

# MARGINS OF MODERNITY

## PROGRAMME

### THURSDAY JUNE 4 – DAY 1

9:00 **Coffee and registration**

9:30 **A word of welcome**

Alain Delattre (Dean of the Faculty of Letters, Translation and Communication, ULB)  
Damien Scalia (Director of the Maison des Sciences Humaines, ULB)  
Petra James (Co-director of MODERNITAS Research Center, ULB)

10:00 **Panel 1: Science and technology made by literature**

**Chair:** Dennis Ioffe

**Banerjee, Anindita** (Cornell university, US)

*Red Allah's Oil: Petrofuturism in the Shadow of Empire*

**Surman, Jan Jakub** (Czech Academy of Sciences, CZ)

*Vernacular modernities: Sommer Batěk and Czechoslovak pulp-fiction*

**Raysz, Sybil** (ULB, BE)

*Living anomalies in Czech and Russian Science Fiction Literature:  
Blurring the boundaries of modernity*

11:00 **Panel 2: Women as Marginal Actors**

**Chair:** Libuše Heczková

**Viceconti, Chiara** (Sapienza University of Rome, IT)

*From the margins to the center of modernity: Mythical Revision and Female Agency in the texts by Johanna Braun and Olga Larionova*

**Földes, Györgyi** (ELTE - Research Centre for the Humanities, HU)

*Mysticism, neo-avant-garde and punk culture: Judit Kemenczky in Budapest and Boston*

**Duverne, Céline & Shauna Heck** (ULB, BE)

*A Dissident Modernity: Marguerite Coppin and the Fin-de-siècle "Third Sex"*

12:00 **Lunch break**



13:30 **Panel 3: Modernity Grounded in British Models**

**Chair:** Petra James

**Filée, Eve** (ULB, BE)

*Behind the First Ruskins: Women as catalysts of Ruskinian thought in Belgium and Bohemia*

**Juszkiewicz, Piotr** (Adam Mickiewicz University, PL)

*Jerzy Warchałowski (1874–1939) and the (apparent) paradoxes of modernism*

**Dickinson, Rachel** (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK)

*Ruskin, Modernity and Women at the Margins*

**Cox, Helena** (University of York, UK)

*“Be yourself and thus you will be Czech” - Bohemian Art Journals around 1900 as major mediators of Central-European modernity*

14:50 **Coffee break**

15:10 **Panel 4: Alternative Practices of Modernity**

**Chair:** Ola Sidorkiewicz

**Rakoczy, Marta** (Institute of Polish Culture, PL)

*Children’s stories as marginalized voices of modernity: between production of modern subjects and creation of alternative modernisation*

**Karpowicz, Agnieszka** (University of Warsaw, PL)

*Logovisuality and (counter)modernity. The case of the Polish avant-garde*

**Forbes, Meghan** (Independent scholar, US)

*Dancing at the Margins: Míra Holzbachová on the North American Continent*

**Říha, Jakub & Zuzana Říhová** (Czech Academy of Sciences, CZ)

*The Margins of the War: Group 42, Jiří Kolář, and T. S. Eliot*

16:30 **Coffee break and discussion**

17:00 **End of day 1**

18:30 **Conference dinner**

## FRIDAY JUNE 5 – DAY 2

9:30 **Coffee and welcome**

10:00 **Panel 5: Soviet Policy, Institutions, and Censorship**

**Chair:** Elizaveta Berquin

**Korotkov, Georgii** (Stanford University, US)

*Anarcho-Futurism on the Periphery: The Chelyabinsk Journal Sdvig (1923) and the Repression of Provincial Modernism*

**Kocialkowska, Kamila** (University of Warwick, UK)

*The Poet and the Postal Censor: Ilia Zdanevich and the politics of zaum in Tbilisi*

**Ostrovskaya, Elena** (Independent scholar, FR)

*“An international organization led almost exclusively by Hungarians”: Hungarian and Polish writers at the head of the Literature of the world revolution*

11:00 **Panel 6: Periodicals, Networks, Centre-Periphery Dynamics**

**Chair:** Helga Mitterbauer

**Berquin, Elizaveta** (ULB, BE)

*Russian Émigré Periodicals in Belgium: Decentring the Canon through a Data-Driven Approach*

**Pranjić, Kristina** (Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, SI)

*From Canons to Cartographies: Yugoslav and Adriatic Avant-Garde Networks*

**Bezari, Christina** (ULB, BE)

*Transnational Modernity in Southern Europe: Rethinking the Center-Periphery Divide*

**Jeon, Inwha** (ULB, BE)

*Franco-Korean Authors as Mediators of a Diasporic and corporeal Modernity*

12:20 **Lunch break**

14:00 **Panel 7: Materiality, Technology and Spaces**

**Chair:** Barbora Svobodová

**Soukupová, Veronika** (Academy of Arts, Architecture, and Design in Prague, CZ)

*Weaving Modernity: Textile Artist and Journalist Jaroslava Vondráčková and Her Role in the Transnational Frameworks of Interwar Modernism in East-Central Europe*

**Rampley, Matthew** (Masaryk University, CZ)

*Where was Czech(oslovak) modernism? Architectural Historiography and the Global Reach of Czechoslovak Architecture*

**Laviolette, Patrick** (Masaryk University, CZ)

*Car-go Cults and Devětsil Who Govern*

15:00 **“Margins of Modernity” – Digital Platform Presentation**

15:20 – 16:00 **Closing remarks and discussion – End of day 2**

# MARGINS OF MODERNITY

## LIST OF ABSTRACTS

### DAY 1

#### PANEL 1: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY MADE BY LITERATURE

##### **Anindita Banerjee** – *“Red Allah’s Oil”: Petrofuturism in the Shadow of Empire*

The proposed paper examines a question that has received no attention in the relatively sparse body of recent humanistic inquiry into the cultural landscape of contemporary Russian oil: the entanglement of Soviet narratives of energy, and by extension the crucial element of oil in the construction of socialist utopia, in the geopolitics of empire. My presentation focuses on their conjuncture not in the metropolitan centers of Soviet power, but at the edges of Russia’s imperial peripheries.

