

The Unbearable Lightness of Building— A Cautionary Tale

Light, Air, Clarity

Early in the morning of the appointed day we set off while it was still dark, with her luggage strapped to a toboggan, and without a word we made the long journey through the snow spinning down around us, along the left bank of the Vltava, past the Baumgarten, and further out still to the Trade Fair Palace at Holesovice. The closer we came to it, the more often did small groups of people carrying and dragging their heavy burdens emerge from the darkness, moving laboriously towards the same place through the snow, which was falling more thickly now, so that gradually a caravan strung out over a long distance formed, and it was with this caravan that we reached the Trade Fair entrance, faintly illuminated by a single electric light bulb, towards seven in the morning.

—W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

In the summer of 2002, in the course of an architectural pilgrimage that included Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseille, Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, and two Cistercian abbeys in Provence, I visited Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona pavilion. I was awestruck by the cleanness of line, the grace of the slender cruciform pillars supporting the unbroken slab roof, the proportionality of spaces and volumes, the felicity of materials—travertine, onyx, glass, water—the taste shown in the one purely decorative element in the building, Georg Kolbe's naked female figure *The Dawn*, standing in the smaller of the two reflecting pools.¹ The pavilion recalled the classical restraint of the abbeys while remaining quintessentially modern. Its beauty seemed to exist outside time. As Mies intended, all was light, air, and clarity.

I was looking, of course, at only a facsimile of what Mies had actually built—a copy that was reconstructed by Ignasi de Solà-Morales, Christian Cirici, and Fernando Ramos on the identical Barcelona site in 1981–1986.² Despite its canonization in the annals of architectural modernism, beginning with Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's exhibition and catalogue *The International Style* at New York's Museum of Modern Art

Georg Kolbe's *The Dawn* in the
Barcelona Pavilion, 2002. A photo-
graph of a reflection of a copy.

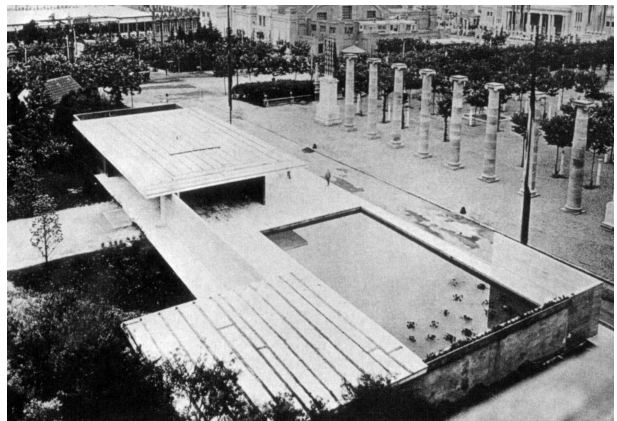


(MoMA) in 1932, the original had only ever been a temporary structure, the German State Pavilion for the Barcelona World's Fair of 1929. To me this mattered little. What I was seeing remained Mies's vision—as authentic a realization of his idea as the building that stood on the same site seventy years ago.³ Reproduction or not, this remained, in Hitchcock's words, “perhaps the supreme example of architectural design of the decade of the twenties.”⁴

Others see differently. At the time it was being reconstructed, the Barcelona pavilion was the subject of an idiosyncratic exhibit at the 1985 Milan Triennale by the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas and his Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA). “How fundamentally,” Koolhaas asks, did this “clone of Mies's pavilion [that] was being built in Barcelona . . . differ from Disney?” He continues,

In the name of a higher authenticity we researched the true history of the pavilion after the closing of the 1929 World's Fair and collected whatever archaeological remnants it has left across Europe on its return journey. Like a Pompeian villa, these fragments were reassembled as far as possible to suggest the former whole, but with one inevitable inaccuracy: since our “site” was curved, the pavilion had to be “bent.”⁵

The “true history” of the pavilion, as presented by OMA, is quite other than is suggested by the tranquillity of the reconstructed building in Barcelona, which stands in the place of the original—in all senses—undisturbed by the vicissitudes of time. At the end of the World's Fair, Koolhaas tells us, Mies's pavilion was left in an uncertain limbo: “unlike the other temporary pavilions, which looked more like buildings, the German pavilion, which looked light, was too heavy to move easily. Since Germany was in a state of confusion, it was decided to leave the pavilion on loan to Spain until a decision could be made.”⁶ With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War the pavilion was largely forgotten. For a time it became an Anarchist headquarters, and was damaged in the fighting. The Franco government, which disliked the political associations the pavilion had now acquired, decided to repatriate it to Germany as a gesture of goodwill. Mies himself, meantime, had left the Fatherland for the United States in August 1937, where he took up a position as director of the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. The Nazis—who in 1933 had closed down the Bauhaus (of which Mies was the last director, succeeding Hannes Meyer in 1930) and anathematized “degenerate art” in a traveling exhibition viewed by millions⁷—had little use for monuments of architectural



Right: Mies Van Der Rohe.
Barcelona Pavilion, 1929.
Aerial view.

Opposite: Installation view of
Mies Van Der Rohe retrospective,
Museum of Modern Art,
New York, 1947. Image © The
Museum of Modern Art/Licensed
by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

modernism. Draped with purple satin, yellow silk, and red velvet, the pavilion's marble slabs were first used as backdrops for propaganda films in which voluptuous blondes sung operatic arias for the homesick troops; later the slabs were incorporated into the floors of a ministry building in Berlin. A few days before World War II ended, the ministry was bombed and the marble slabs cracked.

