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Czech Cubism in the Marketplace of Symbolic Goods

So-called Czech Cubism is one of the most attractive topics in the historiography of Central European architecture, but few scholars have asked themselves what is truly Cubist in Czech 'Cubist' architecture. Although the ideological basis of this phenomenon lies in German, psychologically oriented art theory, the wider professional community perceives it as a response to concurrent events in French art. This paper analyses the notion of Czech architectural 'Cubism', shows its genesis, and explains the function of this label. The term 'Cubism' began to be used in Czech critical discourse as a classification concept for architectural works only after the form of modernity advocated by Emil Filla and Vincenc Kramář became canonical in the competitive struggle for a monopoly on artistic recognition. The term 'Cubism' expressed the orientation of Czech modernism towards Paris, which in Filla's and Kramář's conception represented the only legitimate centre of development. The chosen label neutralised the controversial, anti-rationalist, or even anti-modernist aspects of Pavel Janák's group's programme, as well as its origins in German theory. The autonomous and original artistic phenomenon that emerged from rich transcultural encounters and interchanges was thus subordinated to the model of vertical art history and degraded to a product of diffusion – i.e., the reception of French art.

Keywords: Modern architecture, Cubism, Expressionism, German art theory, circulation, interchange, classification concepts

In his 1940 book *Nová česká architektura a její vývoj ve dvacátém století* [New Czech Architecture and Its Development in the Twentieth Century], which could be termed the first (and for many years the only) systematic attempt at a historical interpretation of Czech modern architecture, Jan Evangelista Koula investigated, among other issues, the phenomenon known as architectural Cubism. Part of his interpretation was the apodictic statement that 'Czech architectural Cubism was aesthetically birthed from Cubism in painting and sculpture'.¹ At almost

¹ Koula (1940): 31.

the same time, another book appeared in the USA, Sigfried Giedion's renowned *Space, Time and Architecture*, an essential work concretising the historiography of the modernist movement. Giedion here also addressed the connections between painted Cubism and architecture. His frequently cited comparison between Picasso's painting *L'Arlesienne* from 1912 and the workshop wing of Gropius's Bauhaus in Dessau from 1925–1926 intended to prove that the interpenetration of exterior and interior space in modern architecture corresponds with the simultaneous presentation of outside and inside in Cubist painting, and hence both painting and architecture express the same modernist sense of space and time.² It is common knowledge that Giedion's conviction of a direct historical link between Cubism and modern architecture based on 'transparency' and 'simultaneity' was rejected by later architectural historians as unjustified, arising from superficial morphological or even invented similarities: 'There exists not the slightest similarity between Picasso's fluctuating planes and Gropius's open wall', is the summary of the debate's outcome by Yve-Alain Bois.³ It could be expected that comparable critical attention could be directed, at least on a local scale, to the assertion by the Czech author Koula. If Giedion's thoroughly worked conception was dismissed as a 'cliché', what treatment would await Koula's thesis, issued without any supporting historical or theoretical arguments?

In the history of Czech architecture, we can find few phenomena to have enjoyed such extensive research attention as the one now under discussion. During its period of greatest interest shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain (i.e., the years 1991–1993), a total of ten exhibitions were held in prestigious European and American museums on Czech Cubist art.⁴ Yet the question of what is truly Cubist in Czech 'Cubist' architecture was only voiced by a few researchers. Though Rostislav Švácha, Ákos Moravánszky, and Alena Janatková each undertook thorough investigations of the

² Giedion (1946): 402–403.

³ Bois, 'Cubistic, Cubic, and Cubist', in Blau and Troy (1997): 191. See also Blau and Troy (1997): 1–16; Colomina, 'Where Are We?', in Blau and Troy (1997): 141–166.

⁴ Žantovská Murray, 'The Burden of Cubism, The French Imprint on Czech Architecture', in Blau and Troy (1997): 41.

intellectual starting points and aims of the Czech ‘Cubists’,⁵ in the public awareness and unfortunately in much historical writing as well there persists an explanation of their work as a reaction to the latest events in French artistic culture. The present paper cannot avoid clashing with these established interpretations, yet does not wish to repeat the conclusions of the mentioned colleagues. Its chief aim is to investigate the idea of a Czech architectural ‘Cubism’, to describe its genesis, and to uncover the function of this label. And it will search for the reasons why this designation took root in historic interpretations and why it remains active.

The phenomenon known as Czech architectural Cubism was brought into the world by four young architects – Josef Gočár, Vlastislav Hofman, Josef Chochol, and Pavel Janák. Except for Gočár, who had studied with Jan Kotěra at the School of Applied Arts, they had all undergone their training at the notably conservative Prague Technical University, though Janák and Chochol had supplemented their education with studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna under Otto Wagner. They met as members of the Mánes Artists’ Association, which they (along with another eleven artists of the younger generation) left in 1911 to form, in the same year, the Group of Fine Artists (*Skupina umělců výtvarných*) and the journal *Umělecký měsíčník* [Artistic Monthly]. The most significant ‘Cubist’ works of the four appeared in the years 1912 and 1913. Their forms reject the orthogonal structural system of classical architecture and instead use slanting lines or crystalline formations in the aim of achieving a dramatic expression. As if evoking the tradition of the Gothic, they worked towards the dematerialisation of the building, stressing the expressive force of the structural framing. Understandably, the few architectural realisations of the Group from this brief period before the outbreak of the First World War also display many diverging traits that ensued from differences of temperament, professional training, or theoretical standpoints, among them a far from uniform stance towards artistic tradition. These

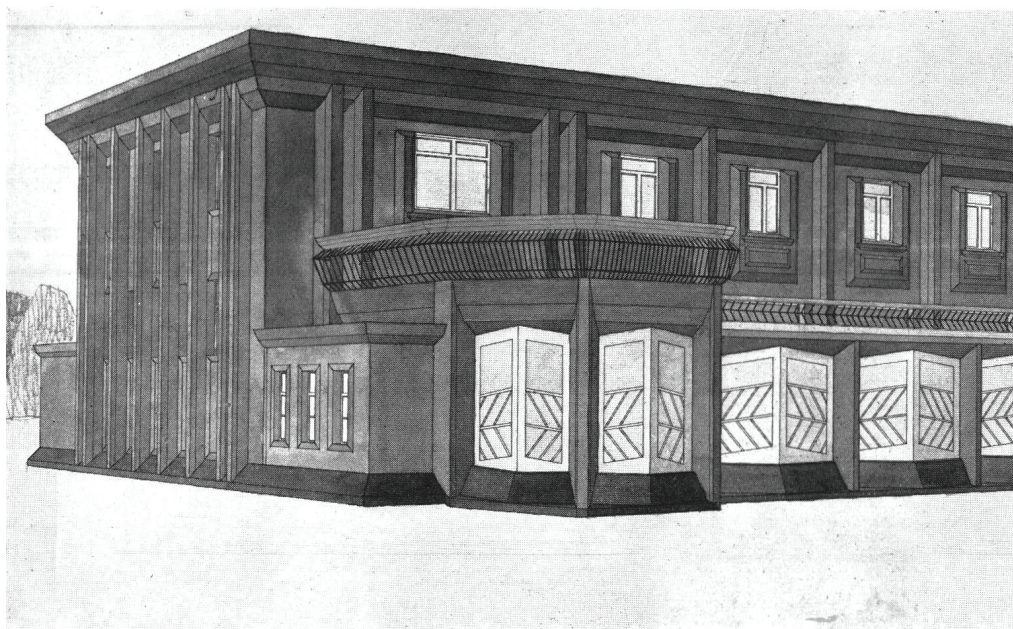
⁵ Note esp. Švácha, ‘Kubistické teorie architektury’, in Švestka and Vlček (1991): 202–211; Janatková (2000); Moravánszky, ‘Die Befreiung der Form aus der Materie: Architektur und Theorie des Prager Kubismus’, in Valena and Winko (2006): 25–38.