Coeval with Lenin’s legendary call for ushering in Communism through mass electrification, “petrofuturism,” as I call it, took shape in the early revolutionary era on the offshore oil sites of the Caspian Sea. It was imagined, inscribed, and imbued with tremendous potential by a group of avant-garde artists and writers who congregated in Baku in 1920 for the First Congress of the Peoples of the East, a landmark event that aimed to align the internationalist trajectory of the October Revolution with anti-colonial struggles across Asia. The most iconic artifact produced by this collective was a chapbook titled *Red Allah’s Oil* (*Alaia neft’*), whose cover featured gigantic oil infrastructures very similar to the oversized transformers with which Soviet artists often paired Lenin. Using *Red Allah’s Oil* and its surrounding cultural texts, my paper complicates the utopian imaginary of Soviet energy. Unlike electricity, which rapidly became a metonym of salvation “for the entire country” according to Lenin’s slogan, petrofuturism could not quite escape its own contested geography: although its symbolic power rested on envisioning fossil fuels as the ultimate index of equality among the world’s dispossessed, it was simultaneously tainted with oil’s enduring role as a tool of violent imperial expansion.

##### **Jan Surman** – *Vernacular modernities: Sommer Batěk and Czechoslovak pulp-fiction*

Although Czechoslovak science fiction from the interwar period has been well researched, it is often viewed through the lens of well-read and widely translated authors. This paper will look beyond these celebrities, focusing on the marginalised and forgotten writer Alexander Sommer Batek (1874-1944). Educated as a chemist and still known as the creator of modern Czech chemical terminology, he was a renowned Esperantist and proponent of a healthy lifestyle before the First World War. After the war, he continued these efforts and started to address increasingly political topics. He also began to self-publish the journal *Zpravodaj z Kézbybyl*, in which he published articles on social life, politics and popular science, as well as serialised science fiction novels. The most notable of these were about a Martian visit to Earth and about Prague in the year 2019.

In my talk, I will focus on Sommer Batek’s oeuvre as a science fiction writer, situating him within both the international and the emerging Czechoslovak literary fields. His work will help me demonstrate how he used future-oriented literature to further his progressive agenda, framing it into a moral imperative. Last but not least, I will demonstrate how vernacular science fiction can be used to discuss both the evolving relationship between science, society, and the future and the growth of the pulp fiction press as a means of diversifying literature.

**Sybil Raysz** – *Living anomalies in Czech and Russian Science Fiction Literature: Blurring the boundaries of modernity*

This paper is the result of a thesis project exploring Czech and Russian science fiction literature as an agent in (de)constructing epistemic narratives of modernity. The multiple and contradictory viewpoints which are held under the umbrella term “modernity” often reflect complex relationships with rationality and the shifting roles of science within society. Science fiction, by its use of the tools of rationality to transform reality into the science fiction world, constitutes a peculiar vantage point from which the reader is invited to question and redefine their relationship to rationality.

Informed by this, we will focus on anomalous figures created by Czech and Russian SF narratives which blur boundaries and categories. The figures which will be discussed are robot(-like) beings from four texts: two novels from canonical writers of the interwar period, Evgeny Zamyatin's "My" [We] (1921), and Karel Čapek's "Válka s Mloky" [War with the Newts] (1936), and two short stories from science fiction writers from the 1960's and 1970's, Josef Nesvadba's "Einsteinův Mozek" [Einstein's Brain] (1960), and Galina Panizovskaya's "Moya Galatea" [My Galatea] (1971).

The common denominator between those anomalous figures is that they are pieces of technology who fail/refuse to work as tools and instead work at being. They are products of modern technological-industrial society but transcend the notion of technology as purely instrumental. By unsettling the Human-Nature distinction based on rationality, these figures play with the compartmentalization operated by mainstream narratives of modernity to offer hybrid alternatives.

The paper will explore those robot figures as emblematic of the modes of operation of science fiction, a genre which is notoriously hard to define and escapes even those boundaries which are summoned to define it: those of verisimilitude or conformity to science. The genre, a plural and hybrid entity, escapes visions of science as a rigid set of rules to which it should conform. It can play with the boundaries of cognition while retaining its generic identity, demonstrating the elasticity of those boundaries. As such, in parallel of avant-garde practices and narratives, science fiction explores through its creation of novel beings alternative modes of being modern.

## **PANEL 2: WOMEN AS MARGINAL ACTORS**

**Chiara Viceconti** – *From the margins to the center of modernity: Mythical Revision and Female Agency in the texts by Johanna Braun and Olga Larionova*

The science fiction genre is closely associated with modernity and progress. In the Eastern Bloc, this literary genre was initially considered marginal but went on to contribute to the utopian image of socialist modernity, in which equality and progress were central. However, as Anindita Banerjee also observed in the Russian context, science fiction was more successful in unmaking modernity than in creating a national one. The teleological promise of socialist modernity remained unfulfilled, as systemic marginalization persisted despite official rhetoric of equality.

This is particularly true of women. Some used science fiction to make their voices heard and criticize the system, using aesopian language to circumvent censorship. In East Germany and the Soviet Union, Johanna Braun (who worked together with her husband Günter Braun) and Olga Larionova succeeded in doing so by revising myths and tales. In *Der Irrtum des großen Zauberers* (The great magician's error, 1974) and *Planeta, kotoraya nichego ne mozhet dat* (The useless planet, 1967), the myths of women as snakes, machines and statues are overturned to unveil masculine domination in society, to express the need for a modernity that reflects the true values of socialism and to subvert the constraints of socialist realism.

