

Interdisciplinary workshop  
organized by the Institute of  
Art History of the CAS, v. v. i. and  
Department of Sociology of the  
FA of Charles University in Prague  
within the programme Strategy AV21



# Elites in the 20th Century: Continuity or Discontinuity

## Programme

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- 9:30 registration
  - 10:00 Martin Krummholz: Introduction
  - 10:10 Jan Sládek: Changing political elites from “below” – Hope or Hype?
  - 10:35 Jaromír Mazák: Political elites and the new media
  - 11:00 Jakub Mlynář: Continuity and discontinuity of the past in the perspective of the (auto)biographical narrative of the elites
  - 11:45 Merse Pál Szereedi: The radical Elite vs. the New Art – Debates around the Hungarian Avant-Garde (1919–1925)
  - 12:10 Gábor Dobó: The self-description of Kassák’s avant-garde magazine Dokumentum (1926–1927) and the hegemonic discourse in Hungary
  - 12:35 Vendula Hnídková: Pavel Janák – Icon Reconsidered
  - 14:15 Eva Janáčová: Jewish elites in the Czech fine arts of the 20th century
  - 14:40 Maria Topolčanská: Mediating authority and prestige in architecture across the threshold of change of political power in 1989 – Cases of Czech and Slovak scenes since 1980s
  - 15:05 Klára Němečková: The Myth of Urbino – The critical reception of Neue Sachlichkeit design through the example of a porcelain “classic”
  - 15:50 Barbara Vujanović: Ivan Meštrović – Sculptor between art and politics
  - 16:15 Jelena Šesnić: The Continuity and Discontinuity of the Elites in Croatian Transition from Communism to Post-Communism – The case of literature
  - 16:40 Closing discussion



INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY  
ACADEMY OF SCIENCES  
OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC, v.v.i.

Friday, 20 November 2015, 9:30–17:00  
Academic Conference Centre  
Husova 4a, Prague I  
free entry

**Jan Sládek** is a lecturer and researcher at the Dept. of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague. He focuses mainly on urban issues and recently defended his dissertation about grassroots politics on local level. *Changing political elites from “below” – Hope or Hype?* On many occasions, a promise of new political elites coming “from below”, i.e. local politics and activism, is mentioned. In this presentation, the general view on political elites and activist experience and careers is introduced. The empirical basis for this consists of data from statistically representative surveys and interviews with grassroots activists from Prague.

**Jaromír Mazák** is a lecturer, researcher and Ph.D. candidate in sociology at Charles University in Prague. His academic interests include different areas of political sociology including social movements, electoral behaviour and political participation in online spaces. He cooperates with the Czech Television on the project Trends of Czechia focused on political views of the Czech public and has experience working for the Further Education Fund of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

*Political elites and the new media.* In 2008, Barack Obama launched his presidential campaign in a novel way. Using multiple social networks sites including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, he mobilized wide support especially among the young. The same young who had been considered as losing interest in politics and elections. This was a breaking point in political campaigning which arrived in the Czech Republic somewhat delayed with the 2013 presidential elections. Ever since, there has been pressure on Czech politicians to enter the online space and engage in exchange with their audiences, both supporters and critiques. In the first part of my contribution, I will address the opportunities and risks for political elites related to campaigning in the online spaces. Second, I will turn my attention to the use of social media by the public in order to challenge or support elites trying to show the new dynamics of citizens-elites interactions. I will primarily draw on my research and research of my colleagues at Political Communication Research group ([www.PolCoRe.cz](http://www.PolCoRe.cz)).

**Jakub Mlynář** is currently finishing his doctoral studies in Sociology at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague. Since 2010, he has been working as the coordinator of the Malach Centre of Visual History at the Faculty of Physical and Mathematical Sciences of the same university, where extensive digital archives of audio-visual recordings of oral history are accessible.

*Continuity and discontinuity of the past in the perspective of the (auto)biographical narrative of the elites.* The narration of one's own life story is from its essence an activity that lies in the reflection of lived continuity on the background of discontinuity historical reversals and transformations. The biographical axis of a human life naturally blends in oral history with the historical axis of political history and both of these dimensions penetrate one another in noteworthy ways. A number of factors have an influence on the final form of the narrative. The interaction of the interviewer and the “narrator” takes place at the intersection of multiple influences, period circumstances and suppressed assumptions. Attention will be devoted to those passages of the interviews where precisely the (dis)continuity of various historical periods are explicitly discussed, with a consideration of the variability of the importance of elites, social values and (un)acceptable civic and social attitudes. Through a partial analysis of that precise and specific element of collective memory, which is precisely oral history, I will try to look into the ways people deal practically with the multiple layers and ambiguities of past time. The case studies are several selected interviews with the representatives of the Czech cultural elites, deposited in the archive of the USC Shoah Foundation (<http://sfi.usc.edu>).

