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Neighboring Alterity: Eastern European Art and Global Art Studies

Facing stereotypes

The current debates on the art of Eastern Europe after 1945 are to some extent marked with oblivion. One of the reasons for this is the end of the bipolar West-East culture model after the changes of 1989-1990, a threshold that made the creation of identities through clear, though forced, differences more and more out-of-date. The other factor comes with the new dissolution of Eastern European specificities in the nowadays post-colonial debates on world art and global art, which thus show possible risks of non-reflexive losses of geographical differences and historical polyvalences from sight. Consequently the attempts at writing art history and defining exhibition practice as a kind of critical assessment of artistic production of the last decades, and a balanced resume of the then and today's status of Eastern European artists, still meet methodological obstacles.

One of the most visible burdens is the problem of creating collective identities. In these terms, the search for the common denominator of Eastern European art as defined by regional distinctions shows, nowadays, the complexity of research challenges and the winding roads of historical comprehension of artistic phenomena. Since the latter is still obstructed by the prolonged existence of the mental Iron Curtain, the reception of the East has somehow become stranded between the old world of cultivated political frontiers and the new world of open multilateral networking strategies. This leads, in effect, to the discernible *a priori* absence of Eastern European art in the discourse of the post-hegemonic, post-colonial and transnational art history, which at present builds the framework of modern self-reflective and critically progressive discipline of art research. It turns out to be a vast blank space, since art history from this region, freed from political burdens after 1989, is also indisputably an es-

sential part of the present scholarship with its new, comprehensive, methodological approaches and contemporary claims for global overview.

Therefore, there is firstly a need for a new formulation and apprehension of Eastern European art history within a broader European context based on the criteria of historical inconsistencies. The historical-geographical incompleteness that delineated the Eastern European world of art in the 20th century can become an inherent argument within the general discourse without burdening the regional art production with the label of a closed site-specific phenomenon. Zdenka Badovinac, who wrote one of the essays in our volume, speaks in this context about 'interrupted histories' in Eastern Europe.¹ This desideratum is still valid, since the problem of historical reconstruction and deconstruction of Eastern European art, called into question in 2009 by Piotr Piotrowski in this groundbreaking book "In the Shadow of Yalta", changed hitherto held perspectives.² In this study he created a model of 'horizontal art history', i.e. written from the margins, which inevitably brings us to discuss multilateral and dynamic sources of the heterogeneity of Eastern European art, instead of searching for its integrity as the intelligible 'other'. We cannot treat Eastern Europe as a uniform art space or even a consistent territory of self-sustainable art production in the 20th century, since it is marked with monumental, timely thresholds of polarized, pan-European or even global politics. In effect, it is all about a tension between reminiscence of the fifty years of post-war regime in its various representations, and the divergent identity claims resulting from the sudden possibilities of artistic development after the huge political and national changes of 1989.

Secondly, in contemporary art historical research, as well as in exhibition practice, we are still facing a myth, a tale of an Eastern European artist who –

being politically suppressed at least after 1950 – was not interested at all in starting a dialog with a regime and elaborated instead on alternative experiments. Therefore, he seemingly used only new media, turning away from such traditional means of ‘official’ art such as painting or sculpture. As such, he is nowadays often classified with an avant-garde mark of anti-socialist nonconformity and hence his work appears immediately as a struggle for freedom. This label was clearly visible in the exhibition *Promises of the Past: A Discontinuous History of Art in Former Eastern Europe*, organized in 2010 in the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.³ The same institution has just extended the historical range of this label to pre-war Modernism. It is sufficient to say that in the 2013 new arrangement of the Centre’s permanent collections that give new, very informative insights into the global rise of different modernities – *modernités plurielles* – Eastern European artists appear almost only as children of the revolution.⁴ Thus, a myth is still being created: the artist’s mission is either to build the great revolutionary framework and eventually, worthily lose the game with the system, like Russian Constructivists, or to replace the post-war system and create a parallel universe, a fictitious reality beyond oppression.