Moreover, the authors used marginal genres such as satirical science fiction (Braun) and emerging psychological science fiction (Larionova) to depict a new modernity in which women are central and equal, as their female characters have a crucial role in the plot. Finally, the aim of this contribution is to show that through female agency, science fiction functions as a transformative space to transcend margins and boundaries, ultimately subverting established power hierarchies.

### **Györgyi Földes** – *Mysticism, neo-avant-garde and punk culture: Judit Kemenczky in Budapest and Boston*

Judit Kemenczky, a neo-avant-garde Hungarian poet, writer, translator, orientalist, and visual artist, had an exceptional and extremely successful start to her career, yet her work is still relatively unknown today. According to many of his peers, she was one of the most important Hungarian neo-avant-garde poets, but she was so unique and followed her own path, ultimately arriving at a form of religiously inspired art for which there was no real demand in any part of contemporary literature and art. Her metaphysically inspired writings reflect the concept of "everything is One" (which is also consistent with one of the main references of Judit Kemenczky, a professional orientalist, namely the main teaching of the I Ching, i.e. the unity of diversity and the eternity of change, and also present in the teachings of medieval mystics, among whom she translated Hildegard von Bingen). This principle of unity also allows her to bring together different historical periods, cultures, ways of thinking, and religions (although in a rather subversive way, realized in her texts through avant-garde montage or collage structures), and is also compatible with the neo-avant-garde's intermedia conception of art.

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, she was a member of the neo-avant-garde Fölöspéldány group, with whom she often appeared at so-called "live" literary evenings, where participants from the literary sphere performed their works in a performance-like manner with punk-rock bands. Another important stage in her life was her marriage to the neo-avant-garde poet József Bakucz, which led her to follow her husband to Boston. However, Bakucz died suddenly in 1990, and one consequence of this trauma was that her art – although it had always been imbued with esoteric-mystical inspiration, just not in such an explicit way – became deeply religious, and she was definitively excluded even from the neo-avant-garde canon.

In my presentation, I will present Judit Kemenczky's unique (and marginal) poetry, and seek to answer the question of what position she occupied in the neo-avant-garde art network in the two main locations of her artistic activity (Budapest and Boston).

### **Céline Duverne & Shauna Heck** – *A Dissident Modernity: Marguerite Coppin and the Fin-de-siècle "Third Sex"*

A member of the Theosophical Society, writer, and Belgian public figure, Marguerite Coppin stands out as a singular figure in the literary field of the late nineteenth century.

A marginal writer, due to her geographical distance from the Parisian center and her status as a woman author, Coppin is equally a writer of margins. In *Le Troisième sexe*, published in the "Fin de siècle" series by the controversial publisher Kistemaekers, the protagonist Nuit d'Ide, devoid of the « stigmates de la race sexuée » (1890, p. 148), rejects all carnal love. In opposition to the norms of bourgeois society and hygienist doctrines, Marguerite Coppin proposes an alternative model of sexual identity – that would earn her a trial for offending public morals. Moreover, influenced by esoteric theories circulating alongside the dominant positivism, the author develops a « théorie passionnelle » (1890, p. 148), grounded in a spiritualization of desire and a dematerialization of the body. Through a sociocritical and epistemocritical study of her work, we aim to examine how sexual ambiguity, feminist discourses, and esoteric thought contribute to a distinctive writing of modernity.

This involves not only highlighting her place within the social imagination of the fin de siècle, but also assessing the interpenetration of esoteric and literary discourses. With the support of digital humanities, we aim to situate the poetics of this self-taught writer within European networks that embody these multiple faces of modernity, and to analyze her reception in the press and criticism of her time.

At the intersection of esotericism, feminism, and decadence, this paper seeks to (re)introduce a forgotten Belgian author and to question, from the margins, the ambiguities of fin-de-siècle modernity.

### **PANEL 3: MODERNITY GROUNDED IN BRITISH MODELS**

#### **Eve Filée** – *Behind the First Ruskins: Women as catalysts of Ruskinian thought in Belgium and Bohemia*

This paper examines the reception of John Ruskin (1819–1900) in Belgium and Bohemia at the turn of the twentieth century. The influence of the English aesthete has already been extensively studied in major centres of reception such as Victorian Britain, Proust's France, and Tolstoy's Russia, but remains understudied in the so-called 'peripheral' spaces, such as Belgium and Bohemia, multilingual areas at the crossroads of international influences.

Yet, in each of these spaces, a certain canon still emerges, centred around prominent figures responsible for disseminating Ruskin's name throughout their respective nations: F.X. Šalda and Emile Cammaerts were both among the first translators of Ruskin, as was Henry van de Velde, a Belgian architect who left his mark across Europe conveying Ruskin's ideas through his writings, lectures, and creations. However, in light of their personal archives, their pioneering role in the discovery of Ruskin appears to be challenged by the influence of their female friendships. Friends and wives such as Zdenka Braunerová, Tita Brand, and Maria Sèthe acted as cultural mediators for these men, and thus shaped their understanding of Ruskin. It is through these women's translations, explanations, and introductions that these three men will hone their personal interpretations of Ruskin and, consequently, that of their nation. This paper argues that the reception of Ruskin in Belgium and Bohemia cannot be understood without accounting for this largely invisible female mediation, marginalised both geographically and socially. Their role, however, closely reflects the very model of femininity and intellectual support theorised by Ruskin himself.

#### **Piotr Juskiewicz** – *Jerzy Warchałowski (1874–1939) and the (apparent) paradoxes of modernism*

Not only is Jerzy Warchałowski an important figure in the history of modernism as a collector, co-founder of artistic institutions, critic, art theorist and curator of the Polish pavilion at the 1925 World Exhibition of Decorative Arts in Paris, he is also a figure who verifies existing theoretical reflections on modernism – in particular the tensions between the regional and the universal, the specific to a given culture and the borrowed from outside, and the modern and the traditional.