**Merse Pál Szeredi** is MA art historian and PhD student at the Eötvös Loránd University. He is a researcher at the Kassák Museum in Budapest since 2014, as well as the co-curator of the 2015 temporary exhibition in the Kassák Museum entitled “Signal to the World. War – Avant-Garde – Kassák” (with Gábor Dobó). He has been working as an intern at the Hungarian National Gallery and the Berlinische Galerie and has been researching in Berlin, Vienna and The Hague through several scholarships. His research focuses on the work of Lajos Kassák and his circles between 1919 and 1926 with special emphasis on the analysis of their international net-works.

*The radical Elite vs. the New Art – Debates around the Hungarian Avant-Garde (1919–1925).* After the fall of the 1919 Budapest Commune the progressive Hungarian intelligentsia was forced into emigration for more than a half decade. The most extensive colony – including the group of Lajos Kassák – was formed in Vienna. The magazine MA was published during the Commune and the exile years in radically changed social and artistic contexts, which framed extensive debates on the social status of New Art. Concerning either the Expressionist Messianism during the Commune or the Utopist Constructivist Weltanschauung of the Vienna exile years, the views of Kassák were rejected and denounced as l'art pour l'art in elite political and artistic circles outside of the international avant-garde. Kassák's theory of Activism – and the revolutionary collective individual – in 1919 and the less directly politicized Bildarchitektur of 1921 was confronted by the emerging ideology of Communism and Proletkult, respectively. Besides the – seemingly – isolated struggle of the Hungarian émigré circles, their Viennese reception was also defined by the discourse opposing the cosmopolitanism of avant-garde to the national notions of modernism. In the paper I examine the confrontations of Kassák's political-artistic Activism and Utopia with the progressive elite, focusing on the contemporary debates between the Activists and the Hungarian and Austrian political and art world.

**Gábor Dobó**, MA in Literary History and PhD student at the Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest, researcher at the Kassák Museum in Budapest since 2014, as well as the co-curator of the 2015 temporary exhibition at the Kassák Museum entitled “Signal to the World. War – Avant-Garde – Kassák”. In his research he applies the methods of Periodical Studies and Intellectual History on the Hungarian avant-garde magazines. He has studied at the Universities of Budapest, Florence and Angers; his PhD research focuses on the international network of Lajos Kassák’s 1926–1927 magazine titled “Dokumentum” [Document].

The self-description of Kassák’s avant-garde magazine *Dokumentum* (1926–1927) and the hegemonic discourse in Hungary. Probably less revolutionary than Lajos Kassák’s subsequent magazine MA was apparently limited to the act of “documenting” contemporary artistic and social phenomena. *Dokumentum* (1926–1927) published notes, analyses and even artistic interpretations of technical, industrial, social and artistic innovations from autobuses to surrealist poetry, considering them “representations” of a new epoch. My presentation deals with the contradictions between the self-description of *Dokumentum*, as an almost scientific journal, and the reviews written by other intellectuals who, in contrast, recognized the journal as Kassák’s newest radical “left-wing futurist” magazine. The stigma of being a “futurist” associated with any kind of avant-garde initiative in Hungary from the 1910s, determined the framework in which the magazine *Dokumentum* was interpreted in the late 1920s. Indeed, “futurism” was considered something anarchic, extravagant and even destructive in Hungarian criticism. We can deduce, that contemporary Hungarian critics translated the complex artistic message of *Dokumentum* into the supposed intention of Kassák to disarrange and restructure the contemporary Hungarian cultural life. As a result, Hungarian intellectuals vigorously attacked the artistic and social aspect of *Dokumentum*, defending the aesthetic and political status quo of the institutionalized Hungarian cultural life. The aesthetic concerns of critics about *Dokumentum* reveal that in fact they were more ideological in nature. Indeed, their judgments can be described as attempts to preserve the contemporary cultural situation in Hungary.

**Vendula Hnídková** is research fellow at the Institute of Art History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. She defended her thesis “Pavel Janák – Organizátor života” [Pavel Janák – The Organizer of Life] at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. Her Post-Doc Project: “Moscow 1937 – Architecture and Propaganda from the Western Perspective” is dedicated to the relationship between artists and political establishment. In 2013 she curated an exhibition “Národní styl. Kultura a politika” [National Style. Arts and Politics] at the National Gallery in Prague.