According to these West-friendly stereotypes, the means to achieve this higher reflective reality is utopia, absurd irony or mystical escapism. This or that, it has to be, by all means, a perspective of transmission. It should allow the artist either a passive defense in the form of enduring the ongoing censorship of mind, or let him keep in contact with non-political dimensions of the absolute, and consequently transform the social into the human as related directly to the whole universe. A good example of this second kind of relativization is given by the famous actions by the Slovakian Dadaist ‘anti-artist’ Július Koller, whose project named U.F.O. (Universal Futurological Operations) was aimed at the rudimentary aesthetic transformation of reality in the world, which he declared to be a ready-made (fig. 1).⁵ If we treat today, however, such magnificent separatist manifestos as a general model of regional identity, the artistic production turns *en bloc* into an alternative organization of the world, in which the



Fig. 1 Július Koller, *Impossible Cultural Situation (U.F.O.)*, 1989.

artist assume a role of an oppositional visionary. And here lies the problem, since within this approach artists from the East have to fulfill the laws of art historical retrospectives, and must not show any ‘false’ political engagement or subjection if their works are still to be analyzed according to the Western notions of art as an area of autonomy.

The curse of different temporalities

Accordingly, this volume, resulting from the symposium *Mythmaking Eastern Europe: Art in Response*, that was held at the University of Zurich on 18. December 2012, is an attempt to initiate a critical debate on political entanglements of Eastern European art in building-up political systems, a debate that can call the anachronistic overall image of its homogeneous resistance into question. We shall ask what did official art, the historical compromising attitudes, the evolution of the ministries of approval, and eventually the institutionalization of the art scene look like. To what extent can we talk about artists who are conformant to the system and still work as modernists? And in turn, in how far was this position of in-between already out-of-date after 1989, as art was often involved in building new or regenerating old nationalities? It is also worth asking if there are any patterns of such interlacings between official and alternative art. Moreover, we shall continue and inquire how far the official turned into the commercial after 1989.



Fig. 2 Bálint Szombathy, Lenin in Budapest, 1972.

The performance with Lenin banner by the Hungarian artist Bálint Szombathy in 1972, which served as a logo of our symposium, used to be interpreted most of all as an ironic sign depriving the well-known authoritarian image of its authority, i.e. an act of dada-like protest calling the issue of control and governance into question (fig. 2). In fact, the artist declared himself that he wanted to

“explore possible semantic situations of V.I. Lenin’s image and the milieu in question where meanings and diverse authoritative messages (...) occur”.⁶

If one considers the use of sophisticated pictorial techniques such as the romantic, highly reflective *Rückenfigur* (rear figure) of the artist, directed in its progressive movement against the daily, uninvolved mass, the figure holding the portrait of Lenin striking the beholder back with his all the more perforating, exclusive gaze, these interventions become something more than an

artistic irony. The same applies to Szombathy’s attempt to decontextualize the official likeness of the socialist idol through symbolic incorporations and performative extensions. The presentation of his persistent observer in front of the images of workers’ life, and not workers themselves, evokes rudimentary questions of the limits of political and pictorial representation. Such interventions create an intelligent play with the beholder’s capacities of self-reflection. The banner Lenin put on Szombathy’s shoulder seems to address the beholder with a tricky message: only those who follow me know what I am actually trying to say. As such, the hermeneutical value of the Lenin performance also brings the artist’s own positioning into debate: as someone situated between the universal language of art and the need for embedded political response.