Following liberation, the ministry building was used as a temporary hospital and camp before finally being demolished. The marble was preserved, and the rest of the crates containing the pavilion were unpacked—Germany's cities had been devastated by the war, and all building materials were welcome for reconstruction.⁸ The planners of what had now become communist East Berlin at first suggested that the pavilion be reassembled as a gas station “for the time when each worker would own a car,” but this proved impractical given the character of Mies's design. Instead it became the locker room for a sports complex planned for the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games, in which, in the event, East Germany was not allowed to compete.⁹ The locker room was abandoned, visited only by football fans, until one day a passing Western scientist stumbled upon it and “became convinced that he had discovered the remnants of the mythical pavilion.” After ten years of negotiation the fragments were exported within the framework of a cultural exchange, “in return for one medium-sized computer and a secret design for a new machine gun.”¹⁰

There is something reassuringly surreal about this history, which gives it the ring of truth. It is in such absurdities that we momentarily touch (in Mies's words) “the will of the age”¹¹—though not, perhaps, in the way that Mies himself would have conceived it. The dreams and nightmares of the twentieth century are brought down to earth, in all their banality.¹² This is not, however, how the histories of modernism—or the twentieth century—are ordinarily displayed. More typical of the former, and emblematic of the latter, was the 1947 Mies retrospective, again at MoMA, again curated by Philip Johnson, though designed in this case by Mies himself.¹³ A minimalist installation dominated by enlarged photomurals, the exhibition exemplified Mies's motto, which Johnson's catalogue made a

catchphrase: “Less is more.”¹⁴ Typical was the oversized panel—without borders and stretching from floor to ceiling “so that it appeared to float in space, like the images in Picasso's *Guernica*”¹⁵—which collaged two unbuilt projects, the Friedrichstrasse Skyscraper



of 1921 and the Glass Skyscraper of 1922, with the realized 1926 Monument to the November Revolution and the Barcelona pavilion.¹⁶ Left out were all but one of Mies's pre-1920 designs, and the scanty explanatory labels were uninformative as to both contexts and chronology. German and American projects were interwoven, with no sign that the passage between them led through uneasy accommodations with the Nazi regime and Mies's eventual exile.

Like the reborn Barcelona pavilion, this was a modernity for the ages: "the effective 'newness' of all the material in the exhibition [was] evident in the installation photographs; no wear and tear distinguished the older projects from the newest."¹⁷ History was trumped by aesthetics.

The Canons of Erasure

We waited there in the crowd of those who had been summoned, a silent assembly stirred only, now and then, by an apprehensive murmur running through it. There were men and there were women, families with young children and solitary figures, there were the elderly and the infirm, ordinary folk and those who had been well-to-do, all of them, in accordance with the instructions they had received, with their transport numbers round their necks on pieces of string. Agata soon asked me to leave her. When we parted she embraced me and said: Stromovka Park is over there, would you walk there for me sometimes? I have loved that beautiful place so much. If you look into the dark water of the pools, perhaps one of these days you will see my face.

—W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

Rem Koolhaas's reconstruction of the "true history" of the Barcelona pavilion is a work of imaginative fiction—the German pavilion was actually demolished at the end of the 1929 World's Fair along with all the others. We should not, however, dismiss OMA's conceit too lightly on those grounds. For at the same time as he was working on the Barcelona pavilion, Mies was planning the Tugendhat villa in Brno, Czechoslovakia, which shares many of the same design elements and is almost as celebrated an icon in the modernist architectural canon (Hitchcock described it in his 1966 foreword to *The International Style* as "one of the two finest houses in the new style," the other being Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye).¹⁸ But in the case of the Tugendhat villa, events every bit as bizarre as those Koolhaas imagines for the Barcelona pavilion really *did* happen.

Mies first surveyed the Brno site in September 1928, and Grete and Fritz Tugendhat, who both came from prominent local textile-manufacturing fami-



Mies Van Der Rohe.
Tugendhat Villa, Brno, 1930.

lies, were able to move into their completed house in December 1930. Their idyll did not last long. Jews caught out in the wrong place at the wrong time, they emigrated in 1938 first to Switzerland, then three years later to Venezuela. The villa was confiscated by the Gestapo following the German invasion of March 1939 and was occupied by various German tenants. Near the end of the war it was damaged by shelling, and the interior was devastated by Soviet soldiers who used it as, among other things, a stable for their horses. The villa was repaired and let out as a ballet school until 1950. Attempts by the Tugendhat family to regain ownership were thwarted by the communist coup of February 1948, and in 1950 the house was confiscated and given to the State Institute of Rehabilitation, which ran the building as part of the Brno Children's Hospital until 1969. The various occupants all structurally modified the premises to suit their own purposes, and most of Mies's original furnishings and fittings disappeared.

The villa was listed as a "site of special cultural interest" late in 1963, and an exhibition of Mies's work in 1968 at the Brno House of Art, followed by a conference on possible reconstruction in January 1969, gave hope of restoring the house to its original state. Ownership was transferred to the city of Brno a month later. These efforts in turn foundered on the politics of the "normalization" that followed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Reconstruction was stalled until 1982–1985, and the villa served in the meantime as a depository for the archives of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism. After the restoration—an architecturally sensitive one, in the circumstances—the house became an accommodation and meeting center for Brno city administration. It was here, around the magnificent round ebony dining table, that secret negotiations took place in 1992 for the division of Czechoslovakia into two separate states. The villa was finally handed over to Brno City Museum and opened to the public in 1994. It was officially granted "National Cultural Monument" status a year later—as a monument to architectural modernism rather than to the true history of modernity in which it played so surreal a part.¹⁹

The Tugendhat villa is pictured in *The International Style*, as are several other Czech examples of 1920s modernist architecture.²⁰ To an extent that is only lately beginning to be recognized,²¹ interwar Czechoslovakia was a cauldron of avant-garde experiment in architecture and the visual arts, integrally connected to developments elsewhere in Europe. I use the word *recognized* here in its literal sense, to mean "re-cognized, thought again": for the exchanges and transformations across what only later became the continental divide were well enough known at the time.²² Prague was a city "whose gates," the Devětsil group theorist Karel Teige wrote in his second manifesto of poetism in 1928,