229. PICASSO, "L'Arlésienne," 1911-12. Oil. "In the head may be seen the cubist device of simultaneity — showing two aspects of a single object at the same time, in this case the profile and the full face. The transparency of overlapping planes is also characteristic" (Catalogue of the Picasso Exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1939, p. 77).



230. WALTER GROPIUS, The Bauhaus, Dessau, 1926. *Corner of the workshop wing. In this case it is the interior and the exterior of a building which are presented simultaneously. The extensive transparent areas, by dematerializing the corners, permit the hovering relations of planes and the kind of "overlapping" which appears in contemporary painting.*

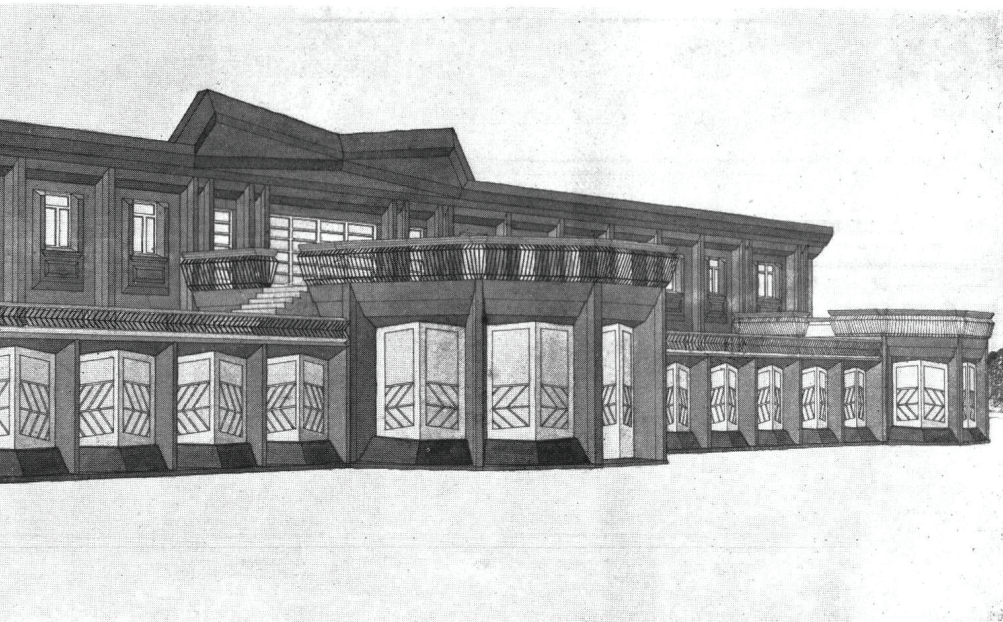


2. Josef Gočár, design for the Spa House of the town Bohdaneč, 1912–1913.
Der Architekt 19 (1913)

standpoints were voiced by the Group's members, with the exception of Gočár, in many published and unpublished reflections.⁶

As even Koula must have been aware, the works of these four architects were, in large part, responses to the situation in which modern architecture in Central Europe found itself at the start of the second decade of the new century. The rationalist model of Otto Wagner, which gave exclusive priority to function and essentially denied architecture any character of artistic creativity, had lost its previous conviction and was subjected to critiques from a wide range of positions. The dimensions of the problem were captured quite well in a 1912 lecture by art historian Max Dvořák, wherein he noted that the new forms, while effective in profane structures, cannot be used for tasks exceeding the bounds of this sphere.

⁶ An exhaustive overview of previous titles is given in Švácha (2000).

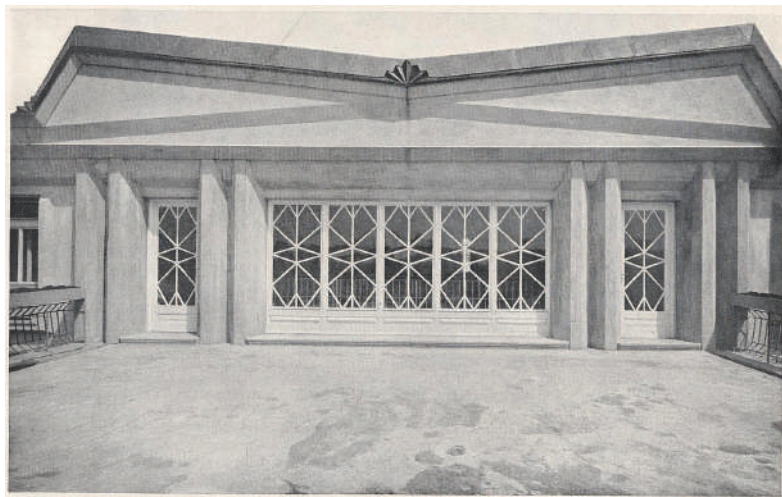


For Dvořák, the most crucial demand of the age was a new monumental style, which demanded for its creation not merely the offering of new functions, constructions, or materials, but instead decisive factors of an artistic character. From this standpoint, Wagner's oeuvre did not represent a truly new architecture, but 'merely the overture to it'.⁷ Similar convictions were held at the time by a broad spectrum of rationally minded architects: for example, Hermann Muthesius, who was one of the first modernists to realise that an orientation toward utilitarian essentials and material qualities would not suffice for the creation of a new modern culture, and strove in his address to the congress of the Deutscher Werkbund of 1911 to rehabilitate an autonomous will toward form.⁸

Pavel Janák, as the motivating force of the Czech Cubist group, set out his own views in the oft-cited article, 'Od moderní architektury k architektuře' [From Modern Architecture to Architecture] from 1910. He criticised the limitations of Wagner's intellectual world, dominated by

⁷ Dvořák (1997): 9–21.

⁸ Roth (2001).