Paradoxically, an anti-socialist face has proven an effective trademark for artists in art history and exhibition practice. In its pragmatic values, it surprisingly meets its opposite: the contemporary commercialization of socialist icons. The long shadow of the anti-socialist mission thrown on Eastern European artists in the Western reception as well as in the Eastern self-retrospective, reflects nowadays a social phenomenon of pop-cultural taming of the obscure past. The image of Lenin gains nowadays an attractiveness discussed above, as it belongs to the new culture of oblivion, where the fear of reminiscence goes hand in hand with historical unconsciousness. Both references seemingly help to erase the past thanks to a self-protective anti-indigenization strategy that makes the exotic out of one’s own remembrance. The action initiated by Szombathy in the 1970s, reflecting upon such opposites as individuality vs. mass, irony vs. engagement, the missionary vs. the pragmatic, was in these terms interestingly put anew into discourse in 2009 by a Scottish performer Kenny McBride. His idea was to bring the likeness of Lenin back to where it nowadays belongs: to the museum.⁷ This means, to the place where the history remains history and is as such subdued to hermeneutical reconstruction. In his ‘re-enactment’ of Szombathy’s intervention he temporarily placed a copy of the famous Lenin banner, a black-and-white witness of his own artistic history, in the then newly opened gallery of hitherto neglected Socialist Realism of the National Museum in Warsaw.



Fig. 3 Kenny McBride, *Re-enactment 3. Lenin in Warsaw*, 2009.

After he had received Piotr Piotrowski's permission, as the then museum director, aiming at the critical mission of the institution, McBride put the banner in front of one of the Polish icons of the working class of the 1950s, the 'Manifesto' canvas painting by Wojciech Weiss of 1949 (fig. 3).⁸ Directed frontally to the beholder, doubling the still confusingly gazing Lenin, despite his sunglasses, and arranging himself among the crowd of communist protagonists in the extended pictorial space of Weiss' painting, he thus contributed to the issue of historical differentiation of artistic legacy of the socialist times and to the debate of its present stereotypes.

Moreover, he directly touched on the problem of what we could call the posthumous self-marketing of socialism:

"A major concern in approaching a re-enactment of this work by Bálint Szombathy was how to avoid a misinterpretation on the part of the viewer regarding what the image of Lenin represents. In post-Communist Europe there are a plethora

of hostels, bars, and nightclubs named after aspects of Sovietology; Lenin, Propaganda, and Nostalgia, are just such a few examples. (...) I was interested in placing an iconic image of Lenin within a national museum's Socialist Realism collection in a post-Communist country, to relocate Lenin to the cultural arm of Communist ideology. The action is a re-siting of Lenin within the context of a socio-cultural past, within the official house of relics, and far from the status it has acquired in contemporary European neo-capitalist societies."⁹

McBride situates himself in the museum in a provocative way in front of Socialist Realism. This positioning creates somehow an inversion of Szombathy's situation, or maybe ironically recovers its lost consistency, since this time the mass, the idol and the artist look in the same direction. The fusion between the well-known and omnipresent iconic fetish, the appropriate narrative environment in the well-known painting behind, and the space of the museum as a place where history ends and is only represented by images, justifies the artist's protest against oblivion and historical disguise.

One can see this reconciliation work also as a commentary on what happened when Szombathy himself evoked the Lenin action again in 2001, showing the same banner on the streets of Bratislava in order to see how far the appearance of the socialist idol would affect people passing-by. (fig. 4) In the meantime, the



Fig. 4 Bálint Szombathy, *Lenin in Bratislava*, 2001.

circumstances changed: The new socio-political reality, the rise of early capitalist development building hope for the future by means of an instant erasure of the past, enabled people to get rid of old fears as well as to transform memories into entertainment or nostalgia. As Szombathy noted, this time “people mostly reacted with a smile, instead of showing any concern.”¹⁰ Thus, the intervention turned into an event. Ten years later, in 2010 and 2011, he made a couple of happenings in European cities. He walked as a ‘sandwich man’ showing flags of non-existent socialist countries and the inscription “Remember” in different respective languages. One of those places was Komárno in Slovakia. He documented his action directly on the local bridge over Danube, on the Slovak-Hungarian border (fig. 5), which additionally explores the issue of internal Eastern European tensions and particularities (the name of the other, Hungarian part of the town is Komárom). He performed a similar intervention during the opening events of the Venice Biennale in 2011, as e.g. with the Czechoslovakian flag in front of the old Czechoslovakian pavilion or with the flag of the Soviet Union in the streets of Venice (fig. 6, 7). These actions, in contrast, as Szombathy noticed, “triggered deep response from the passers-by”.¹¹

