



The Sacred Cause: The Europe that was Lost - Thoughts on Central and Eastern European Modernism

Tom Sandqvist

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«This book is about Modernism and Avant-Garde movements in Central and Eastern European art around the last turn of the century. It sketches a surrealist, bewildering, irrational arena. At the same time, we are offered a differentiated view on the complex whole of the avantgarde scene in Eastern Europe. The author takes us to dark soirées, scandalous dada theatrical performances, drunken bouts with loudmouthed reformers. Subjectivity stands against rationality, ethnonationalism against internationalism. Yugoslavian zenitism, Czech poetism, Hungarian activism, and other less-known isms, are proposed in exstatic outbursts in shortlived magazines. The pace is hectic, the commitment enormous, and the sheer force of strongminded individuals overwhelming. All in all, the inversed perspective seems alluringly fresh, with Eastern Europe as the co-producer of ideological content, instead as the receiver, or, even worse, the passive reflection of Western thought. I am impressed by the tolerance of much of the audience before and after the First World War: To be a genius seems to be just a matter of course. Karel Teige in Prague, Ljubomir Mici? in Zagreb, Lajos Kassák in Budapest, and Jacek Malczewski in Krakow were tireless propagators of avant-garde art - but also of nostalgic messianism. How did they get away with this, at times, monomaniac egoism, one wonders. Sandqvist finds the answer in that subjectivity was the remedy for avantgarde artists as a defence mechanism against the repressive society and destructive socioeconomical forces.» (Jan von Bonsdorff, Professor, Uppsala University)

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