3. Josef Gočár, Spa House of the town *Bobdaneč*, 1912–1913, detail of the front facade. *Kunstgewerbeblatt* 24 (1912–1913)

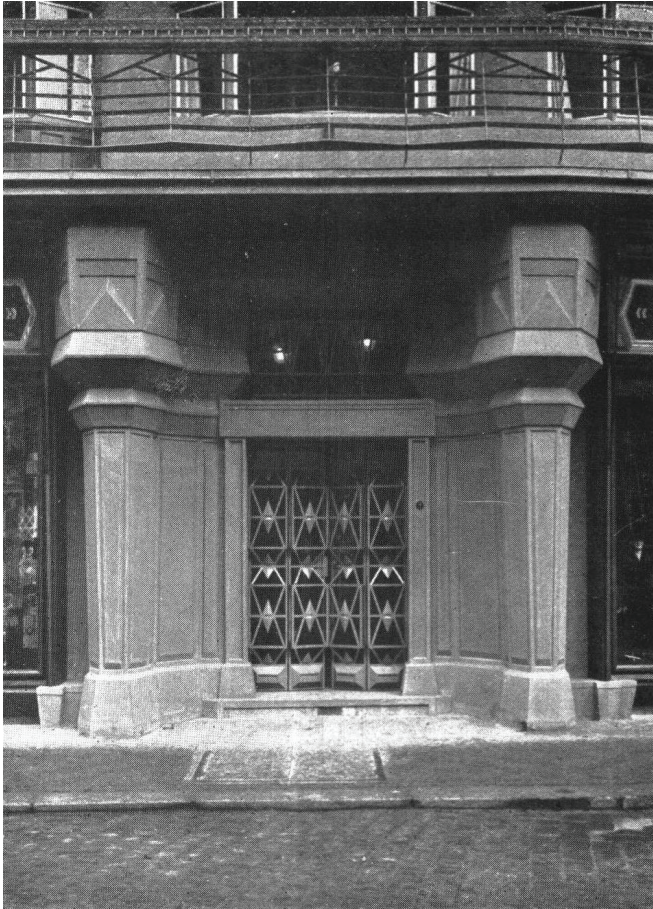
material conditions with artistic form degraded to the simple application of ornament. ‘Modern architecture has known until now [...] only the problems of the practical solution of needs yet had almost no awareness of the problem of space, the problem of mass and form’, concluded Janák. Function, new materials, new construction should, in his view, be subordinated in the future to sculptural artistic form as the ‘construction of psychologically active and acting lines, surfaces, and physical details, which in their relations, actions, and reactions become the speakers for the idea to which they were built.’⁹ In his 1912 article ‘Hranol a pyramida’ [‘The Prism and the Pyramid’], Janák demanded, in place of reduced volumes and smooths façades, dramatic action on the frontal surface, where slanting lines and crystalline formations act as symptoms of the spiritual charge brought into matter. ‘A reflective and sensitive spirit

⁹ Janák (1909–1910): 105–109.



4. Josef Gočár, The House of the Black Madonna in Prague, 1912.
Umělecký měsíčník 2 (1912–1913)

yearns, essentially, for the revitalisation or exaltation of matter to match its imagination, clashes against the materiality of dead matter as the force emerging within it, and comes to terms with it by slicing off the corners, the edges; entering into the depth of matter wherever it does not recognise or sympathise with said matter', he stated. While the prism,



5. Josef Gočár, The House of the Black Madonna in Prague, 1912,
detail of the portal. *Umělecký měsíčník* 2 (1912–1913)

subjected to the laws of physical strain, implied for him the product of matter's purely practical treatment, the pyramid was the 'culminating shape of matter spiritually abstracted'.¹⁰

¹⁰ Janák (1911–1912): 162–170.

Janák, in these programmatic texts, laid emphasis on the theoretical dimension of the new architecture, in other words the component that Wagner neglected. From psychologically oriented German aesthetics, he took the requirement for the spiritualisation of architecture and the sovereignty of artistic form. In place of the regard toward materially conceived functionality, he stressed the difficult-to-grasp values of the spiritual environment, national character, and qualities of the Slavonic peoples. And the tool for this spiritual charge in matter, as well as the bearer of abstract stylistic tendencies, was for him crystalline spatial composition. The intellectual pillars of Janák's theories are indicated in the writings of the previously mentioned architectural historians: primarily deserving of mention are Adolf Hildebrandt and his theory of relief, Theodor Lipps and his theory of empathy, Wilhelm Worringer with his antithesis of a southern Classical-organic and a northern Gothic-crystalline art, and Alois Riegl with the alternation of the haptic and optic principles. The list could continue with the names of Heinrich Wölfflin, August Schmarsow, and others.¹¹

What role in the development of 'Cubist' architecture was held by the paintings of Picasso and Braque? Even if it may have been a poorly understood or even subconsciously reflected influence, can we completely exclude its having had any effect? Janák, in a later interview with art historian Zdeněk Wirth, admitted that at the time he was formulating his programme, he had only the vaguest sense of current trends in French painting: 'As for France, though its artistic activities were so closely followed here, we knew almost nothing.'¹² How little interest Janák took in Picasso's work is shown in his diaries from these years, which contain only one mention of the painter, and a notably critical one at that.¹³ And furthermore, it can be asserted that precisely for Janák, any painterly influence could hardly be seen as decisive, since he put such forceful emphasis on the autonomy of architectural creation

¹¹ See note 5.

¹² Interview, *Prager Presse* (1st April 1931): 4. Reprinted in Janák (2009): 177.

¹³ Žantovská Murray, 'The Burden of Cubism, The French Imprint on Czech Architecture' (note 4), in Blau and Troy (1997): 50.