In this way, through re-enactments, which tear the comfortable curtain of social oblivion apart, the problem of different temporalities of Western and Eastern art found its primary expression. We can say that the European *today* in art historical writing almost always meets the Eastern European *yesterday*. This is especially striking in the composition of several exhibition catalogues, such as *Europa oggi*, from 1988, in which no single Eastern European artist was represented.¹² The panorama of Europe’s own reminiscences and traumatic visions suffers from the same exclusion, too: an example of an exhibition catalogue already edited in 1995 and related to the way European artists reflected World War II until the 1960s: *Europa nach der Flut* (Europe after the flood) makes this exclusivity of torment more than clear.¹³ We are also facing an unhappy shift of time in historical and art historical research. On the one hand, the contemporary interests in pre-modern art of the East, developed most of all in Germany, at least since the early 1990s, were, and to a great extent still are, motivated by



Fig. 5 Bálint Szombathy, *Remember!*, 2010.

the politics of common ‘national’ or ‘ethnic’ legacy (*das gemeinsame Erbe*).¹⁴ Taking into account that this enigmatic notion is focused on tracing the German history among or directly within other histories, it is rather easy to notice that such an approach gives in its essence a very clear sign of directionality for art history. This kind of intentional lamination goes against every attempt to overcome the traditional image of absorptive Easternness and progressive Westernness.¹⁵ On the other hand, there is the rise of global interests and the career of transnational, transcultural branches of progressive art history that boomed soon after the accession of the first Eastern European countries to the European Union in 2004. In its methodical impact it excluded, however, the ‘new’ neighbors from behind the definitively fallen Iron Curtain from this area of study due to their already progressing ‘domestication’ in political, economic and eventually socio-cultural dimensions. As such, the East has been, again, eaten by the West. In its alternative appearance, Eastern Europe is now still fresh and appealing, but mostly only due to its projected obscure anachronistic features. It is exactly this image of neighboring alterity, which contributes at present to the existence of a void space between the West and the rest.

Eastern European art and the global art history

The abovementioned objections resonate a hitherto rather neglected structural issue that needs to be solved within the new transcultural and global

approaches. These not only try to overthrow the directionality, but also to recognize timely differences between intention, production and reception, as described long ago e.g. by George Kubler,¹⁶ since they are essential in comprehending the past and contemporary world art scenes without falling into a new generation of comparative art historical colonialism. Otherwise, we apply the Western clichés or the self-created heroic mythologies of the East in nearly the same manner, as it nowadays often happens, when for example Panofsky's iconology is used within some seemingly post-colonial research modes to elaborate on Buddhist or Hindu art and its worldwide networked agency.¹⁷ In both cases, there is a similar methodological gap. Within the endeavors of furnishing the Eastern European art production, the *corpus delicti* are certain Western notions of art's autonomy, which at a certain time shaped certain discourses on modernity. If these, directly related to the absurd negation of communist reality behind the Iron Curtain, should still deliver today a fixed collective model of artistic identity of European lands being in transition and serve as a proof of modernity, they build an inevitable trap. Eastern European art thus takes a position of extra-European traditional extinct cultures in the way it is forced to permanent self-definition as explicitly Eastern and modernist kind of protest against regimes. This loss of balance in comprehension of different time modalities becomes visible especially if the notion of contemporaneity of art is at stake.

In short, the European East seems not to be sexy anymore within a global context: neither can it be investigated through the West's own microscopic lenses, nor is it far enough and exotic enough to be seen through new methodological telescopes of the global studies. In the present 'grand narrative' of art history there is, again, a huge *no man's land* between Elbe and Asian border, Eastern Europe invariably remains farther than the geographical Near East. This is the situation, which provokes contemporary artists and curators to still deal with this problem and to complain, and what in turn forces their art to serve, in fact, as a statement, protest, or postulate, in any case as a new remedy against rejection, as for example in Mladen Stilnović's work *An artist who cannot speak English is no Artist* from 1994.¹⁸ Therefore, in this context one



Fig. 6 Bálint Szombathy, *Remember!*, 2011.