“we wanted to throw open to all the healthy breezes of the world and the gulf streams of worldwide creative activity. . . . Discovering modern civilization to be unequivocally international we decided it was time to abandon provincial and regional horizons and nationality.”²³

During the twenty years of the first Czechoslovak Republic, Prague’s gates were opened very wide indeed, in all directions—to Moscow, for example, as well as to Paris. I do not have space to document these exchanges here. Suffice it to say that among the avant-garde figures lecturing, exhibiting, or performing in the Bohemian capital between the wars were the dadaists Raoul Hausmann, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Kurt Schwitters; the futurists Enrico Prampolini and F.T. Marinetti; the surrealists André Breton, Philippe Soupault, Paul Eluard, and René Crevel; as well as László Moholy-Nagy, Alexandre Archipenko, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Il’ya Ehrenburg. Visiting architects included Hannes Meyer, Marcel Breuer, Mart Stam, Amédée Ozenfant, J.J.P. Oud, Theo van Doesburg, Adolf Loos,²⁴ Walter Gropius, and Le Corbusier. The traffic was two-way. No less than eight Czech architects (Krejcar, Feuerstein, Chochol, Fragner, Honzík, Linhart, Obrtel, and Koula), for example, participated in the 1923 International Architecture Exhibition at the Weimar Bauhaus, while Jaromír Krejcar’s steel and glass functionalist pavilion was one of the highlights of the 1937 Paris World’s Fair at which Picasso first exhibited *Guernica*—not then as a set of free-floating images forever suspended in space but as a protest against the bombing of the Basque city by Franco’s German allies.

The historiography of twentieth-century modernism, which has erased and written over the memory of these links, was another casualty of the Cold War. Not only, as has become embarrassingly clear since the curtain parted and the wall fell, was what we in “the West” used to think of as the modernist canon seriously distorted in its self-regarding focus on Paris, London, New York, and Berlin.²⁵ That eccentricity of perspective found its mirror image in forty years of postwar communist official reconstruction of the Czech cultural heritage, which (with occasional subversions²⁶) was for the most part relentlessly nationalistic and aggressively antimodernist in the choice of what was exhibited—or not—and in how it was framed.²⁷ The neglect of the Tugendhat villa (whose architect, after all, was a large cigar-smoking German with a taste for impeccably tailored suits, and whose owners were bourgeois Jews) fits into a wider pattern. The 1960s Prague “thaw” and “spring” apart, it was only in the mid-1980s that this mold began seriously to crack with Jiří Kotalík’s comprehensive, but low-key and underpublicized, series of surveys of twentieth-century Czech art at the National Gallery,²⁸ followed by a sequence of what were for the time daring exhibitions of half-forgotten

Czech modernist movements at the Prague City Gallery.²⁹ Few of these exhibitions ever traveled outside Czechoslovakia, and their catalogues were seldom translated.

Some figures continued to remain persona non grata so long as the Berlin Wall stood, haunting absences whose presences still skewed the past. The traces of the “lucid, intelligent, and integrated” Karel Teige³⁰—the Devětsil group Marxist theorist, publicist, typographic designer, and collagist, who was without doubt the towering personality of the inter-war Czech avant-garde—could never be wholly erased, but Teige had his first full-scale Prague retrospective only in 1994.³¹ The Czechoslovak Surrealist Group, who were significant figures not only in the Czech art scene but also in the international surrealist movement—the first issue of the *Bulletin Internationale du Surréalisme* came out from Prague in a bilingual French/Czech edition in 1935, following Breton and Eluard’s visit to the city—received similarly short shrift. They had to wait until 1996 for a large-scale Prague exhibition, which also was never seen outside the Czech Republic. The superbly researched and richly illustrated catalogue is still only available in Czech.³²

This domestic “forgetting” is complemented by the failure of the catalogue of MoMA’s 1966 definitive exhibition *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage* to mention a single Czech artist—despite the fact that the Czech painters Štyrský and Toyen participated in almost every major international surrealist exhibition of the 1930s, including the greatest of them all, the 1938 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* at the Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris, which is celebrated today for Marcel Duchamp’s coal sacks, Dalí’s *Rainy Taxi*, and the mannequin-lined “Rue surréaliste.”³³ Not for nothing was André Breton in 1953 to castigate “the artistic chauvinism that has infected France more thoroughly than any other country,”

which “received an absolutely noble and authentic answer in the work of Toyen, work as luminous as her own heart yet streaked through by dark forebodings.”³⁴ Toyen herself was by then permanently exiled in Paris, escaping the coup of “Victorious February” 1948.

These edifices of erasure were symmetrical, each mirroring one another, a west creating an east—and vice versa. Common to both Western and Czech constructions of the history of the modern was the painting out of the constant interchanges—the visits, the correspondence, the friendships, as well as the multiple exhibitions, publications, and translations—that had shaped the arts of what was not



Vitzslav Nezval, Karel Teige,
and Roman Jakobson.

then a Europe envisioned in Manichaean terms. The legacy of this dual erasure still lingers, on both sides. Welcome as it might be from the point of view of rehabilitating artists left out of the canon, Steven Mansbach's recent survey, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, scarcely reassures. In defiance of what the material he assembles time and again reveals, Mansbach manages at once to confer a specious unity on a region that stretches "from the Baltic to the Balkans" and yet—still—somehow to locate this imaginary construction on "the eastern periphery of Europe."³⁵ Despite MIT Press's best efforts, Karel Teige's writings on art, architecture, and almost everything else under the modernist sun have yet to achieve the familiarity of, say, Walter Benjamin's, André Breton's, or even Clement Greenberg's.