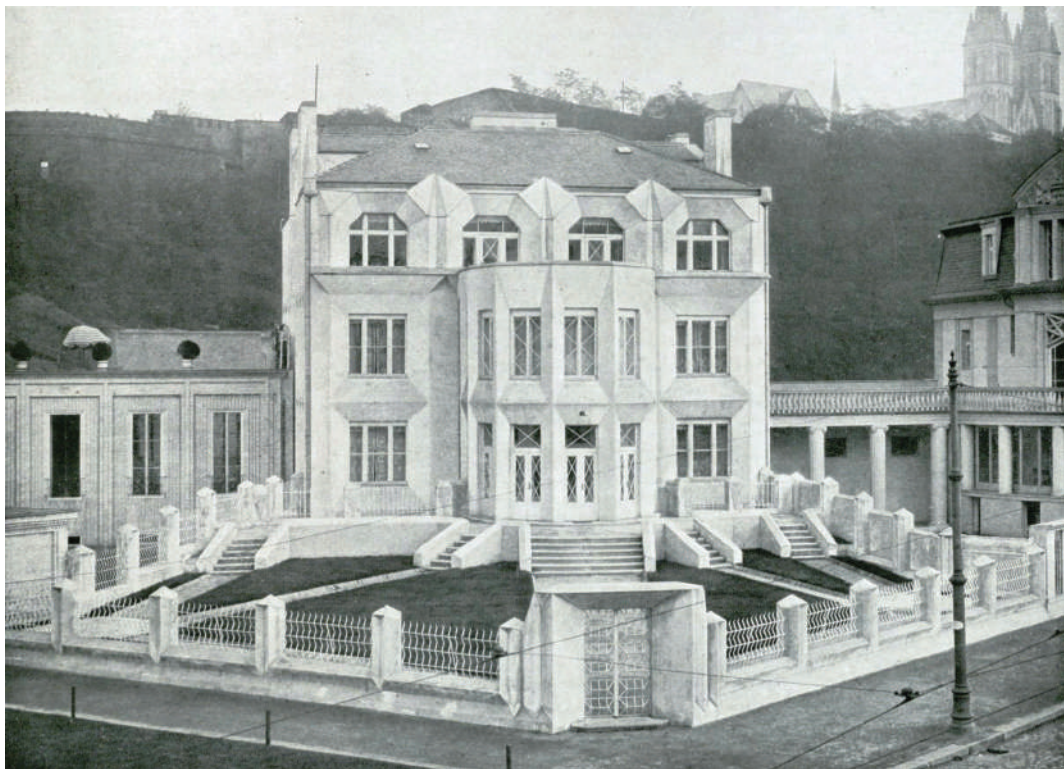


6. Josef Chochol, triple-house under the Vyšehrad in Prague, 1912–1913. *Volné směry* 18 (1915)

and the specific nature of its means and ends. In his 1911 article, ‘Proti náladě v architektuře’ [Against Emotion in Architecture], he vehemently refused the contamination of architecture with ‘unarchitectonic thought’ and reiterated as an underlying truth ‘that architecture is a question of matter, space, and their artistic laws.’¹⁴ The same position was also defended by Janák in a lecture from 1920: ‘the actual world of architecture is the purely plastic manifestation.’¹⁵ An even more energetic refusal of the connection between architectural work and the analytic methods of Cubist painting came from Vlastislav Hofman and Josef

¹⁴ Janák (1911–1912): 78–80 and 105–107. Cited in Janák (2009): 53.

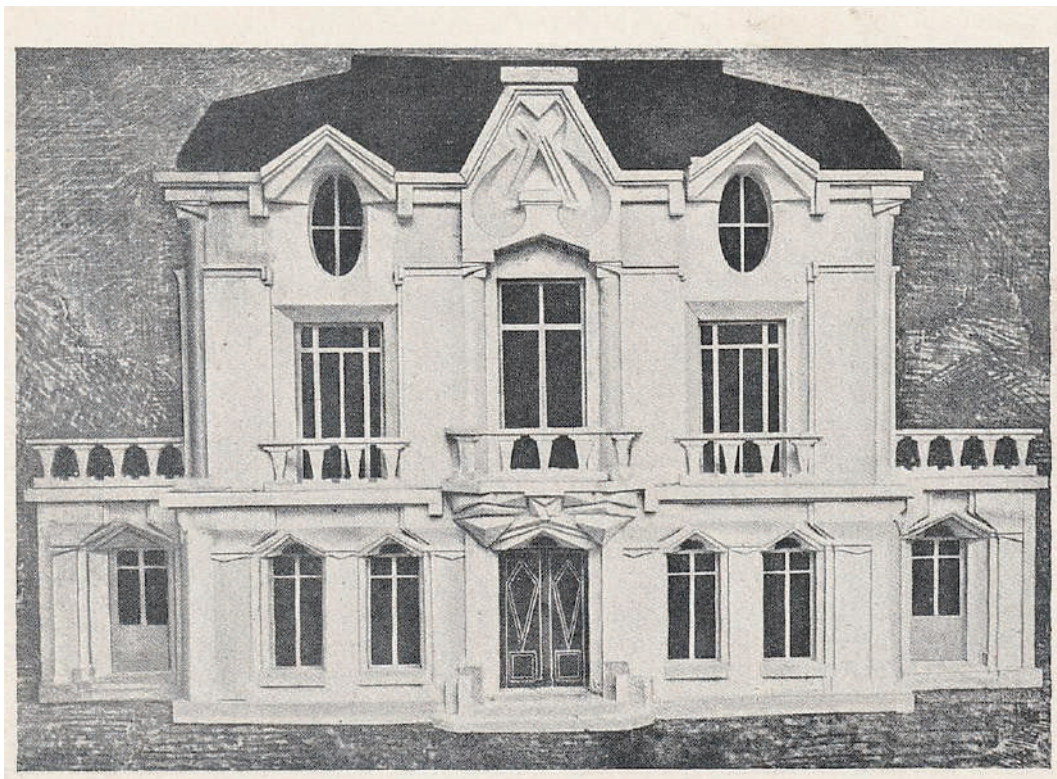
¹⁵ Janák, ‘O moderní architektuře’, unpublished lecture from 1920 in Janák (2009): 124.



7. Josef Chochol, Bedřich Kovařovič's House in Prague, 1912–1913. *Volné směry* 18 (1915)

Chochol. The first of them voiced his doubts in a critical mention of the *Maison Cubiste* by Raymond Duchamp-Villon: 'It is, of course, a question whether the possibilities and means of painting could be the only true source [for new architecture]', wrote Hofman. If architecture might be assuming 'the taste for formal sensibility merely from paintings and using it exclusively for surfaces, it would no longer meet its original and ultimate task: creating a new conceptual stance, a new grasping of the principles of space and a new conception in the reproduction of shaped matter in its affiliated possibilities and capabilities.'¹⁶

¹⁶ Hofman, 'K podstatě architektury' (1913): 53–56.



8. Raymond Duchamp-Villon, La Maison Cubiste, 1912. *Kunstgewerbeblatt* 24 (1912–1913)

Though these statements might well seem to reinforce our thesis, we nonetheless cannot entirely cast aside any links between Czech architecture and French painting, being prevented in this aim by the striking incoherences in the opinions of the Czech architects. Indeed, in his 1912 article 'O nábytku a jiném' [On Furniture and Other Matters], Janák assigns the crucial role to the revolution in painting, insisting that the underlying impulse 'that jointly instigates all the arts [...] is most visibly and most fully manifested in painting'.¹⁷ Likewise, in his recapitulation of activity before the start of the First World War, he

¹⁷ Janák (1912–1913): 21–29.

mentions that the architects of this era addressed the same problems as their colleagues in painting: 'It was the first time in the history of modern architecture that architecture sensed, along with painting and sculpture, the validity of the exact same artistic laws'.¹⁸ Yet as for what vital links held together the trajectories of both disciplines, Janák formulated them only very generally, more with an eye to timeless values than immediate ones. The chief ambition of modern architects, in his view, was to 'make a new architecture, yet one that would be as good as the architecture of the ancient orders, a desire that, classically stated, was that of Cézanne in painting'.¹⁹ The chronological primacy of the painted experiments was also noted in connection with Czech architectural Cubism by Viktor Wallerstein, author of a review in the German journal *Kunstgewerbeblatt*: 'In painting, the turning point has already arrived. To us now, it seems to reach farther than ever before, and we should not be surprised if the revolution in painting has now extended as well to the adjoining fields of architecture or the applied arts'.²⁰ The German critic was more specific in his reflections than Janák and clearly described in his article how painting had served as an example for architecture: 'much as, in the most recent painting, no surface can remain quietly standing and acting and everything is divided in a certain rhythm into triangles, rhomboids, or angles, so here as well the surfaces are regarded analogously and in harmony with the material so that they become artistically enriched with plasticity and form barriers to the light falling upon them'.²¹ Wallerstein's characterisation of the means of painting could be extended not only to the works of analytical Cubism but with equal justification to the work of the German painters exhibiting alongside the Czech ones in the Berlin gallery *Der Sturm*. This interpretation is furthered by Wallerstein when he names as the precursors to the Prague architects such figures as Hermann Obrist, Bernhard Pankok, and August Endell. A third authority to be cited here is the Czech art historian and theorist Václav Vilém Štech, who

¹⁸ Janák (2009): 115–126.

