words, the eastern part of the continent has been derogionalized and geography has become much less important. In fact, apart from the problematic of history, present artistic initiatives seem to be shifting emphasis from geography (thinking in terms of countries and regions) to topography (thinking in terms of places). Now, we are more likely to speak about cities (Bratislava, Budapest, Bucharest, Prague, Warsaw, and Vilnius) than about Central or Eastern Europe. Particularly the latter term is strongly determined by history and politics. This does not mean, however, that there are no projects based on regionalism. Next to not very successful political initiatives (such as the Visegrád Group), as regards culture, such attempts have been made in the Balkans, where local artistic identity is growing dynamically thanks to joint artistic and editorial events, including among the Baltic states, where joint efforts are perhaps more modest and definitely less spectacular. Against the background of these two regional constructions, particularly the Balkans, Central Europe (understood in traditional terms) keeps a very low profile, owing more to its local metropolitan centers than to any regional initiatives. The artistic legitimation of the iden-
tity of postcommunist Central Europe must be specified not in geographical, but in topographic terms; once again, it is a shift of emphasis from geography to topography.

As a result of the shift of emphasis from geography to topography, the idea of the “transnational,” so useful for research on the artistic culture of the recent past, has been losing its relevance as well. At first glance, one might say that in this case the term “international” is more operative, which would mean a return to the idiom of modernism. After all, it was modernism that turned it into an object cult, a sort of fetish of a new culture. Without making precise distinctions, one may, of course, argue, in a casual manner, that cultural exchange seen in a topographic perspective is more international than transnational; however, such a claim is perhaps rather superficial. In fact, the name of the game is different now: it is cosmopolitanism. I understand this term in the original Greek sense as a combination of the city (polis) and the world (cosmos): cosmo-polis, a world city, a city-world, city-universe, one whose citizens are citizens of the world, for whom the proper space of the debate is both the municipal agora, and—let us say—the space of the whole planet. A new culture, emerging from the general processes of globalization, is then literally cosmopolitan. The relations among particular cities or metropolitan centers should perhaps be called transcosmopolitan. Consequently, if the artistic geography, which was a comparative method of analyzing art of the communist era, implied transnational relations, in fact resulting in the nationalization of modernism and the neo-avant-garde, the artistic topography, a method of analyzing the culture of the postcommunist (though not only) era, approached as part of the global structure of artistic exchange, implies the concept of transcosmopolitanism.

In other words, since 1989, in (former) Eastern Europe cities have become more important than countries. Certainly, the former have always had their identity, which did not necessarily overlap with the national one. Still, in the communist era, cities—particularly capitals, but sometimes also other “provincial centers,” such as Brno in Czechoslovakia, Zagreb in Yugoslavia, Leipzig in the GDR, Łódź, Cracow and Wroclaw in Poland, Leningrad in the USSR, and Cluj and Timișoara in Romania, functioned, as it were, as the partes pro toto of the national identity. Now, it appears that along a general tendency toward the metropolization of culture on a global scale, the
big cities of (former) Eastern Europe have become much more unique and autonomous, as well as independent of national identities. This trend has also been acknowledged by today’s artistic discourse, for instance, in *Leap into the City*, a book edited by Katrin Klingan and Ines Kappert, consisting of chapters focusing on particular postcommunist cities, not always metropolitan centers in a global sense, such as Ljubljana, Priština, Sarajevo, Sofia, Warsaw, and Zagreb. What seems especially important in this book is that the cities have been approached in a number of different perspectives. It does not propose any uniform method of description or attempt to grasp their uniqueness in the same way. Instead, it is an approach through certain fragments, discussions and partial analyses, far from essentializing generalizations. It is a genuine achievement of the volume’s authors and editors, since in this way the city can be saved from nationalization to reveal its heterogeneous character.¹⁰

Most certainly, a very special city-place (*cosmo-polis*), quite difficult to compare with the others mentioned so far, but still, I believe, important for the debate about (former) Eastern Europe, is Berlin. We tend to take for granted the fact that East Berlin, the capital of the GDR, has been incorporated by the Federal Republic and the Western part of the present capital. It may be worthwhile to address the question whether this genuine metropolis has any significance in a discussion about the cosmopolitan character of this part of Europe. In other words, we should perhaps find the Eastern European traces in today’s capital of Germany. One such trace is an exhibition called *Riss im Raum*, organized by Matthias Flügge, showing the post-1945 art of the Czech Republic, both parts of Germany, Poland, and Slovakia. Another is *Exchange and Transformation: Central-European Avant-Gardes*, a show brought to Berlin from Los Angeles, focusing on the classic Central-European avant-garde or, more precisely, the classic avant-gardes of that part of the continent. Perhaps there are more. In this respect, one should also ask whether such interests actually challenge the transnational model in favor of the transcosmopolitan one. There are many examples that corroborate this intuitive claim, provided, among others, by the activity of the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, run by

¹⁰ See Katrin Klingan and Ines Kappert, eds., *Leap into the City* (Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Literatur und Kunst Verlag, 2006).
Christoph Tannert. References to Eastern Europe are often to be found in the wide-ranging, international program of that institution.