The best-known twentieth-century Czech painters probably remain Alfons Mucha and František Kupka—both of whom did much of the work that is most familiar to us while residing in Paris. Kupka, possibly the first modern painter to exhibit a purely abstract canvas anywhere, found his way into the pantheon of modernism only because Alfred Barr (whom Philip Johnson describes as the "resident ideologue and goad" who "insisted on capitalizing 'International Style'" for the 1932 MoMA show)³⁶ was astute enough to purchase four of his works in Paris for another canonmaking MoMA spectacular, the *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition of 1936.³⁷ Czech architects like Josef Chochol, Vít Obrtel, or Jaromír Krejcar are scarcely household names, even to students of architecture, despite the fact that (in the words of Kenneth Frampton in 1993, hailing "a modernity worthy of the name") they left a physical legacy of "a grand total of over 200 buildings of *distinction*, many extremely large and built within the space of twenty years from the founding of the [Czechoslovak] state in 1918 to its effective dissolution in 1938 . . . this is an exceptional record."³⁸

Against this background the opening in 1995 of a permanent exhibition of the modern collection of the Czech National Gallery—which had never had an adequate display space since its beginnings in the Modern Gallery of the Kingdom of Bohemia in 1902—can only be welcomed.³⁹ The new location of the collection seems especially fortunate. The exhibition is housed in Prague's Trade Fair Palace—Veletržní palác, in Czech—a building that seems admirably suited to its present purpose from the point of view of both its functionality and its ancestry. Designed by Oldřich Tyl and Josef Fuchs in 1924–1925, the palace was built in 1926–1928. Occupying an entire city block, it contained a large exhibition hall, a soaring eight-story atrium, an underground cinema, a restaurant and a café opening onto the terrace of the flat roof, and plenty of office space. In its day it was one of the largest functionalist structures yet to have been built on the European continent. The exterior consisted of concrete

Top: Oldřich Tyl and Josef Fuchs.
Veletržní palác, Prague, 1926–28.

Bottom: The Great Hall of
Veletržní palác after the 1974 fire.

curtain walls, interlaced with continuous horizontal windows, with the lower and upper floors breaking the monotony by being slightly set back—all features that Hitchcock and Johnson were shortly to delineate as characteristic of the International Style, though for some reason Veletržní palác was not among the Czechoslovak exemplars they chose to include in their 1932 MoMA catalogue. A singularly beautiful feature of the building—almost Miesian, one might say—was the illumination of the exhibition hall and atrium through glass-paneled roofs, flooding the vast interior spaces with natural light.

What the visitor sees now, however, is no more Fuchs and Tyl's original than the present-day Barcelona pavilion is Mies's. Veletržní palác was burned to a skeleton by a devastating fire in 1974. It long stood empty and abandoned, left in an uncertain limbo, too much of a monument to demolish lightly or easily to repair. It was eventually restored to its former glory by the Liberec architectural consortium SIAL. Work began in 1986, and after many delays Veletržní palác rose from the ashes "like a



phoenix,” to quote the inevitable title of the exhibition that marked the occasion.⁴⁰ The palace looked much as it used to, but there were some modest changes. Among them was the replacement of staircases by ramps, as advocated by Le Corbusier when he saw it in 1928—making it an even more perfect embodiment of the aesthetics of the International Style than it had been in its original incarnation. The absence from the 1986 reconstruction of Mies’s Barcelona pavilion of the eight Ionic pillars that originally fronted the site, but had never been part of his design, has a similar effect, allowing us to see the building’s modernist essence more clearly, unimpeded by the historicist detritus of the time and place in which it was built.⁴¹

Building Modern

I tried to think where Agata might be now, whether she was still waiting at the entrance or was already inside the Trade Fair precinct. I learned only years later, from one who had survived the ordeal, what it was like there. The people being taken away were herded into an unheated exhibition hall, a great barn-like building which was freezing in the middle of winter. It was a bleak place where, under faint, glaucous lamplight, the utmost confusion reigned. Many of those who had just arrived had to have their baggage searched, and were obliged to hand over money, watches, and other valuables to a Hauptscharführer called Fiedler who was feared for his brutality. A great mound of silver cutlery lay on a table, along with fox furs and Persian lamb capes. Personal details were taken down, questionnaires handed out, and identity papers stamped EVACUATED or GHETTOIZED.

—W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

One vantage point from which we might begin to deconstruct the received histories of the modern movement, restoring a sense of time and place, is Karel Teige’s debate with Le Corbusier in the pages of *Stavba* in 1929–1930 over the latter’s proposed Mundaneum, a “city of world culture” to be built on the shores of Lake Geneva. Teige had championed Le Corbusier’s new architecture as editor of *Stavba* and in Devětsil’s journals earlier in the twenties. But he now pitted a modern architecture that “is not born out of abstract speculations, but from actual, living needs, under the dictate of life and in no way under the patronage of any kind of academy or officialdom,” against “the error . . . of monumentalism . . . the error, of a palace.” “*The Mundaneum*,” screamed his italics, “*is a composition*.”⁴² Le Corbusier’s response, entitled “In Defense of Architecture” and published in the Czech journal *Musaion*, marked the first time he publicly replied to critics.⁴³ Teige was no less scathing a couple of years later in

the favorite model of today's luxury architecture. . . . Flat roofs, terraces, horizontal windows, concrete furniture, chrome chairs, plate glass and so on have become a modernistic fetish and have gained the status of an obligatory stylistic formula. And, of course, fashion and style have always been the exclusive domain of the rich.⁴⁴

The seeds of this polemic were already evident when Le Corbusier visited Prague in October 1928, where he was attending a conference on "new forms of practical art,"⁴⁵ and took time out to lecture at Devětsil's Liberated Theater on "Technology as the Basis of Lyricism." Teige was his host. Le Corbusier visited a number of recently completed Prague buildings. These structures, he told Teige, unfailingly interested him, even if they did not always fill him with enthusiasm. He was glad, he said, to see that Czech architects had not succumbed to the *neue Sachlichkeit* vogue. He confided that he had found "almost nothing I would have to acknowledge as a positive contribution from Germany in matters of modern architecture." Coincidentally, the high priest of radical functionalism Hannes Meyer would be in Prague the following month, initiating contacts with Devětsil. Meyer had already approached Teige earlier that fall to lecture at the Bauhaus, which Teige did the following year, offering courses on typography and the sociology of architecture.⁴⁶