¹⁹ Janák (2009): 115–126.

²⁰ Wallerstein (1913): 222.

²¹ Wallerstein (1913): 226.

also considered the existence of parallel tendencies in the era's painting and architecture: 'concurrently with painting, where there transpired a new conception of space on the surface through the movement of axes, the change of viewing points, the two-dimensional representation of depth relations, there also changed in architecture the factual movement of matter on a slanting plane into a movement now mental, forced to the surface.'²² It is telling, however, that it was Štech himself, though with reservations and in an earlier text, who had chosen for the new phenomenon in Czech architecture the term 'Expressionism'.²³

Janák himself spoke of his work or that of his associates from the Group of Fine Artists as a 'new art', invoking Cubism rarely and only negatively. As far as I can tell, he first applied the term 'Cubism' to his architecture only in a lecture from 1940.²⁴ It was with similar reserve that, initially, the term was also used by Janák's friends from the Group. It is no secret that in 1913, Vincenc Kramář, the leading theorist of Czech modern art, hesitated to characterise even Picasso as a Cubist.²⁵ Behind the hesitance lay the passionate debates underway in this era over the true meaning of the concept, erupting after the publication of the book *Du Cubisme* by Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger. The Parisian dispute over 'true or false Cubism' spread to the Czech lands, where the efforts of these authors to systematise the approaches of Braque and Picasso were seen as an attempt at the illegitimate appropriation and imitative weakening of another's programme. Such reification of the idea of 'Cubism' seemed to embody precisely the academicisation and neutralisation of avant-garde methods, and for the Czech observers it seemed more the malicious labelling of an opponent (*Feindbegriff*).²⁶ At the same time, the acceptance of this designation or any other was hindered by the proud individualism of the Czech artists, who could identify 'with the Cubism of the crowd'

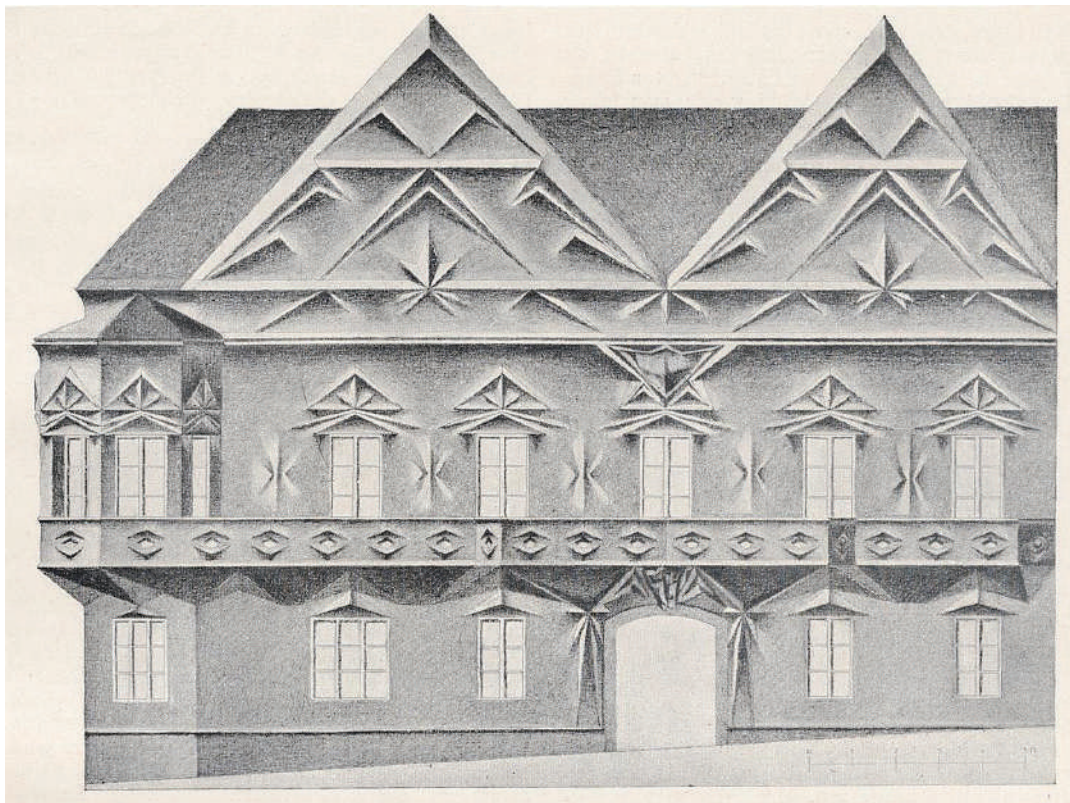
²² Štech (1921): 201.

²³ Štech (1921): 187.

²⁴ Janák, 'Čtyřicet let nové architektury za námi – pohled zpět', *Architektura ČSR* 2 (1940): 129–130, cited in Janák (2009): 209.

²⁵ Kramář (1912–1913): 121, cited in Lahoda (1996): 13.

²⁶ Kramář (1912–1913): 114–121; Koselleck (2006): 274–284.



9. Pavel Janák, design for the Town Hall in Havlíčkův Brod, 1912.

Kunstgewerbeblatt 24 (1912–1913)

with as much difficulty as with any other –ism.²⁷ ‘Such labels are always welcomed only by feeble personalities as a sign of allegiance, of pride and unrecognition, transforming them into the banner under which they rush forth to conquer the world’, is how this stance was expressed by painter Vincenc Beneš.²⁸ And when the same observer discussed the

²⁷ Janák (1913–1914): 5–6, cited in Janák (2009): 87.

²⁸ Beneš (1912–1913): 326–331. Cited in Padrta (1992): 170.

architectural designs of Vlastislav Hofman as 'Cubist', he noted that the choice of the expression was merely to indicate forms that were 'confining and reductive'.²⁹

It was as a neutral classification term in the current sense that the expression 'Cubism' began to be used in the Czech context for architectural works only much later. In 1930, Zdeněk Wirth in his brief study of Josef Gočár mentioned his 'Cubistic episode', arguing that the architect's aim had been 'to let himself be guided by the same artistic laws as the painting and sculpture of the given period'.³⁰ In the same year, Karel Teige published his survey *Moderní architektura v Československu* [Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia], in which he devoted an entire chapter to architectural 'Cubism'. As the spokesman for the Czech avant-garde known for his identification of architecture with science, he could of course offer no judgement beyond terming it a romantic deviation. Nonetheless, the same text presents highly informed references to the intellectual roots of the phenomenon in German aesthetics and its links to Dutch and German Expressionism, along with a certain reserved praise for its originality and chronological priority over the cited parallel efforts. All the same, Teige inserted into his argument at several points the assertion, never justified and not entirely compatible with his other insights, that 'the aesthetic of Cubist architecture is derived from Cubist painting'.³¹ It seems that his motives in doing so had a single goal – to use the affiliation between painting and building that he himself had drawn with the cunning of an inquisitor simply to prove the 'absurd misconception of the essence of Cubism' by the Cubist architects. As he argued, 'the aesthetic misunderstanding of this architecture, in essence the failure to grasp the underlying principles of Cubism, consists in how it took from Cubism only the superficial formulae, that the slanting-shaped rhythm of various second-rate late-Cubist, sometimes even Futurist, kinetic, or non-structural paintings was taken as a point of

²⁹ Beneš (1912–1913): 326–331. Cited in Padrta (1992): 171.