Educated in St. Petersburg and politically aligned with the Polish national right wing, Warchałowski co-created the modernist milieu of Kraków from the early 20th century onwards. Through his work and public statements, he adopted Morris's vision of social reform through the revitalisation of applied arts, which he put into practice co-founding the Polish Applied Arts Society (1901) and Kraków Workshops Cooperative (1913).

He updated Morris's ideas, drawing on Hermann Muthesius's (a co-founder of the German Werkbund) thoughts on architecture and decorative arts. Warchałowski took also into account the contemporary economic and political situation in Galicia, striving to formulate the

concept of a modern national style. Concurrently, an analysis of Warchałowski's activities and views largely dispels the apparent contradictions of Central European modernism that many researchers sought to overcome. Detailed research proposals in the form of artistic geography, horizontal art history, or the so-called 'reframing' of meanings, which do not always accurately reflect the original theoretical inspiration, ultimately boil down to questions of historical narrativism, in the spirit of Hayden White, such as: who is speaking, on whose authority, to whom and in what geographical context?

By presenting Warchałowski as a co-creator and promoter of Polish modernism, the text outlines an alternative perspective on modernism research. This perspective stems from the analysis of how European societies reacted to processes of modernisation. Understanding the diverse nature of these reactions, ranging from enthusiasm for modern civilisation to diagnoses of its profound crisis, enables us to overcome the paradoxes of modernism that are often considered unsolvable: the simultaneous adoration of modern civilisation and the cult of the primitive; criticism of cultural tradition alongside recourse to it; praise of individuality alongside recognition of the primacy of the collective; emphasis on the autonomy of art alongside primacy of utilitarianism; and cult of the metropolis as centre alongside admiration of the urban periphery.

### **Rachel Dickinson** – *Ruskin, Modernity and Women at the Margins*

Like many nineteenth-century figures, Victorian polymath John Ruskin's (1819–1900) influence declined in the twentieth century, driven in part by the Modernist turn and a wider movement away from the Victorian past. Ruskin's reputation was additionally tarnished by readings which constructed him as a misogynist, sometimes even a paedophile. In the twenty-first century, Ruskin studies are enjoying a revival; notably, his ideas are being used to grapple with key issues of modernity which haunt our Post-postmodern world, including environmental issues, damaging aspects of unchecked capitalism, rampant individualism and splintering of communities. The issue of Ruskin and women is also being reassessed. This is not new; almost forty years ago Dinah Birch's 'Ruskin's Womanly Mind' (1988) opened new critical pathways to reconsider Ruskin's positive position in relation to the feminine. Most recently, Anne Longmuir's *John Ruskin and the Victorian Woman Writer* (2024) traces Ruskin's reciprocal influence with canonical female writers of the 1850s and 1860s.

This paper focuses on Ruskin and women at the margins. It opens by highlighting particularly relevant points in Ruskin's public-facing writing, which offered inspiration for disempowered women. Then, it uses private letters, first-person accounts and material objects to consider how Ruskin's ideas were taken up by schoolgirls, female schoolteachers, and craftswomen – most working in rural locations, far from cultural hubs. It argues that Ruskin inspired 'modern' modes of living for marginalised and overlooked late nineteenth and early twentieth century women, and concludes by noting ways in which these women's responses resonate with movements in our own cultural moment.

### **Helena Cox** – “Be yourself and thus you will be Czech” – *Bohemian Art Journals around 1900 as major mediators of Central-European modernity*

As part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, around 1900, Bohemia (nowadays Czechia) was a melting pot of domestic and international art movements. Czech art journals such as *Volné Směry* (Free Directions) and *Rozhledy* (Outlooks) had ambitions to introduce Czech artists to the widest scope of global art. These journals soon became a key mechanism of cultural transfer, creating networks of artists, illustrators, journalists, critics and literary authors. More importantly, the journals created a specific subspace where international art movements coexisted and overlapped, co-creating a multifaceted cluster of local and global modernities.

This led to movements such as Symbolism and Decadence to exist alongside Pre-Raphaelitism, Modernism, Naturalism and Japonism, among other. The delayed reaction to some of the art movements, together with the prevailing sense of being located on the fringes of Western art, turned the Czech art journals into platforms for heated discussions about the role of Czech cultural identity and the place of international art within it. In this paper, I will focus on case studies of Czech fin-de-siècle artists, such as Max Švabinský and Jan Preisler, and analyse the ways they responded to the cluster of international styles showcased in art journals, including the British Pre-Raphaelites and French Symbolists. Through these case studies, I will examine how domestic themes and international trends overlapped and intersected, with multiple geographies and temporalities interacting all at once. Further, I will explore how the sense of being an artistic periphery shaped Czech artists' work as well as their sense of cultural identity. I will scrutinise the overlapping nature of international art movements in the central European context and explore how Czech art journals became crucial mediators between various languages, cultures and viewpoints, and how this impacts our terminology and understanding of modern Central European culture today.

#### **PANEL 4: ALTERNATIVE PRACTICES OF MODERNITY**

**Marta Rakoczy** – *Children's stories as marginalized voices of modernity: between production of modern subjects and creation of alternative modernisation*

The starting point for my reflection will be the child as a marginalised subject of modernity, as well as modernity itself as a field of tensions and contradictions processed in different ways by various actors in social life. Modernity as an 'iron cage' produces the myth of childhood as a domain of freedom, liberty and authenticity. The figure of the child becomes the object of dreams of escape from overstandardised civilisation and its norms. And the myth of the world of children as undetermined and enchanted is created in many modern works, such as Walter Benjamin's autobiographical story. At the same time, modern initiatives – such as youth movements inspired by states, churches and associations, modern pedagogy and mass formal education – serve to manage childhood and subject it to social and political control. Modern institutions, practices and discourses project the child as a citizen of the future society and colonise it by imposing skills and values on it.