The Prague building that made the deepest impression upon Le Corbusier was Veletržní palác. Despite his abundant criticisms, he could not conceal his admiration—or, indeed, his jealousy:

The visit to the first building [of the Trade Fair complex] was a genuine experience for me. The first impression of the huge palace is impressive. It was claimed that my proposal for a palace for the League of Nations in Geneva was unrealizable.—The Prague Trade Fair Palace is a practical refutation of such objections. . . . For me it is very instructive to see architecture of this scale in reality. Against the individual features of Veletržní palác I have a series of objections: I do not consider its ground plan fortunate, and from the defects of the ground plan stem architectonic deficiencies of its external form: there are three or four buildings here of varied character, which unhappily permeate one another. The desirable refined simplicities are not found here. There is no harmony of proportions here. The square windows of the northern front are irregular. There should be ramps instead of stairs. I consider the communications within the building to be insufficient . . . The exterior formation is heterogeneous and shows a mixture of influences: Fiat factories,

here Behrens, there modern Russians. It is an extraordinarily significant building, but it is not yet architecture.

He nonetheless concluded: “I congratulate Prague and its architecture on being able to realize so grandiose a building project. When I saw Veletržní palác, I realized how I have to create great buildings, I, who have up till now built only a few pretty small houses on miserably limited budgets.”⁴⁷

Teige himself was less stinting. “The designs of Oldřich Tyl,” he wrote two years later in *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia*,

are among the most consistent works of rationalist architecture. Tyl’s realistic, truly engineering mentality and his mastery of the scientific and technological basis of architecture allowed him to create such complex works as [Veletržní palác]. This is a remarkable work of modern architecture, a skeletal building that organically integrates light, functional spaces, and great halls; its form is derived from the essence of its purpose, not from artistic speculation.⁴⁸

Le Corbusier’s criticisms of the Trade Fair Palace are mainly aesthetic, while Teige’s enthusiasm is based upon what he understands to be the building’s embodiment of entirely functional imperatives.⁴⁹ What was soon to be coalesced as a set of essentially aesthetic principles by Hitchcock and Johnson in *The International Style* (Barr was insistent in his preface that “it should be made clear that the aesthetic qualities of the Style are the principal concern of the authors of this book”),⁵⁰ and identified above all with Gropius, Oud, Mies, and Le Corbusier, concealed bitter differences over the politics of architecture, in which the status of aesthetics was what was centrally at issue. Philip Johnson himself concedes this in his 1995 foreword to the reissue of the book, noting that back in 1932 “Marxists and others interested in the social side of architecture objected to the emphasis on design and style.”⁵¹ The reduction of modernism to a *style*—and of modernity to modernism—was to play particularly well in the postwar Western world, when it was no longer fascism but communism that had become the main enemy of all that was progressive.

But Adolf Loos’s denunciation of “ornament as crime” was taken literally by many in the 1920s and ’30s, to mean a crime against the poor. Superfluous aestheticization was a materialization of the revolting excess of the bourgeois order, whereas purism, constructivism, and functionalism stood for a cleansing of the world not only of wanton luxury but also of the exploitation of labor that paid its bills. “What is the sense,” asked Teige, “of production that in reality does not produce new positive values or products destined for life? Decorative art destroys a work, and industrial art destroys manpower. The result is the same as dumping eggs in

Lake Michigan.” Of Pavel Janák’s grandiose Riunione Adriatica building on Národní třída (1923–1924), an example of the highly ornate rondocubist “national style” that was briefly fashionable in the wake of Czechoslovak independence, Teige fumed, “The façade . . . is distinguished by its willed splendor of material, which reminds us of all the horrors of the perverted Renaissance. If a mere façade costs enough to build four apartment houses, it is a sin against economy and society. For such economic and social transgressions there can be no forgiveness.”⁵² Architecture should serve human needs, not be ruled by the golden section.

This is one reason Teige was so shaken soon afterward by the victorious design in the 1932 competition for the Palace of the Soviets, aptly described by Rostislav Švách a as an “old-fashioned, academicist, antiquarian scrap heap of a neoclassicist project”⁵³—a project to which Le Corbusier, as well as the Russian constructivists, lost out. Teige saw this architectural backtracking as but the symptom of “a worse and hidden evil.”⁵⁴ Through the rest of the thirties his critique of Soviet architecture and growing doubts about Stalinist socialism were to proceed hand in hand, eventually culminating in the portrayal of Nazi and Soviet tyranny as two faces of a singular evil in *Surrealism against the Current* (1938). The similarities of regime, he wrote introducing a Prague exhibition of Štyrský and Toyen in 1938, were reflected in “the crusade, announced against independent art and the international avant-garde simultaneously in Berlin and Moscow . . . the wave of terror, aimed at that creativity which in Germany is called ‘degenerate art’ and in the Soviet Union ‘monstrous formalism.’”⁵⁵ He found Stalin’s pride and joy, the Moscow metro, genuinely surreal: “When the train with its beautiful modern carriages stops at a station decorated with Grecian columns, the impression is that antiquity merges with the present, as if in a dream.”⁵⁶

Modernism for Teige—and many others at the time—was never just a matter of style, international or otherwise. The one point of unwavering consistency in his passage through poetism, constructivism, and eventually surrealism was the refusal of any separation between art and life. In his first manifesto of poetism (1924) he had insisted that “poetism is not art, that is, not art in its current romantic sense of the word.”⁵⁷ His 1925 article “Constructivism and the Liquidation of ‘Art’” was equally uncompromising:

The term Constructivism does not allow one to think of art. Although we consider Constructivism today’s style, the name of contemporary culture and civilization, it does not represent a new formalist system or an a priori aesthetic order; it abandons all traditional forms and betrays the nine muses of classical Parnassus. Constructivism

is concerned not with forms but with functions. The domain of all till now was formalism. Constructivism proclaims the exchange of formalism by functionalism. It does not imply a new artistic formula, for the important reason that it is not concerned with art at all.