³⁰ Wirth (1930): viii.

³¹ Teige (1930): 94.

formal departure'.³² Echoes of Teige's ideas can also be seen in the book by Jan E. Koula cited at the start of the present text.

Starting in the 1960s, when Stalinist ideological taboos retreated and the avant-garde began to find its place in Czech art history, a significant portion of researchers took the link between the architectural works from the circle of Janák and Gočár and Cubist painting as proven, and the term 'Czech architectural Cubism' as relevant to describe the phenomenon.³³ Yet there has also been no shortage of sceptics who have adhered to a somewhat pedantic position in this discourse – assuming the definition of Cubist principles in painting and confronting the architectural forms with them. For example, the Czech-British author Dalibor Veselý compared the 'articulation and structure of non-perspectival space' from Cubist painting and the approaches of Czech architects, to reach the firm conclusion that the Czech architecture known as Cubist is linked to the paintings of Picasso and Braque only by a thoroughly superficial resemblance.³⁴ Defenders of the established terminology, in turn, are now forced to make far more sophisticated interpretive achievements, since the legitimation of the earlier term now requires expansion of the usual definition and reinterpretation of Cubist principles. As such, Marie Benešová already in her 1966 study, argued in an indirect rebuttal to Teige that, similarly to architecture, 'the aim of Cubism in painting was not geometrization, but the creation of a painting as pure artistic emotion'.³⁵ It is hard to imagine a broader and vaguer definition. Thirty years later, Irena Žantovská Murray found the common denominator of Cubist painting and architecture in the formal strategy of 'superimposition' ['překrývání'] mentioned by Janák in his diaries. For her, 'the use of superimposition by the Czech cubist architects illustrates perfectly the process of appropriation and transformation of a

³² Teige (1930): 92.

³³ For example, even Wolf Tegethoff's judgment on the Prague movement stated that 'its roots lay in Paris and in Cubist painting, from which it also took its name' (Tegethoff, 'Kubismus zwischen Paris und Prag. Eine Einführung,' in Hölz and Kolber [1994]: 11).

³⁴ Veselý (2005): 586–604.

³⁵ Benešová (1966): 171.

concept derived from French painting'.³⁶ Yet in much the same way, this argument itself turns out to be highly unstable – Janák's text published in *Umělecký měsíčník* clearly confirms that the Czech architect studied the possibility of 'superimposition' in greatest detail from the example of Herman Obrist.³⁷ In the effort to keep the established designation while avoiding contradiction with empirical findings, interpreters of the phenomenon have been confronted with unusually difficult tests of expressing themselves diplomatically. For example, Rostislav Švácha, whom we have to thank for the foundational study of the architectonic thought of Janák's circle under the cautiously formulated title *The Pyramid, the Prism, and the Arc*, does set out a qualified assertion that 'the assumption of Picasso's methods, let alone a simple imitation of the forms of Picasso's paintings, is however very likely not how Cubist architecture emerged'. At the same time, he asserts that 'the Parisian orientation of Prague's Cubist architecture is of course indisputable'. His answer to the question about the concrete impact of this orientation does not, in any way, seem self-evident: for Švácha, the 'example of Picasso's and Braque's Cubism helped with a thorough purification of an already existing style'.³⁸ One compromise solution was provided by Jiří Padrta and Miroslav Lamač with the term 'kuboexpressionismus' [cuboexpressionism], which they saw as connecting 'the organically idealistic intellectual and emotional charge of Expressionism with the Cubist conceptually reflective view of form'.³⁹

It is not my intention to pin a new label at all costs on this Czech 'family heritage', in the same way as it is not my wish to revise the concepts of the 'Gothic', 'Baroque', 'Mannerist', etc. From a seasoned member

³⁶ Žantovská Murray, 'The Burden of Cubism, The French Imprint on Czech Architecture' (note 4), in Blau and Troy (1997): 49.

³⁷ Janák (1912–1913): 253.

³⁸ Švácha (2000): 31, 32, 43. In the catalogue for the exhibit on Vlastislav Hofman from 2004, Švácha explicitly states that 'the method by which the illusion of three-dimensionality was achieved by Picasso on a two-dimensional canvas' played in the development of Prague's Cubist architecture 'only a marginal role.' (Švácha, 'Architekt Hofman v průsečíku míst a doby,' in Nešlehová [2004]: 53).

³⁹ Padrta (1992): 43–46, 215–221.

of the art-historical community, knowing that all its terms are ‘empty, illogical, and unsystematic’, to cite Friedrich Moebius,⁴⁰ one could hardly expect something of this kind. As I already indicated in the introduction, I am only attempting to answer the question of why the term ‘Cubism’ caught on the Czech context for this architectural phenomenon, and why it is still in use. The reasons should be sought in the areas addressed by the sociology of art. As we already know from Pierre Bourdieu, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries the artistic world functioned as a field of conflict, dominated by efforts to gain a monopoly for artistic recognition: the ‘permanent struggles between possessors of specific capital and those who are still deprived of it constitute the motor of an incessant transformation of the supply of symbolic products’.⁴¹ The competitive struggle focused on who had the right to be called a modern artist, who ‘meant something’ for his era, what form of modernity is correct, canonical, and which path by contrast represents a heresy. Even the rivalries with the avant-gardes form a struggle for survival, where the victors enter history and become ‘classics’ while the defeated are issued the mark of the ‘outdated’ or ‘surpassed’, and with it, exclusion from history. Bourdieu perceived such a logic of permanent revolution as an operational law of the artistic field – or in other words, the animating force of art history.⁴²

Proof for these interpretations of the competitive struggle in the field of artistic production are offered on Bourdieu’s part largely via examples from literary history, such as the gains by symbolism at the expense of naturalism or the subsequent disputes between the Symbolists and the Decadents. Yet equally apt illustrations could also be the clashes between the Cubists of Montmartre (Picasso, Braque) and those of Montparnasse (Gleizes, Metzinger), or the currents in Czech art after 1910. In the latter case, the first manifestations of rivalry appeared between the established artists’ group Mánes and the younger Group of Fine Artists, followed by new tensions from within the Group itself. The protagonist of this

⁴⁰ Moebius, ‘Stil als Kategorie der Kunsthistoriographie’, in Weissert (2009): 126.

⁴¹ Bourdieu (1995): 127.