And yet, children have their own voice in the field of modern discourse, one that is often forgotten today. The basic material for my paper will be children's stories from marginalised communities – Polish and Jewish children from the working class. These stories were collected in the 1920s by Warsaw educators and teachers – especially Maria Falska and Janusz Korczak/Henryk Goldszmit. Children's autobiographies and various forms of writing about their own lives are a modern form of producing children's voices, embedded in a specific educational project. They serve to professionally introduce children to the public forum and to build new criteria for artistic and social expression in the public sphere. Children's voices engage in a polemic with the modern idea of a subject who manifests and builds their agency through the act of writing (Richard Bauman) and speaking in public (Spyros Spyrou). At the same time, they create an alternative vision of modernity, detached from the idea of progress and the cult of industrial civilisation. They show the costs of modernity borne by the weakest and most vulnerable subjects. They also redefine the myths accompanying adulthood as maturity and show the power relations generated by immature adults that are omnipresent in a child's life. And although they are the voice of the child mediated and processed by adults, they are the voice of a subject who can show us today a different, hitherto unexplored side of modern processes, as well as other dimensions of modernisation.

**Agnieszka Karpowicz** – *Logovisuality and (counter)modernity. The case of the Polish avant-garde*

Logovisual genres are intrinsically linked with marginality as a category (for example, from the point of view of canon, literary theory and art history, which separate word and image), but also with a break from modernist hierarchies and genres (W. J. T. Mitchell). According to Willard Bohn, the “crisis of sign”, of which visual poetry is the manifestation, is lined to the crisis of culture. Dysregulation, changes of attitude and shifts between the two orders which are words and things, as underlined by Michel Foucault, generally produce, according to Bohn, transformations in the relationship between words and images experienced in logovisual art. We are not speaking here only about a crisis of representation as such, but also – and, perhaps, especially – of cultural processes, a collapses of collective imaginations and modes of experience of a world of which logovisual art is the symptom.

Logovisual experiments of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century stem from the avant-garde tradition in a multimedia environment which operates on words and images a technological reproduction and uses them to propagandist, advertisement, ideological or rhetorical ends. The visual poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century thus became a genre which not only appropriated subversively the verbal and pictorial constructs of the new multimedia environment, but which also questioned and opposed the relationship between word, image and meaning. In this way, it has been made into a critical, philosophical and conscious reflexion on language, a reflexion which was often autothematic. Piotr Rypson and Bohn both correlate (neo)avant-gardist tendencies in logovisual art with the crisis of sign as a modern phenomenon determined by the pressure from new media of word and image and the visual environment in which they come about (mechanical reproduction, posters, advertisement in the urban space, pop culture). The non-normative and heterogeneous intermedial forms resulting from experimentation at the threshold between word and image have this in common, notes Bohn on the basis of Geoffrey Cook’s conclusions, that “Every time, the evolution of that genre has accompanied the death of a cultural epoch and the birth of a new one.” [chaque fois [...] le développement de ce genre s’est accompagné de la mort d’une époque culturelle et de la naissance d’une autre].

In this perspective, I (1) will reflect on the reasons for which modernity is so intricately linked to the diffusion and popularity of logovisual genres and (2) will attempt to respond to the question regarding the specificity of Polish (centre-European) logovisuality compared with similar trends in Western Europe.

**Meghan Forbes** – *Dancing at the Margins: Míra Holzbachová on the North American Continent*

I propose to present ongoing research into the dancer, choreographer, and cultural worker Míra Holzbachová, whose illustrious and infamous long career across the Twentieth Century has largely omitted from the historical record in the decades since her death in 1982. Originally trained in modernist dance, such as at the Jacques-Dalcroze School at Hellerau, Holzbachová made her debut with Devětsil’s Liberated Theater in Prague. By the time of the Second World War, she was forced into exile in the United States due to her antifascist engagement at home and in Spain, when a six-month tour ended up lasting seven years. It is this period that I propose to discuss in the context of the MODERNITAS conference, for its connection to themes of migration and exile, and also highlights anticolonial activism by an actor working at many margins – as a woman, a communist, and a citizen of Czechoslovakia. While abroad, Holzbachová took on the stage name of “Mira Slavonica,” adapting a broadly Slavic identity and thereby marking herself as “Other” in the U.S. She danced for Eleanor Roosevelt, whom she admired, but nevertheless always maintained a fiercely critical stance towards North America’s homegrown version of imperialism and capitalism and immediately returned to Czechoslovakia at war’s end. Holzbachová devoted a portion of her U.S. stay to

studying with Indigenous communities and after her return to Prague, published a photographically-illustrated book with the title *Amerika země Indiánů* (America, Land of the Indians) in 1963. In this text, Holzbachová framed her wartime experience as herself a citizen of an occupied nation, forced to live in exile on likewise unceded land and she also gave a series of lectures on the topic. In Brussels, I would discuss her engagement with these issues as I argue that a serious account of Holzbachová's reflections offer an unprecedented perspective on indigeneity coming from Central Europe that adds an important point of reference for emerging conversations on Czechoslovak participation in colonial networks and embrace of scouting culture, and their odd connections to Modernism.

**Zuzana Říhová & Jakub Říha** – *The Margins of the War: Group 42, Jiří Kolář, and T. S. Eliot*

The presentation focuses on the relationship between war, everyday life, and modern art in the context of the Czech art group Skupina 42. It begins with Jindřich Chalupecký's reflection on the group's formation in 1942 during the difficult years of World War II and emphasizes their deliberate decision to temporarily postpone discussions about war and focus on art. Based on an archival turn and genetic criticism, I would like to present a detailed case study of Kolář's early poetry, including his first collection and later wartime texts, to reveal how censorship and the realities of war influenced stylistic choices and thematic content, often leading to veiled references to violence and conflict. The presentation extends to Kolář's translations of T. S. Eliot and a comprehensive genealogy of his texts, illustrating how the archival turn can reveal layers of intertextuality and contextual shifts.