Fig. 7 Bálint Szombathy, *Remember!*, 2011.

should not only open the borders of the mind and embrace the globe with notions of preferably far reaching networks in order to overcome the politically incorrect notions of exoticism and primitivism. The productive differentiation comes along with an evaluation of one's own basic cognitive instruments as elaborated once in the past and with an acknowledgement that they are nowadays still dependent on traditionally layered stereotypes of alterity. Otherwise, Eastern Europe will retain its exotic rank, which will grow in direct proportion to the increasing number of regional case studies.

The present volume is, therefore, an attempt to deliver some critical contributions to the different perspective of art historical research on Eastern European art. How can this perspective be briefly described? The already established and comfortable

label of collective avant-garde identity behind the Iron Curtain and the fact of political isolation of the Eastern European art world as well as art history itself should not prevent us from searching for inner splits and from the further exploration of bilateral relations between East and West within globalized art history. This approach should not be obstructed by the fear of losing local specificities in cosmopolitan or multicultural attitudes. In this process we need an acceptance of the pluralistic phenomenology of disintegration and limited definability of art production in the East, so that the particularities will become visible within a universal perspective exactly due to multilateral differences. This is how in this case Piotrowski's concept of 'writing art history from the margins' can help us save the local within the global.

In context of the disappearance (or rather: aboriginal absence) of Eastern European art in the globalized discourse, it is worth mentioning two recent exhibition catalogues that go beyond the usual frames. The first is *Europaweit. Kunst der 60er Jahre* (Europe-wide. Art of the 1960s) which builds a documentation of the exhibition in Karlsruhe and Halle organized in 2002.¹⁹ In this publication the hitherto existent East-West-mind barriers were eliminated within a productive historical-cultural micro-perspective without losing sight of minor local specificities, even if the time period of the 1960s did not allow the organizers to explore the issue of the mentioned gap between the temporalities as far as one could wish. With this step, however, the passivity of the East was overcome. The second catalogue, which accompanied the exhibition of the European Committee that was opened in the German Historical Museum in Berlin one day before our Zurich symposium took place, is entitled: *Verführung Freiheit: Kunst in Europa seit 1945* (The Desire for Freedom: Art in Europe since 1945).²⁰ It followed the path of reflexive historical reconciliation and the organizers developed a bilateral perspective on modern European freedom in art as rooted in both democracy and socialism. In any case, Horst Bredekamp's statement in his essay made the exhibition's intentions more than clear:

"Dieser Ansatz bot die Möglichkeit, die beiden Blöcke des Kalten Krieges nicht allein in ihrer feindlichen Abstoßung zu sehen, sondern sie in

ihren unterschiedlichen Antworten auf dieselben Strukturprobleme hin zu vergleichen; nicht im Sinne einer Konvergenz, sondern aus den Bedingungen ihres gemeinsamen Ursprungs".²¹

Our Zurich symposium was held on quite a special day. One day after the meeting, on the 19th Oct. 2012, it was exactly a hundred years since Aby Warburg gave a paper on the Congress of Art Historians in Rome, in which he presented an interpretation of the early Renaissance astrologic frescoes in Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara. As it is well known, it was a talk which paved the way for contemporary art historical iconology.²² This is worth mentioning here not because of the coincidence of the dates, but due to the fact that in Warburg's talk of 1912 the newly rediscovered milestone of very contemporary art history, the multilateral focus of the discipline, was brought to life. The authoritarian imagination of the whole universe depicted in the Schifanoia frescoes, based on feudal centralism and focused hierarchical identity, was questioned by Warburg by the means of art historical notions of mutual transformation and translation between Renaissance Italy, ancient topoi, Jewish translators, Arabic nature sciences and Indian cosmology. Liberated from biographical and historical causalism, Warburg, defining himself as "Jewish by birth, a Hamburger at heart, with the soul of a Florentine", thus stressed the need for a common display that would show networks and relations instead of recognizable constants. Although enormously explored in recent years, Warburg's idea of networked intercultural comparisons still cannot be overestimated and as such it delivers a reliable pattern or rather a stimulus for bringing the research on art in Western and Eastern Europe together. Instead of showing East as East within exportable initiatives,²³ a common display of Western and Eastern phenomena – *Europe-wide* – would free art history from the burden of particular reminiscences of a political kind, from the persistent search for the East's own nature, as well as from the sentimental claims for self-alterization. This resembles, of course, Warburg's well-known idea of the atlas, a critical formula of differentiated display, a very popular research topic nowadays. Not without a reason, since the atlas is:

“...far more than a subset of the archive. The atlas is distinct: it is relational and geographic-spatial, not taxonomic. It is governed by grids, not categories. (...) It is a method of artistic organisation that deploys neither filling cabinet nor montage nor Postmodern appropriation (...) nor traditional narrative.”²⁴

As such, an open form of common East-West display and its multilateral commentary needs to be accompanied by a critical estimation of already existing approaches. This volume aims, therefore, at exploring the problem of stereotypes, which seem to be so trivial that they are barely even visible. As such transparent veils, however, they still match the contemporary search for political correctness in research. As an alternative, the following essays offer a multifocal insight into the contemporary reception of Eastern European art with the focus set on some of its unwelcome or uncomfortable political inflections. In this way, this small volume can be a contribution to the current general debate on the present borders and objectives of art history as an academic discipline searching for its new global identity beyond anachronistic geographical concerns.

Endnotes

1. *Interrupted histories*, Moderna galerija Ljubljana, 14 March 2006 - 17 June 2006, curated by Zdenka Badovinac.
2. Piotr Piotrowski, *In the shadow of Yalta. Art and the Avant-Garde in Eastern Europe 1945-1989*, London 2011.
3. *Promises of the Past: A Discontinuous History of Art in Former Eastern Europe*, ed. by Christine Macel and Natasa Petresin, exhibition catalogue, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 14 April-14 July 2010, Zürich 2010.
4. *Modernités plurielles 1905-1975*, ed. by Catherine Grenier, exhibition catalogue, Centre Pompidou, 23 October 2013 - 26 January 2015, Paris 2013.
5. Július Koller, *Univerzálna Futurologická Operácia [Universale Futuristische Operation]*, exhibition catalogue, Kölnischer Kunstverein, 19 July - 1 September 2003, Köln 2003.
6. Author's correspondence with the artist, 2012.
7. http://www.agora8.org/reader/Kenny_McBride_ch5_reenactment.html#3, 13.03.2014.
8. Author's correspondence with the artist, 2012.
9. http://www.agora8.org/reader/Kenny_McBride_ch5_reenactment.html#3, 13.03.2014.
10. Author's correspondence with the artist, 2012.
11. Author's correspondence with the artist, 2012.
12. *Europa oggi: arte contemporanea nell'Europa Occidentale / Art now: contemporary art in Western Europe*, exhibition catalogue, Museo d'arte Contemporanea, Prato, 25 June - 20 October 1988, Firenze 1988.
13. *Europa nach der Flut: Kunst 1945-1965*, exhibition catalogue, Centre Cultural, Barcelona: 12 May - 30 July 1995, Wien, Künstlerhaus: 10 September - 10 December 1995, Barcelona 1995.
14. The book series *Geschichte der Deutschen im Osten Europas* edited since 1992 can serve here as a representative example. Cf. the early critical review of this series by Klaus Bednarz: <http://www.zeit.de/1992/51/einfach-untergegangen>, 13.03.2013, as well as: Markus Krzoska, Rezension zu: Rogall, Joachim (Hrsg.): *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas. Land der großen Ströme. Von Polen nach Litauen*. Berlin 1996, in: H-Soz-u-Kult, 13.07.1998, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/id=352>, 13.03.2014.
15. This remains one of the main problems of global art studies, therefore instead of citing innumerable respective statements I would like to only refer the readers to the multifaceted volume *World Art Studies: exploring Concepts and Approaches*, eds. Wilfried van Damme and Kitty Zijlmans, Amsterdam 2008.
16. George Kubler, *Shape of time. Remarks on the history of things*, Yale University Press 1962. Cf. also the author's response to the critics of his theses: George Kubler, *Shape of time reconsidered*, in: *Perspecta*, vol. 19, 1982, p. 112-121.