⁴² Bourdieu (1995): 216, 254.

activity was Emil Filla (1882–1953), a greatly talented and intellectually-minded artist, the central figure of Czech Cubism. In 1911, he was the main initiator of the founding of the Group of Fine Artists, and it was through his efforts that its members adhered to the orthodoxy of Picasso and Braque. Filla resolutely placed himself at the forefront of the efforts to bring Czech art out of its provincial isolation and viewed the Cubist aesthetic as a direct moral imperative.⁴³ And yet, since he managed to link to this programme his hardly modest personal ambitions, his generational cohort accused him of using the collective initiatives to his own benefit – winning both symbolic capital and economic profit. ‘Filla is basically too much of a politician, a wheeler-dealer: he incessantly wished to keep the prestige of leader and incessantly forced himself to the front, and won from it material gain’, is how painter Václav Špála characterised his colleague.⁴⁴ ‘It’s almost too audacious, how he takes everyone only as material for his imperialism and it can be felt that he will seek to remove anyone who stands in his way and be even a little dangerous to him’.⁴⁵ According to statements from his contemporaries, Filla’s first goal in the struggle to win monopolistic power for the Group of Fine Artists was to break apart Mánes, in which aim he was willing to strengthen his position even with the assistance of institutions of state power. During the course of 1912, in turn, a dispute arose within the ranks of the Group on the ‘right’ and the ‘wrong’ Cubism, spurred by Filla’s power-hungry pressures against those holding views different from his own. His opponents, who included alongside Špála and Hofmann such figures as the brothers Josef and Karel Čapek, or architect Josef Chochol, rejected Filla’s authoritarian injunctions and doctrinaire adherence to Picasso’s example. ‘We only opened a branch office of Picasso’s individuality’, was how Hofman expressed his critical objections to Filla and his aligned painters.⁴⁶ In place

⁴³ Lahoda (1996): 103. Cited in Lahoda (2007): 149–151.

⁴⁴ Letter from Václav Špála to Vlastislav Hofman dated 25th May 1911. Cited in Lahoda (1992): 54.

⁴⁵ Letter from Václav Špála to Josef Čapek from summer 1912, cited in Lahoda (1992): 58.

⁴⁶ Hofman, ‘Výstava Skupiny výtvarných umělců’, *Přehled* 12 (1913–1914): 565–568, cited in Padrta (1992): 172.

of this, the latter group hoped to cultivate a different, pluralistic version of modern art open to a wide range of tendencies. When the divergence of opinion grew into open antagonism, seven members of the opposition left the Group at the end of 1912.

Even though Filla was personally able to reflect on his own efforts, assume theoretical standpoints, and argue trenchantly with intellectual opponents, he was also highly skilled in using the services of art historians or critics, who could join him in exchanges of opinions and place benedictions on the path he followed. At first, this role was met by Václav Vilém Štech, who in autumn 1912 wrote the introduction to the catalogue of the Group's second joint exhibition. Soon after, though, Filla's most crucial ally in the struggle for recognition and propagator of his modernist orthodoxy became Vincenc Kramář (1877–1960), an exceptional art historian who had been trained by Alois Riegl and Franz Wickhoff in Vienna. Kramář maintained close ties to the Paris gallerist Daniel Henry Kahnweiler, who personally introduced him to Picasso and Braque and from whom he had, in the years before the First World War, purchased many of the paintings and drawings that formed the core of his unique collection of French modern art. And it was Kahnweiler's information and opinions on which Kramář and Filla based their evaluative categories – and by extension the conviction of which artists represented the genuine avant-garde. Based on these positions, Kramář published in *Umělecký měsíčník* his 'Kapitola o -ismech' [Chapter on -isms], attacking as heretical the work of the Italian Futurists and the French 'false' Cubists. He accused them of precisely what Filla's faction was accused by its opponents – ambitions for power and striving to monopolise artistic legitimacy. The artists from Metzinger's group were, in his eyes, 'outright imperialists, no less than the Futurists who preceded them chronologically in the efforts toward conquering the globe'. His critique stressed the conformity of this group toward current power elites alongside their desire for the canonisation of their own work, appropriation of the historic honour for founding the movement, and the denial of its true initiators. 'In the latest publication, *Du Cubisme*, from Gleizes and Metzinger [...] we find constructed an entire Cubist

pedigree – a new tactical method for elevating its significance – and listed here are a series of painters from Courbet to Cézanne. But as for Picasso, not one word.⁴⁷ Kramář's attack fully matched in force and harsh sarcasm any of the polemical texts by Filla.

'Standing alone is, in our Czech circumstances, next to impossible and holding an exhibition alone would also be next to impossible (mainly financially). And if one is an individual, there is the likelihood that few would take notice, and here is where it begins to make sense, the whole, the collective presentation', – in such direct words, Špála voiced the motivations for his membership in the Group.⁴⁸ Bourdieu, in his reflections on the formation and dissolution of avant-garde groupings, tended to emphasise more the aspects of shared habitus and ethos over conscious calculation, yet in other respects the fates of the Group of Fine Artists again, almost surprisingly, match his observations. The shared striving towards symbolic capital and the negative self-definition with respect to established positions inside such organisations brought together artists with various programmes and personal temperaments. 'These dominated groups tend to enter into crisis, by an apparent paradox, when they achieve recognition.'⁴⁹ And the French sociologist also saw clearly what significance the names of the groups or movements had in the struggle for hegemony in the artistic scene: for him, they 'only have such importance because they make things into something: distinctive signs, they produce existence in a universe where to exist is to be different, "to make oneself a name", a proper name or a name in common'.⁵⁰ These terms are misleading and often without any meaning altogether, 'but are sufficient to classify and give existence to, with the least amount of effort, the groups designated – rather than defined – by labels'.⁵¹ From this perspective, it was doubtless a poor tactical decision to call the group 'the Group' and term its artwork 'new art'. Introducing the term 'Cubism'

⁴⁷ Kramář (1912–1913): 120, 223.

⁴⁸ Idem.

⁴⁹ Bourdieu (1995): 267.

⁵⁰ Bourdieu (1995): 157.

⁵¹ Bourdieu (1995): 122.