However, the case of Berlin is surely not a typical illustration of the cosmopolization of the former Eastern Bloc. The cities mentioned in the book edited by Klingan and Kappert provide better examples of that process. They are definitely much smaller than the capital of the reunited Germany, and the local processes going on there are narrower in scope than those observable in Berlin. One of those processes is the development of art institutions of a European (and sometimes even more general) significance, such as the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle in Warsaw, most likely the largest and the most active public institution of its kind in postcommunist Europe (except for Berlin), and the private DOXa in Prague. Both of them organize big exhibitions of a cosmopolitan character. Another important factor that contributes to growing cosmopolitanism is migration, in particular that of artists. It happens more and more often (and this has been the case in the West for a long time) that artists choose as their place of residence the city or country where they were born or educated. Communist Europe did not know this phenomenon, or rather it experienced it on a minor scale. The movement was largely one-way: Eastern European artists, intellectuals, managers of culture, dealers and curators emigrated to Western Europe or the United States never to return. Now, since 1989, not only have many of them come back, but they have also started moving from one Eastern European city to another. What is more, some (so far few) Western artists have moved to the East, and there will perhaps be more and more who do just that.

Still, what makes the metropolitan centers cosmopolitan in the first place are biennial exhibitions, the number of which all over the world is now allegedly 146. They are organized in Australia, China (both on the mainland and Taiwan) and (most of them) in Europe, very often by curators of international renown. Moreover, the artists who take part in them often come from the highest level of global artistic culture. Frequently, such shows are generously financed by both the private and public sectors—local authorities want to publicize the attractions of their regions. For the local audiences, the

---

Part II · Moving Objects

biennials provide opportunities to become familiar with current trends in art, while on the other hand, they turn into cultural tourist traps and attract the international public and the media. Some of them are very open, others concentrate on particular regions or problematics. The biennial exhibitions are also organized in (former) Eastern Europe: in Bucharest, Iaşi, Prague (two competing events: one organized by Flesh Art—Giancarlo Politi and Helena Kontova, the other by the National Gallery—Milan Knížák) and in Poznań, Poland (called Mediations). The Mediations biennial is actually unique, since it has a double frame of reference: global and regional, Eastern European. It developed in the context of an earlier exhibition, Asia-Europe Mediation, prepared by Tomasz Wendland, presently the biennial’s director, responsible for mediating between the two continents. This idea has been continued by the biennial. At first, the most important was the Asian aspect, but quickly its scope became global. Interestingly, Eastern Europe has become the focus of the global perspective as a space of mediation between various cultures. In 2008, the Poznań show arranged by three curators (Lóránd Hegyi, Gu Zhenqing, and Yu Yean Kim) attracted more than 200 artists from all over the world and almost every continent. At the same time, the main emphasis was on the Eastern European placement of the “mediations”—not so much by the selection of artists from that part of Europe (although this was important as well), but above all by creating in the essays included in the catalog their discursive context and interpretive frame.12 Of course, the most famous biennials in (former) Eastern Europe are the ones in Moscow and Berlin. One of the latter—the fifth, whose curators were Adam Szymczyk and Elena Filipović—was turned toward the former East.

The passing from the artistic geography, in which the subjects were specific countries and their transnational relations, to topography, favoring cities, is a very interesting feature of contemporary culture. Hence, one can assume that the relations among the cities will soon cease to be transnational to become transcosmopolitan. The biennials and their analysis is a good starting point for thinking in such terms, particularly that, according to Boris Groys, they are not only tourist attractions and opportunities for the promotion of the international, global capital, but also, and perhaps in the first place, oc-
casions to develop a global political forum, global *politeia*. Adopting such a point of view, one can say that the cosmopolitan cities, including also those in (former) Eastern Europe, and their cosmopolitan cultural activity, such as biennials, will create a network of cosmopolitan intellectual exchange and transcosmopolitan relations of which the topography of (former) Eastern Europe will be a part.

---