**DAY 2**

**PANEL 5: SOVIET POLICY, INSTITUTIONS, AND CENSORSHIP**

**Georgii Korotkov** – *"Anarcho-Futurism" on the Periphery: The Chelyabinsk Journal Sdvig (1923) and the Repression of Provincial Modernism.*

This paper examines the short-lived literary journal *Sdvig* (Shift), published in Chelyabinsk in March 1923, as a case study of how avant-garde modernism was received, censored, and ultimately destroyed in Soviet semi-peripheral contexts. The journal's fate illuminates the complex dynamics between center and periphery, revealing how metropolitan aesthetic movements were mediated, transformed, and policed when they reached provincial Russia.

*Sdvig* emerged from "Chelita," a local literary association comprising young journalists—many fresh graduates of Moscow's Institute of Red Journalism, alongside non-party writers. The journal synthesized influences from futurism, Proletkult, imagism, and peasant poetry, attempting to bring cutting-edge literary experimentation to the Urals. However, local party officials condemned it as "anarcho-futurist," accusing it of antisemitism, vulgarity, and "petty-bourgeois superficiality." The scandal escalated to Moscow's Central Bureau of Press Workers, which ordered its closure. The entire print run was destroyed.

Drawing on newly discovered archival materials from the Chelyabinsk State Archive, this paper reconstructs the network of actors involved: local censors, Moscow institutions, young writers, and analyzes how "modernity" became a contested terrain between peripheral aspirations and centralized control. The case demonstrates how experimental forms deemed acceptable in metropolitan centers were read as politically dangerous in regional contexts, where officials lacked the "sophistication" to "digest" futurism.

*Sdvig*'s suppression had lasting consequences: literary life in Chelyabinsk "froze" until 1925. This paper argues that understanding such marginal modernist experiments and their repression is essential for reconstructing the full complexity of Soviet cultural geography beyond canonical narratives.

**Kamila Kociałkowska** – *The Poet and the Postal Censor: Ilia Zdanevich and the politics of zaum in Tbilisi*

In 1919, the Georgian poet Ilia Zdanevich published an updated edition of his play, *lanko krul albanskoi* (*lanko, King of Albanskoi*). The screenplay was one of the first books published under the 41<sup>o</sup> imprint, a Futurist group based in Tbilisi. A 1919 manifesto published by the group emphasises their commitment to exploiting “the power of nonsense.” Senselessness, incoherence, and incomprehensibility formed the basis of the creative programme. Accordingly, Zdanevich’s screenplay was written in a mostly unintelligible language, an evolved version of zaum.

Reading *lanko* is notoriously challenging: words are fractured into fragments and pasted back together as multi-lingual neologisms. To mediate any meaning from this textual chaos, the reader must be attuned to allusive references and equipped to decrypt coded messages. Mining for subtext in this way is a celebrated trait of many modernist texts, yet this paper presents an unusual precedent for reading zaum: postal censorship.

The practice of ‘perustration’ (intercepting, surveying, and redacting postal correspondence) had a long history in the Russian empire and was particularly concentrated in its peripheral regions. Tbilisi, because of Georgia’s prolonged battle for independence, became an especially concentrated site of secret policing practices. This paper explores the points of contact between policing, censorship, and modernist linguistic experiment. Through close, contextualist reading and an analysis of the practices of intelligence operations, I review *lanko* by situating it within the revolutionary readerscape from which it emerged. Zdanevich was writing in a period of political turmoil during which the linguistic genre of gibberish became criminalised and correlated with danger. This paper, then, argues against the critical consensus that zaum evokes a calculated childishness and demonstrates how authoritarian policing practices shaped the linguistic experiment of avant-garde groups who evolved under their surveillance.

**Elena Ostrovskaja** – *“An international organization led almost exclusively by Hungarians”:* *Hungarian and Polish writers at the head of the Literature of the world revolution*

The paper reconsiders a well-known episode in the institutional history of the Moscow-based multilingual group of journals *Literature of the world revolution* (1931-1932). Conceived as an organ of the MORP (International Union of Revolutionary writers, a literary subdivision of the Comintern), it was a successor to *The Messenger of Foreign Literature* (1928-1930) and meant to acquaint the Soviet reading audience with the foreign “revolutionary” literature and foreign audiences with the Soviet literature. The Moscow-based émigré authors prevailed in editorial boards of both journals, with the two editors of the LWR being a Polish writer Bruno Jasenski and a Hungarian author Béla Illés. The situation changed after the “cleansing” of 1932 (cf the criticism of another Hungarian author, Andor Gábor: “You cannot lead an international organization almost exclusively by Hungarians!”)

By focusing on the journal’s East-European editors and contributors, I attempt to reconsider the notions of literary centre and periphery in the journal’s history, problematizing the notion of the subcenter of World Literature (Casanova, Thomsen). I conceptualize a multilingual journal (or group of journals) within the theoretical framework of the contemporary periodical studies reading modernism through the lens of media and innovation (and thus going beyond the binary opposition of modernism and socialist realism towards the continuum of the literary practices of modernity (Ernst, Scheiding, von Hoff).

The analysis relies on close and distant reading of the journal: the share of East European authors in the publications, “emergence” (the immediate and further contest of the journal and its interference with the meaning of these works) (Drouin), literary biographies of the authors.