“For the Constructivists,” he continued, “*man is the measure of all things.*”⁵⁸

Ten years later, in the catalogue for the first exhibition of the Czechoslovak Surrealist Group in Prague, of which he was now a leading member, Teige was still chanting the same mantra:

SURREALISM IS NOT AN ARTISTIC SCHOOL.⁵⁹

“Only those members of the architectural avant-garde are worthy of that name,” he thunders in *The Minimum Dwelling*,

who not only wish to “build modern,” but who also decide to struggle for a new way of thinking, recognizing the wretchedness of the current housing conditions and understanding that it can be alleviated only if the material and spiritual distress of the poor is overcome first. A flat roof or steel furniture can never be regarded as the ultimate goal of modern architecture.⁶⁰

He dismisses the Barcelona pavilion in the same book as “nothing but a somewhat Wrightian architectural and sculptural flight of fancy, with its space arbitrarily divided by a few partition walls.”⁶¹

Alfons Mucha, Steel and Concrete

The German officials and their Czech and Jewish assistants walked busily to and fro, and there was much shouting and cursing, and blows as well. Those who were to leave had to stay in the places allotted to them. Most of them were silent, some wept quietly, but outbursts of despair, loud shouting and fits of frenzied rage were not uncommon. They stayed in this cold Trade Fair building for several days, until finally, early one morning when scarcely anyone was out and about, they were marched under guard to nearby Holesovice railway station, where it took almost another three hours to load them on the trucks.

—W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

The current Michelin *Green Guide* to Prague recommends tourists to make “the short tram ride to the inner-city district of Holešovice,” in order to enjoy not only Gauguin, Picasso, Klimt, Schiele, Miró, Kokoschka, and the rest of the “great figures of modern European art,” but also “the work of twentieth-century Czech artists, whose contribution to the development of twentieth-century art is no less significant for having remained little known for far too long.” It waxes especially lyrical about the

Veletržní palác building itself:

The Great Hall is only used for occasional exhibitions while other parts of the building are not accessible to the public. The permanent collections and other temporary exhibitions occupy gleaming white galleries running off the Small Exhibition Hall; beneath its glass ceiling, this immaculately restored space can now be appreciated as one of the foremost interiors of the heroic period of modern architecture.

“The progressive spirit of interwar Prague,” the *Guide* continues, “is nowhere expressed more strongly than in this huge palace of glass and concrete.”⁶²

Everything said so far in this essay—including Karel Teige’s assessment of how and why Veletržní palác is so significant a *modern* building—might incline us to agree. Both the Trade Fair Palace itself and the artworks it contains not only epitomize the spirit of modernism, they do so in a way that allows us to rescue the history of that modernism from the Cold War deformations of both its Western and its Czech canonizers, restoring, among other things, “those impassioned exchanges at human level to wed poetry to revolution” that André Breton remembered so well from his own 1935 visit to Prague. Veletržní palác is a place that promises the recovery of that “intense and unparalleled seething of ideas and hopes,”⁶³ a monument to the long-forgotten links and exchanges between what once were not an east and a west—links whose memory historiography (and exhibition practices of institutions like MoMA) has comprehensively erased. I would nonetheless recommend to tourists—and historians of the modern—to make a little time to explore the neighborhood further, taking a walk in Stromovka Park, perhaps stopping to admire the Exhibition Grounds at Výstaviště, then catching the metro back to the city center from Nádraží Holešovice, just ten minutes’ walk down the hill. For there are other sights to be seen—other footsteps in which we are treading—which might make us want to question this over-easy equation of the modern with the progressive, however conceived.

Holešovice, where Veletržní palác stands, is a later nineteenth-century suburban development made up mostly of factories and tenement housing, which lies downriver from the city center, on the left bank of the Vltava. The district is typical of Prague—that is to say, it is typical of the grimy industrial town whose spectacular growth after 1850 transformed Prague into a modern *Czech* capital. At midcentury perhaps forty percent of Prague’s 150,000 inhabitants were German speakers, and the city still had walls. By the end of the century the conurbation had swollen to over half a million people, of whom ninety-three percent, according to the

Austrian census, conducted their everyday business in Czech.⁶⁴ The incomers did much to make over the old city in their own image, warrenning the Bohemian capital with visible signifiers of Czechness. Opposite the main entrance to Veletržní palác is one small example. On an unremarkable tenement block are three frescoes. They depict Vlasta, a mythical leader of the “Girl’s War” against Přemysl the plowman, the equally mythical founder of the Bohemian state and the city of Prague; the fifteenth-century “Hussite king” Jiří z Poděbrad; and a local hero, Heřman z Bubny. This historicist iconography seems a million miles away from the modernity on display across the street. Yet the links are closer than we might want to imagine.

By the 1920s Holešovice was long familiar to Czech visitors from other parts of Prague and beyond. The main attraction of the area was Stromovka Park, which lies to the north and west of Veletržní palác. Then as now, it was a pleasant place to take a Sunday afternoon stroll. The poet S.K. Neumann’s 1913 “futurist” manifesto, “Open Windows,” lists “the military concert in Stromovka Park” (as well as the Central Slaughterhouse in Holešovice) among the modernities of which he approves, alongside World Exhibitions, railroad stations, artistic advertisements, and steel and concrete. A future founder-member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Neumann was to succeed Karel Teige as the second president of the Left Front [Levá fronta], an organization of politically engaged artists, architects, and writers founded in 1930. Here, he prescribes “Death to . . . folklore, Moravian-Slovak embroidery, Alfons Mucha, old-Prague sentimentality.”⁶⁵ The old and the new, however, were not so easily disentangled—primarily because the historicist sensibility to which Neumann objects was *itself* a quintessentially modern phenomenon. Nowhere was this clearer than in what was on display at the three major exhibitions that took place at Výstaviště during the 1890s.