*Pavel Janák – Icon Reconsidered.* The leading narrative of the Czech history of modern architecture is deeply rooted in a chronological listing of progressive and avant-garde tendencies. Such a positivistic approach is limited in many respects but for the 20th century what is essential is the complicated relation between architects and the political representation that shapes architectural production, professional practice and style. In my paper I will focus on the precise interpretation of Pavel Janák’s legacy. Using the case study of the Czech acknowledged architect and theoretician I seek to reconsider the role of the modern architect in society. Critically questioning the stereotypical interpretation of Janák’s personality I will decode some seemingly neutral attitudes that, however, hide several conflicts, not only in the architect’s life but in art history in general.

**Eva Janáčová** completed her studies of religious studies at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University in Brno and Art History at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague, where she defended her dissertation thesis on the topic of Jewish figural iconography in the Czech fine arts. She completed fellowships at the universities in Haifa and Jerusalem. She focuses her expertise on the area of Jewish visual culture. Besides her curatorial activities, she also deals with journalism and art criticism.

*Jewish elites in the Czech fine arts of the 20th century.* The Jewish elite of Czech fine arts of the 20th century includes both artists and collectors, gallery owners and art historians. In the period before the beginning of the World War II, the artists Bedřich Feigl and Robert Guttmann, the collectors Arnold Skutezky and Jindřich Waldes and the gallery owner Hugo Feigl were famous for instance. A forgotten chapter of Czech art history is comprised of the Jewish artists, who immigrated to Mandatory Palestine or after 1948 to Israel, where they became recognized. They are for example Anna Ticho, Ludwig Blum, Otte Wallisch or Rudolf Weissenstein. The Holocaust and the political events connected with February 1948 caused in the case of the Jewish artistic elites in Czechoslovakia a significant tearing of traditions and subsequently also of continuity. Despite that, such solitary artists appeared here, such as for instance the painter Robert Piesen or the director of the Jewish Museum in Prague Hana Volavková, who is credited with the creation of the Memorial to the Victims of the Holocaust in Prague’s Pinkas Synagogue.

**Maria Topolčanská** is an architect and urban researcher based in Prague. She graduated in architecture at STU Bratislava and had a postgraduate fellowship at ETSAB, UPC Barcelona. She was an intern collaborator of Domingo-Ferré and J.B.E architects 2000–2003, has been an independent researcher at the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava in 2003–2014. She published essays in Architectural Design, Wonderland Magazine, Era21, A10. She is co-author of books Bratislava: “Atlas of Mass Housing, 1950–1995” and “Modern and/or Totalitarian in the Architecture of the 20th Century in Slovakia”. She founded and chief-edited Fakezine, a teaching tool weekly funzine “Fake Cities / True Stories”.

*Mediating authority and prestige in architecture across the threshold of change of political power in 1989 – Cases of Czech and Slovak scenes since 1980s.* As a prequel to the post 1990 discourse change in Central and Eastern European, there was a decade of history – spanning from late 1970s till late 1980s – of both architectural scenes of the former federative Czechoslovakia that is important to be put in larger context and compared with the parallel development on adjacent scenes, like Hungarian and Polish, or earlier on the Spanish and Catalan scenes in late 1970s. The research follows the emerging generation of critics and architects of 1980s who less than a decade later was the one formulating the post-socialist agenda of architecture anew. Decisive number of architects emerging in 1980s participated in the state driven architectural production and some simultaneously formulated alternative positions to state power. The key critics and historians emerging in 1980s – voices of the official and unofficial theoretical discourses – later mediated the local architectural discourse across the regime change and influenced it decisively in various ways. What are the consequences of trauma

of the regime normalisation in 1970s – 1980s on authority and prestige of the elite architects and architecture critics across the threshold of political change and till today? How was the formation and self-formulation of architectural elite across the change of society mediated and is this process completed?