17. Cf. in this respect the problem of „other” modernities within the global art studies: John Clark, *Modernities in Art: how are they „other”?*, in: *World Art Studies*, eds. Wilfried van Damme and Kitty Zijlmans 2008, p. 401-418.
18. Cf. *East Art Map. Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Irwin, London 2006, p. 92.
19. *Europaweit. Kunst der 60er Jahre*, ed. by Erika Rödiger-Diruf, exhibition catalogue, Karlsruhe, Städtische Galerie und Halle, Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg, 14 April - 25 August 2002, Ostfil-derm-Ruit 2002.
20. *Verführung Freiheit: Kunst in Europa seit 1945*, ed. by Monika Flacke, exhibition catalogue, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, 17 October 2012 - 10 February 2013, Dresden 2012.
21. Horst Bredekamp, *Die Kunst als Freiheit, in: Verführung Freiheit*, ed. Monika Flacke 2012, p. 22.
22. Aby Warburg, *Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoia zu Ferrara*, in: *L'Italia e l'Arte straniera. Atti del X Congresso Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte*, 1912, Roma 1922 (recently in: Aby Warburg, *Werke in einem Band*, ed. Martin Treml, Sigrid Wiegand, Perdita Ladwig, Berlin 2010, p. 373-400). English version: Aby Warburg, *Italian art and international astrology in the Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara*, in: idem, *The Renewal of pagan antiquity: contributions to the cultural history of the european Renaissance*, ed. Kurt W. Foster, Los Angeles, CA 1999, p. 563-591.
23. Cf. my exhibition review, to which the present essay alludes: *Jet lag, oder vom Unbehagen eines Mythos. Zur Ausstellung Promises of the Past: A Discontinuous History of Art in Former Eastern Europe*, kuratiert von Christine Macel und Joanna Mytkowska, Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Paris, 14.04.-19.07.2010, in: *Kunsttexte.de (Sektion: Ostblick)*, Ausgabe 2, März 2011, URL: <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/kunsttexte/2011-1/kapustka-mateusz-11/PDF/kapustka.pdf>.
24. Charles Green, *The Atlas Effect: Constraint, Freedom and the Circulation of Images*, in: *Crossing cultures: conflict, migration and convergence*. The proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art (Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art, CIHA), The University of Melbourne, 13-18 January 2008, ed. by Jaynie Anderson, Carlton, Vic., Australia 2009, p. 946.

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Summary

The European *today* in art historical writing faces the Eastern European *yesterday*. Intentional laminations of national and ethnic ‘legacies’, still present in research, preserve the old directionality of art history and go against every attempt to overcome the traditional image of absorptive Easternness and progressive Westernness. Consequently, Eastern European art after WWII is still appealing due to its projected obscure anachronistic clichés based on escapist visions of modernist resistance against oppression taken from the long 20th century and cultivated primarily during the Cold War. This deficiency creates a challenge for the transcultural and global approaches. The latter not only try to overthrow the directionality, but also to recognize timely differences between intention, production and reception, as described long ago e.g. by George Kubler. These are essential in comprehending the past and contemporary world art scenes without falling into a new generation of comparative and formalistic art historical colonialism. Within the ongoing endeavors of furnishing Eastern European art production with easily legible ‘Eastern’ labels, the corpus delicti still are, however, certain Western notions of art’s autonomy, which at a certain time shaped certain debates on modernity. This introductory essay shows this problem in relation to selected contemporary artistic interventions dealing with remembrance and oblivion.

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Title

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