The great Jubilee Exhibition was held there in 1891, attracting 2,432,356 visitors and marking the centennial of what was claimed to be the first industrial exhibition to have taken place on the European continent at the Prague Klementinum in 1791. The largest of the Exhibition’s buildings, Bedřich Münzberger’s Industrial Palace, a cast-iron and glass descendant of London’s 1851 Crystal Palace and the Hall of Machines at the 1889 Paris World Exhibition, still stands. What is now the next-door lapidarium dates from another Výstaviště spectacle, the 1908 Chambers of Commerce Exhibition, in which the building served as the pavilion of the City of Prague.⁶⁶ The catalogue for the latter opens with a potted history of the development of the city since 1848, replete with statistics. It tells a story, above all, of the transformation of a Prague that “gave the impression in the fifties of a German town, of course not purely German,

but it seemed that only the common people were of Czech nationality.”⁶⁷ Its author was Karel Teige’s father Josef, who was the official archivist of the royal capital city.

Karel Teige claims, probably rightly, that the Jubilee Exhibition had the same effect on “the new Czech architecture” as the 1889 World’s Fair had on architecture in France. “It prefigured the modern architecture of *glass and iron*. Naturally, this caused a negative reaction among the aesthetes of Prague, much as the Eiffel Tower outraged the aesthetes of Paris. Münzenberger’s industrial palace . . . was in itself a remarkable and important building.”⁶⁸ But while the Jubilee Exhibition certainly showcased the latest in Czech manufactures, from machine tools to glass to clothing to beer, it was as much a festival of Czech nationality. In front of the Industrial Palace stood Bohuslav Schnircha’s huge bronze statue of “the most Czech king,” the selfsame Jiří z Poděbrad who graces the tenement opposite Veletržní palác, representing, in its author’s words, “our king on his steed, prepared to defend the Czech homeland.” Besides the products of modern industry, the exhibition displayed plentiful samples of modern sentimentality, such as the “Czech cottage” furnished with 110 pictures by Josef Mánes—one of those talented nineteenth-century painters Karel Teige saw as “condemned . . . to provincialism” by “nationalism, the continuation of historicism, [and] its concomitant ethnic or folkloristic vogues.”⁶⁹ These nationalist overtones led most German-owned firms in Bohemia to boycott the festivities.

Four years later, Výstaviště hosted the so-called Czechoslavic Ethnographic Exhibition [Národopisná výstava československá], which also drew over two million visitors. It bore more than a passing resemblance to a twentieth-century theme park, not least in its concern for “authenticity” of historical replication. The exhibits in this case included reconstructions of a Czech “village square” and sixteenth-century Malé náměstí in Prague’s Old Town; rooms dedicated to Jungmann, Havlíček, Palacký, and other leading lights of the nineteenth-century “national revival”; waxwork displays and costumed reenactments of “traditional” rituals and popular festivals like the Nusle shoemakers’ fair; and a vast assortment of peasants’ Sunday best—which by this date had been reconfigured as “national costumes.”⁷⁰ The six-hundred-page souvenir volume pointedly stressed that “for the first time at a large event . . . our usual [Czech-German] bilingualism was dispensed with.”⁷¹ The third big Výstaviště exhibition of the decade, the Exhibition of Architecture and Engineering of 1898, offered as a major attraction Luděk Marold’s diorama of the Battle of Lipany—the culminating engagement of the Hussite Wars—in a circular pavilion thirty meters across. Executed with the help of several assistants, the painting measured a humongous ninety-five meters by eleven meters.⁷²

Veletržní palác no more represented a rupture with this historicist heritage than did Münzenberger's earlier palace of glass and iron, though we might be tempted to assume as much from looking at the building itself—and inserting it into Karel Teige's (or Hitchcock and Johnson's) narratives of the modern. Václav Boháč, the president of P.V.V. (Prague Trade Fairs) who had commissioned the building, had long articulated a different vision of modernity that saw no contradiction whatsoever between steel and concrete and Alfons Mucha. A leader of the business wing of the National Socialist Party, Boháč had proposed founding the P.V.V. as far back as 1908. In November 1912 he published an article in *Národní obec*, of which he was editor, entitled "A Slav Exhibition in Prague," in which he argued that although Prague was indisputably the best place for such an exhibition, "it is yet only a future Slav Mecca, and only through the astuteness of its representatives will it be made into the richest Slav city." His pan-Slavism had a practical cast—the mark of a truly engineering mentality, we might say. He had little time for merely cultural gestures: "Let us say immediately in advance, that the program of ethnographic and cultural exhibitions without industry and without business is in our view sheer nonsense, backward Czech impracticality."⁷³

The imperial government in Vienna turned down Boháč's proposal. After independence, however, conditions were more propitious, not least because of Boháč's contacts in the now governing National Socialist Party. The Czechoslovak government approved the foundation of the P.V.V. in 1920 as a limited company with substantial shareholding by the City of Prague. The P.V.V. took over Výstaviště, holding its first trade fair there in September of that year. Neither the space nor communications to the city center proved adequate to Boháč's ambitions. In 1924 he devoted his entire savings to buying up the Veletržní palác site, which was then occupied by two old factories. A competition was immediately launched for designs for a new "trade fair city" (originally four buildings were envisaged, including a hotel; only Veletržní palác was realized) in which Tyl's design came first and Fuchs's third. In the second round of the competition, their joint design was accepted by P.V.V., beating out a more decorative but less practical entry by Alois Dryak.