**Klára Němečková** is art historian and curator, since 2015 graduate assistant at the Museum of Decorative Arts, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. 2011–2015 Dissertation Scholarship of the DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft); 2008–2011 Graduate assistant and curator at the Königliche Porzellan-Manufaktur Berlin (KPM); 2008–2009 Lecturer at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin; 1999–2007 Study of History of Art and New German Literature at Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

*The Myth of Urbino – The critical reception of Neue Sachlichkeit design through the example of a porcelain “classic”.* Similar to the tubular steel chairs of Marcel Breuer and Mies van der Rohe or works by Wilhelm Wagenfeld, the table service Urbino by the designer Trude Petri is the epitome of German Neue Sachlichkeit design. Since its market debut in 1932, it has been manufactured continually by the Königliche Porzellan Manufaktur of Berlin and has become established as a “classic”. In the context of its creation, the service was deemed in its uncompromising reduction to be an incunabulum of modern design. Catchwords of the 1930s such as type, series, and lack of ornament were reflected in the unadorned forms. In contrast to the works of Marguerite Friedlaender, who had to leave Germany because of her Jewish background, Urbino was marked out as excellent design especially for its “modernity” also in Nazi-oriented furnishing brochures. Adjectives like “simple”, “natural” and “timeless” fused seamlessly into the National-Socialist values system and were attached to the service. After the World War II, Urbino was yet again deemed to be the epitome of allegedly interrupted pre-war Modernism and along with the entire Bauhaus production was featured in the discourse on moral values in West Germany. In the 1980s the service – for marketing reasons – was even given the distinctive label of Bauhaus classic, aiming to present a simple outline of its avant-garde provenance and to demonstrate its relation to the successful Bauhaus brand – without the designer ever having worked at the Bauhaus. A scrutiny of its presence in the media charts the unceasing critical response to an achievement in design throughout different political systems, while the designer remains in the background.

**Barbara Vujanović** graduated from Zagreb University in 2007. She is a curator in the Meštrović Atelier (Ivan Meštrović Museums) in Zagreb. She regularly publishes reviews and articles and has written prefaces for catalogues and devised curatorial conceptions for independent and group exhibitions of modern and contemporary art. She is co-author and curator of the retrospective of the work of Auguste Rodin which took place in Zagreb (Art Pavilion, 2015).

*Ivan Meštrović – Sculptor between art and politics.* Croatian artist Ivan Meštrović (Vrpolje, Croatia, 1883 – South Bend, USA, 1962) was involved in the most important artistic and political events in his homeland during the first half of the 20th century. A student of sculpture and architecture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna (1901–1906), he made his name during his studies and just after that as an artist close to the circles of Rodin and Klimt, and other similar artists of the period. The question of the South Slav identity and of detaching Croatia from the Austro-Hungarian monarchy became an important issue for Meštrović in 1908 after the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since then till the end of the World War I he used the platform of his work and exhibitions to form the utopian political ideas and to construct the imagined Yugoslav histories and in the end the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Although he was the leading artist in the new state he soon became disappointed with the political oppression and the Serbian domination. He used his contacts, for instance those with the Masaryk family, to conduct his own political and cultural diplomacy. Refusing to support the Ustasha regime during the World War II and the communist regime in Yugoslavia, Meštrović opted to leave his country; first he lived in Italy then in the USA. This paper proposes to give an overview of Meštrović's artistic, intellectual and political role in the context of turbulent events in Croatia and Central Europe in the first half of the last century.

**Jelena Šesnić** is an associate professor in the English Department, University of Zagreb, Croatia. Her teaching and research interests are focused on American literature and culture spanning the 19th to 21st centuries. The author of two books and editor of a collection of essays, she is currently doing research on the cultural production of the Anglophone Croatian diaspora in the context of a cultural history of the Cold War, considering as well the (dis)continuities between the home and diasporic cultures in the given period.

*The Continuity and Discontinuity of the Elites in Croatian Transition from Communism to Post-Communism – The case of literature.* As the popular story goes, the demise of communism toppled the old and inaugurated the new social elites. Still, the variants of the story change from one to another country of the Eastern bloc, including the case of Croatia. In Croatia, the story of swift and successful transition from one system to the other was foiled by several developments: the shift from socialist to capitalist economy; the fall of multi-national Yugoslavia and the institution of the separate national republics (so-called Yu-successor states); the war of succession; the end of communism and the institution of a democratic order. Any one development taken in isolation would be a challenge for a literary-cultural historian, let alone all these intertwined interests. However, a more detailed examination of literary texts that deal with the period of the late 1980s and the 1990s, the period that displayed all the foregoing tendencies, shows that the transition was under way but that it was not a simple, unidirectional process, nor that its participants and agents acted in a unanimous way. It therefore proceeds that the elites that were expected to facilitate and carry out transition exhibit both an attachment for the previous era (continuity) and a distance towards some of its less palatable aspects (discontinuity). This ambivalence furthermore complicates more simplistic narratives of a radical break that came about with the end of communism, the collapse of socialism and, in Croatian case, the break-up of Yugoslavia. This complexity is then best illustrated in exemplary literary texts, such as Ratko Cvetnić's and Pavao Pavličić's novels dealing with the period of transition.