## PANEL 6: PERIODICALS, NETWORKS, AND CENTRE-PERIPHERY DYNAMICS

### **Elizaveta Berquin** - *Russian Émigré Periodicals in Belgium: Decentring the Canon through a Data-Driven Approach*

The 1917 Revolution triggered a massive refugee flow from the multinational and multiethnic Russian Empire that gave rise to a rich but unevenly studied cultural phenomenon, also known as "Russia Abroad." Canonical representations of Russian émigré culture were largely shaped around the notion of "centres of emigration," often focusing on major hubs such as Prague, Berlin, and Paris (Raeff, 1990). However, this narrative tends to overlook how these centres were constructed and leaves on the margins other "peripheral" spaces that are often regarded as lacking stable cultural production. Moreover, this approach rarely considers these centres in their dynamic development.

This paper proposes to reconceptualise Russian emigration as an interconnected network rather than a set of isolated centres, adopting a horizontal approach that challenges hierarchical centre-periphery models (Piotrowski, 2009). In doing so, it seeks to critically reassess the existing canon and rediscover Belgium's place within this narrative. Émigré periodicals, as spaces of cultural and intellectual exchange in exile, serve as the primary lens through which this dynamic is explored.

The paper operates on two levels: first, it offers a broader, more global perspective on the émigré periodical landscape of the interwar period, mapping their distribution across countries based on the statistical data of the time and data extracted from the *Encyclopaedia of the Russian Émigré Literature, 1918-1940: Periodics and Literary Centers* (Moscow, 2000). Second, it provides a closer case study of *Blagonamerenny* ("The Well-Intentioned"), a journal of "Russian literary culture" founded by Dmitry Shakhovskoy in Brussels in 1926, drawing as well on data extracted from the issues of the journal itself.

### **Kristina Pranjić** - *From Canons to Cartographies: Yugoslav and Adriatic Avant-Garde Networks*

This paper examines the Yugoslav avant-garde of the interwar period as a case of semi-peripheral artistic networks shaped by aesthetic transfers, international mobility, and mediating figures rather than by canonical hierarchies or linear narratives of artistic innovation. Drawing on approaches from horizontal art history and cultural transfer studies, the paper argues for a shift from canon-based models toward cartographic and relational modes of analysis.

Focusing on literary, visual, and intermedial practices, the paper revisits Yugoslav avant-garde movements such as Dadaism, Zenitism, Futurism, and Constructivism through the infrastructures that sustained them: periodicals, manifestoes, translation practices, correspondence networks, and performative events. Within culturally heterogeneous and multilingual contexts marked by uneven modernisation, Yugoslav avant-garde practices reworked avant-garde artistic forms through adaptation and critical appropriation.

In its second part, the paper introduces a methodological framework developed within the ongoing research project *Eco-Transversal Remapping of Northern Adriatic Avant-Gardes*. Extending the analysis beyond national and disciplinary boundaries, the project brings together archival research and digital humanities approaches, with particular attention to spatial visualization and interactive mapping. These methods are conceived as tools for tracing artists, collectives, and artworks, and for exploring ecological narratives across the Northern Adriatic region, understood as a bioregional and cultural space. By shifting the focus from canons to cartographies, the paper proposes digital, network, and spatial approaches understood as a response to the constraints of nationally limited models of art history. In border regions and East-Central Europe, where cultural production developed under conditions of shifting borders and linguistic plurality, cartographic and counter-cartographic perspectives allow for the reconstruction of transnational networks and shared narratives that are obscured by canonical frameworks.

**Christina Bezari** – *Transnational Modernity in Southern Europe: Rethinking the Center-Periphery Divide.*

This paper explores the concept of “transnational modernity” in a Southern European context and examines women’s contribution to modernist and avant-garde movements in the early twentieth century. To provide a better understanding of the influences they received and the channels they used to disseminate their work, this paper sheds light on the missing links between salon life and the printed press focusing on the collaborations, networks and dialogues that shaped women’s editorial agendas. How did the connection between the periodical and the salon come into being? What purpose did it serve? Why did women use their periodicals and salons as sites of modernity and how did they create opportunities for transnational dialogue? This paper seeks to answer these questions by proposing an alternative reading of European literary history that challenges the division between “innovative centers” and “imitative peripheries”. To do so, it builds on Magnus Qvistgaard’s critical reading of Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters* (1999), in which he challenges the idea that “small, ‘impoverished’, or ‘peripheral’ literatures” are lagging behind the centers of cultural production (2021: 46). Based on this critical reading, this paper proposes a new way of examining literary history by embracing a network-based model that casts a new light on modern women writers, journalists and translators in Southern Europe and beyond.

**Jeon Inhwa** – *Franco-Korean Authors as Mediators of a Diasporic and corporeal Modernity*

This paper examines Franco-Korean writers and artists as mediators of a diasporic and corporeal modernity that challenges canonical narratives of European modernity. Long confined to an orientalist imaginary shaped by images such as the “Hermit Kingdom” or the “Land of Morning Calm,” Korea emerges in contemporary Franco-Korean texts not as a passive object of representation, but as a critical site from which the fractures of modernity itself become visible. Focusing on Ook Chung’s *Kimchi* (2001), Jung’s *Couleur de peau :Miel* (2007-2013), and Eun-Ja Kang’s *L’Étrangère*(2013), this paper argues that Franco-Korean diasporic writings do not simply depict marginal identities; they reveal the instability underlying modern notions of origin, nation, linguistic unity, and coherent subjectivity.

Drawing on theories of cultural transfer (Michel Espagne and Michael Werner), postcolonial hybridity (Homi K. Bhabha), imagology, archival theory (Jacques Derrida), and diasporic lieux de mémoire (Pierre Nora), the paper explores how experiences of migration, adoption, linguistic displacement, and transnational circulation generate fragmented narrative forms that resist linear models of historical progress. Rather than presenting modernity as continuity and integration, these works foreground interruption, loss, and relational identity. Jung’s autobiographical graphic narrative reconstructs the impossibility of stable origins through fragmented archives and racialized embodiment; Chung’s transnational wandering destabilizes national frameworks through diasporic mobility and spatial fragmentation; Kang’s autobiographical narrative reveals how linguistic exile transforms the body itself, linking language to desire, exhaustion, sexuality, and memory.