10. Zdeněk Kratochvíl, *Le plus grand cirque cubiste* (a parody of the international exhibition of modern art in Mánès). *Umelecký měsíčník* 2 (1912–1913)

was, as a result, a rational and necessary step in the process of historicising this joint initiative. Yet all the same, the semantic content of the label was hardly any greater than the original designation. As we are informed by the ‘history of concepts’, the suffix ‘-ism’, so popular in the naming of artistic currents after 1900, signals primarily that these concepts are oriented toward innovation and bring a serious expectation of the future. Much as in the case of the political concepts ending in the same suffix, they are expressions for change and action, which, at the time of their creation, had no empirical meaning. Reinhard Koselleck went so far as to formulate for such cases his rule of semantic compensation: ‘the smaller the experience contained, the greater expectation’.⁵²

Unlike ‘new art’, the concept of ‘Cubism’ was nonetheless capable of connoting a certain meaning: in the context of what is known of the dissolution of the Group, we can understand it as a declaration of the future directions for Czech modern art and its geo-historical anchoring. The ‘new architecture’ of Janák and his associates was intended as a Central European, indeed national phenomenon, linked to the traditions of Czech Gothic and Baroque architecture, yet distant from the idea of a Czech ‘special path’ now discredited by nationalist ideologies and regarded as eclecticism or unoriginal repetition. It was a movement anchored between Worringer’s poles of a Northern and a Southern art, defining itself largely against what was going on in Vienna but also in Germany, attracted by French art yet still somewhat on a different course. The term ‘Cubism’, by contrast, clearly and unambiguously expresses the orientation of Czech modernism toward Paris, which in this formulation represented the sole legitimate centre of development. ‘That guiding region of the world of art, which in the current age could give the most to our art, and with which we need to live in the closest connection, is French painting. Its most progressive current, the true art of today, is Cubism, engendered by Picasso and Braque’, is how this idea was voiced in 1921 by Vincenc Kramář.⁵³

⁵² Koselleck (2006): 69.

⁵³ Kramář (1921): 64.

The designs by Pavel Janák and his friends had undeniable parallels in Germany and the Netherlands, where architects similarly took issue with rationalistic approaches. In the German case, the efforts were far more than mere parallels. The Prague artists of the Group of Fine Artists maintained contacts with the Berlin propagator of Expressionism, Herwarth Walden, and exhibited in his gallery *Der Sturm*, while members of the German association *Die Brücke* were guests in the Group's second exhibition in 1912. Two exhibitions by the Group, with Gočár and Janák as the participating architects, were held in Germany – their third joint exhibit in Hans Goltz's *Neue Kunst* in Munich and their fifth in October 1913 in Berlin with Walden. For this reason as well, the output of the Prague architects was perceived by contemporaries, such as the previously quoted Viktor Wallerstein, as a part of wider Central European activity and, not without significant justification, also termed 'Expressionist'.⁵⁴ As clearly demonstrated by Teige's discussion or the later writings of the 'canonical' historians of modern architecture, from the positions of the international avant-garde these manifestations were viewed as romantic or formalist heresies. In this sense, applying the term 'Cubism' helped to neutralise these debatable, anti-rationalist, or even anti-modernist aspects in the programme of Janák and his associates. In turn, the obscuring of the ties with German Expressionism within the historiography of Czech modern art was equally necessary for nationalist reasons. Such motivations for objections to the programme of the Group were, in fact, anticipated as early as 1911 by Karel Čapek, who drew attention to their 'certain ideological and theoretical overlay that does not match the reality of Czech conditions'.⁵⁵

What speaks in favour of the use of the term 'Cubism' in application to Czech architecture for the period after 1912, in my view, is exclusively the institutional links between the work of the four mentioned architects and the activities of the painters within the framework of Prague's Group of Fine Artists. Behind the conflation of the heterogeneous outcomes of

⁵⁴ Lamač, 'Český kubismus a svět', in Švestka and Vlček (1991): 56–63.

⁵⁵ Letter to Vlastislav Hofman from 1911, cited in Lahoda (2007): 49.

painting and architecture based on superficial formal correspondences, I see the intention of creating from them a 'style', a unified concept birthed from the same objective-seeming *Kunstwollen*, even if in the present case it could only remain a local 'small style', as Czech Cubism was insightfully termed by Karel Honzík.⁵⁶ Yet similar efforts to cast painting as the driving force for activity in architecture is no less present in the writings of such 'canonical' authors as Sigfried Giedion or Nikolaus Pevsner, who as trained art historians projected onto their observations of architecture both the model of linear developments in the artistic field and the idea of a historical style as a homogeneous unit.⁵⁷ As much as their then-vaunted analogies linking Picasso's paintings and Gropius's buildings have lost their credibility, no less embarrassing are their reductive templates of universal historical styles, a trait criticised in the Czech context even by Vincenc Kramář.⁵⁸ For this reason alone, we should begin to manage without the aid of these misleading genealogies: shifting to a pluralistic model of modern architecture, which, instead of a unidirectional diffusion of artistic innovation from the (Parisian) centre, emphasises the processes of circulation and interculturalisation taking place horizontally, as well as the much more complex interplay of alterity and reciprocity, that will allow us to direct our intellectual activities in a more fruitful way. And the canonisation of the work of Janák's group under the Cubism label has had a paradoxical effect – devaluing the originality and intellectual depth of Czech 'new art' to an intriguing yet thoroughly marginal instance of convergence between central Paris and peripheral Prague. Western, more specifically French, forms remain perceived as the modern idiom par excellence and the rating of domestic artwork is fixed in criteria of similarity or likeness to the Western models. Czech 'Cubism' is not celebrated as the display of originality that it was, but merely as faithful receptivity.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Honzík ([1946] 1947): 41.

⁵⁷ Tournikiotis (1999): 22. For more, see note 3.

⁵⁸ Lahoda, 'Vincenc Kramář a kubismus', in Švestka and Vlček (1991): 67.

⁵⁹ See Veselý (2005): 586–604. Further, see Piotrowski, in DaCosta Kaufmann and Pilliod (2005): 153–171.

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Čekijos kubizmas simbolinių prekių rinkoje

Santrauka

Vadinamasis čekų kubizmas yra viena patraukliausių Vidurio Europos architektūros istoriografijos temų, tačiau vos keli tyrinėtojai yra kėlę klausimą, o kas gi iš tiesų yra kubistiška čekų „kubistinėje“ architektūroje. Nors šio reiškinio ideologinis pagrindas glūdi vokiškoje, psichologiškai orientuotoje meno teorijoje, platesnė profesinė bendruomenė jį suvokia kaip atsaką į to meto Prancūzijos meno procesus. Straipsnyje analizuojama čekų architektūrinio „kubizmo“ sąvoka, atskleidžiama jos genezė ir aiškinama šios menotyrinės etiketės funkcija. Terminas „kubizmas“ kaip architektūros kūrinių klasifikavimo sąvoka Čekijos kritikos diskurse pradėta vartoti tik po to, kai konkurencinėje kovoje dėl meninio pripažinimo monopolio kanoniniu tapo Emilio Fillos ir Vincento Kramáčo propaguojamas modernybės konceptas. Sąvoka „kubizmas“ išreiškė čekų modernizmo orientaciją į Paryžių, kuris Fillos ir Kramáčo požiūriu buvo vienintelis teisėtas šio judėjimo centras. Pasirinkta etiketė neutralizavo prieštarigus, antiracionalistinius ar net antimodernistinius Pavelo Janáko grupės programos teiginius, taip pat iš vokiečių teorijos atėjusius jos elementus. Tokiu būdu autonomiškas ir originalus meno reiškinys, kilęs iš turtingų tarpkultūrinių susitikimų ir mainų, buvo subordinuotas vertikalios meno istorijos modeliui ir redukuotas iki difuzijos, t. y. prancūzų meno receptijos, produkto.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: modernioji architektūra, kubizmas, ekspresionizmas, vokiškoji meno teorija, cirkuliacija, mainai, klasifikavimo sąvokos