The paper further argues that these works shift diaspora away from the sole register of cultural identity toward that of corporeality. Migration is not represented simply as geographical displacement, but as a material transformation of the subject. The diasporic body becomes a site where language, memory, race, and affect intersect. In this sense, Franco-Korean literature does not merely articulate an alternative modernity located at the margins of Europe; it exposes the hidden discontinuities and instabilities that have always structured modernity itself. Rather than peripheral exceptions, diasporic subjects emerge here as paradigmatic figures of the contemporary condition.

## PANEL 7: MATERIALITY, TECHNOLOGY AND SPACES

### **Veronika Soukupová** – *Weaving Modernity: Textile Artist and Journalist Jaroslava Vondráčková and Her Role in the Transnational Frameworks of Interwar Modernism in East-Central Europe*

The paper analyses weaving and writing as modes of artistic thinking, in which material processes, techniques, and forms of labour shaped the aesthetic and conceptual frameworks. Drawing on material-oriented analysis in dialogue with horizontal art history and micro-spatial history, it shifts attention away from centre-periphery models towards localised sites, everyday practices, and material conditions in the formation of modernity. Furthermore, it argues that weaving and textile art played a significant role as precursors of abstraction as an integral part of European interwar modernity. Despite her involvement in key interwar modernist institutions and networks, Jaroslava Vondráčková (1894–1986) has remained only fragmentarily represented in canonical accounts of European modernism. As a socially and politically engaged textile artist, theorist, journalist, and cultural mediator, she participated in the local modernist and avant-garde scene, and collaborated with institutions abroad, such as the Bauhaus. Her marginal position within modernist narratives thus cannot be explained by mere isolation, but rather reflects the structural marginalisation shared by textile art and semi-peripheral cultural contexts. Vondráčková's Prague-based textile atelier and weaving workshop (1929–1948), together with its local and transnational networks of collaboration, is analysed as a pivotal site of cultural transfer. Through the medium of textile production, together with its social implications, which she addressed extensively in her newspaper columns under the notion of the "new textiles", the avant-garde ideas were disseminated not only among elites but also permeated the homes of ordinary people. Taking Vondráčková's textile and textual production as a point of departure, the paper explores the marginal position of textile art and female journalism within modernist hierarchies, proposing it as a catalyst for rethinking modernity. By foregrounding textile materiality, modes of production, and their ideological implications, it challenges narratives that marginalise the applied arts and the contributions of female actors.

### **Matthew Rampley** – *Where was Czech(oslovak) modernism? Architectural Historiography and the Global Reach of Czechoslovak Architecture*

A recurrent feature of the historiography of modernism in central Europe is the dominance of methodological nationalism – reliance on the contemporary nation state as the frame of reference, and the assumption of the 'nation' as a unitary politico-cultural category. In the case of the Czech and Slovak Republics, this has meant the emergence of separate parallel historical narratives, as if the 75 years in which they were jointly part of a state had never taken place. This presentation is concerned with another notable lacuna in histories of modernism: their geographical limitation to the territories of the current Czech and Slovak states. An emerging body of research has highlighted the activities of Czech, Slovak and Czechoslovak architects abroad. Jan Letzel (1880–1925), Bedřich Feuerstein (1892–1936) and Antonín Raymond (1888–1976) were active in Japan, László Hudec (1893–1958) was one of the key builders of interwar Shanghai, while Stanislav Sůva (1912–87) pursued a successful career as a state architect in Iran in the 1930s. Individually, these and other figures have been discussed – although they remain somewhat marginal – but larger questions to do with their place in Czechoslovak architecture have not been examined. How should we view such individuals, who were often agents of colonial and imperial regimes? What does it tell us about conceptions of collective identity, when they are treated as exotic 'additions' rather than a central part of the story of Czechoslovak culture? How might they facilitate a more expansive conception of the cultural geography of the modernism of Central Europe? And how might they suggest, too,

a more critical appraisal of the dynamics of 'horizontal' art history when members of a supposedly 'peripheral' or 'semiperipheral' culture turn out not to have been so peripheral after all? The paper will explore these questions through consideration of those examples mentioned.

### **Patrick Laviolette** – *Car-go Cults and Devětsil Who Govern*

This presentation provides an overview of how Czechoslovak automotive manufacturers work as a prize 'export-industry' of marginal modernity. As a hybrid form of stately infrastructure for the branding of Central-Eastern European socialist values, it's clear that such a techno-industrial apparatus is not a singular thing, but a conglomerate of many pseudo-colonial subsidiaries. After WWI, from 1918 onward, the politicians of the new nation-state developed colonial visions that have lingered in many people's minds, despite being thwarted by several others. The discussion dealing with a desire for colonial expansion by socialist states is now rehearsed, with several authors addressing the wish to open up new markets for Czech-tech export industries. Some of the main topics have dealt with accessing resources for manufacturing certain products and acquiring land for migrant workers. Hence, this paper addresses the deliberate marketing and 'involuntary' promotion of the Czech car industry abroad. It looks at the lives of a few authors and photographers, as they assisted, were commissioned or had their own double-lives as adventurers/explorers, ethnologists, or colonial ambassadors (examples include Jiří Viktor Daneš, Josef Hotmar, Emil Příhoda; Věra Šťovíčková-Heroldová).

Their biographies provide interesting case studies because their lives parallel that of other explorers of their generation and yet transgresses some of the more sensationalistic features associated with the Devětsil group's avant-gardist influence on the marketing of Czechoslovak journeys abroad (the name translates as 'nine forces/powers'). The tension that this paper thus explores is Czechoslovakia's centrality in the technological developments of global modernity and yet the alleged marginal position of such artists, scientists and industrialists in decolonial/postcolonial discussions.