Veletržní palác was ceremonially opened on 28 September 1928, billed as "a gift to the Czechoslovak Republic on the tenth anniversary of its independence."⁷⁴ A good deal of hyperbole appeared in the Czech press, in which the word *palác* took on exactly the historicist, monumental associations Teige was to find so



Alfons Mucha and Václav Boháč
at opening of Veletržní palác,
September 1928.

offensive in Le Corbusier's planned Mundaneum. Veletržní palác was frequently likened to a "cathedral" or "castle" of trade and industry, albeit an architecturally modernistic one: "the building itself does not ingratiate with flourishes on the façade, it tries to convince with its impressive quiet, the quiet of a cathedral, in which seethes, in ten thousand eruptions, unrestrained work, work, and work. . . . I am a castle, in which the modern conquerors of the world long to triumph," ran one such panegyric.⁷⁵ The same metaphor was used in *Nová Praha* in anticipation of the art exhibition held in the great hall to mark the palace's opening: "the monumental hall of Veletržní palác will be transformed into a splendid cathedral of the Slav spirit, love, and ardor, in which the individual pictures will be like symbolic stations in the historical pilgrimage of Slavdom toward the final victory of the Slavic race."⁷⁶

The cause of *Nová Praha*'s excitement was the first public showing of Alfons Mucha's completed *Slav Epic*,⁷⁷ the magnum opus upon which he had been working since he returned to Bohemia from America in 1910 in order to fill his life, in his own words, "exclusively with work for the nation."⁷⁸ The *Epic* consists of twenty gargantuan canvases, whose overall subject might be best summed up by the title of the last picture in the series, "The Apotheosis of the History of the Slavs."⁷⁹ Ten of the paintings deal with Czech themes, the rest with episodes from the history of other Slavonic nations. These are not realistic historical paintings in the nineteenth-century manner, and it is a gross simplification to characterize them simply as academic, as did many modernist Czech critics at the time. Their visual language is that of symbolism. Until recently Western literature on Mucha has given the *Slav Epic* little attention, focusing instead on the artist's role as a leading exponent of Parisian art nouveau at the turn of the century—as we would expect. What is of most relevance here, however, is that despite their contemporaneity with the avant-garde productions of the Skupina výtvarných umělců, the Tvrdošijní, and Devětsil that now line Veletržní palác's walls, these paintings are never treated as works of *modern* art—just as despite the fact that it was Alfons Mucha's *Epic* that actually *did* inaugurate Veletržní palác, it seems far more natural to us to associate the building with the avant-garde art it did *not* display.

What makes Mucha's art "un-modern" is not the date at which it was painted but precisely (and only) its *style*; just as what makes the factual conjunction of Mucha and Veletržní palác appear incongruous is our habit of seeing modernity through modernist eyes—or to put it another way, expecting history to behave in accordance with the dictates of modernist aesthetics. I believe, on the contrary, that we should pay the closest attention to such incongruities. For the history of modernity cannot be

reduced to the onward march of avant-gardes, in the MoMA manner. It is not like Alfred Barr's famous flow chart in *Cubism and Abstract Art*, in which Near Eastern art, Japanese prints, Negro sculpture, neo-impressionism, and Cezanne lead on through cubism and the machine aesthetic to the propitious syntheses of modern architecture and abstract art.⁸⁰ Nor is it even like a "flowing stream, at first slow-moving, broad and free, and varied by many eddies and side currents . . . but then confined . . . to a narrower channel, so that for a while it rushed forward, on the principle of the venturi, at almost revolutionary speed"—to quote Henry-Russell Hitchcock's celebrated description of the history of modern architecture in his 1965 foreword to the reissue of *The International Style*.⁸¹ The modern is, and always was, much more twisted than that—never a simple enlightenment but a chiaroscuro, shot through with darkness as well as light. Just how twisted, Veletržní palác also shows—though not in any way that is immediately apparent to the eye.

Different Trains

Later, said Vera, I often walked out to Holesovice, to Stromovka Park and the Trade Fair precinct. On these occasions I usually visited the lapidarium installed there in the sixties and spent hours looking at the mineral samples in the glass cases—pyrite crystals, deep green Siberian malachites, specimens of Bohemian mica, granite, quartz, and limestone of an isabelline yellow hue—wondering at the nature of the foundations on which our world is built.

—W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*⁸²

In its reincarnation as a museum of modern art, Veletržní palác has become a powerful signifier of recovered memory and a monumental rebuke to Cold War reconstructions of the modern on both sides. But this transformation of the building into a signifier of "the progressive spirit of interwar Prague" conceals no less spectacular a feat of forgetting of its own—and what is forgotten, to come back to Rem Koolhaas's exhibition on Mies's reconstructed Barcelona pavilion with which we began, is above all Veletržní palác's own "true history." This is replete with ironies. As a matter of historical fact, at no point in that history, prior to 1995, was Veletržní palác in any significant way linked with the modernist art that now, seemingly so appropriately, lines its halls. If anything, it stood for everything bourgeois and nationalist that the Prague avant-garde so much despised—whatever Karel Teige might have thought of its importance from the standpoint of his own attempt to identify functionalist architecture with communist politics. But then, as Le Corbusier reminded Teige at the time in his "In Defense of Architecture," "you are a poet."⁸³

Modernist architecture, Koolhaas has also observed, is perhaps supremely well adapted to forgetting, precisely because of that open-ended functionality and disdain for any of the distinguishing markers of time and place that Teige so appreciated. The modernist ideal is what Koolhaas describes as the Typical Plan: a neutral, minimal, and infinitely flexible organization of space that can facilitate a multitude of activities while dictating none.⁸⁴ Veletržní palác could be anything, or anywhere: a modern art museum, a government ministry, a corporate headquarters, a cathedral of the Slav spirit, or a center for assembling Jews for transportation to concentration camps—which is what, during World War II, it became.⁸⁵ Nothing in the building itself shows this past, no equivalents of the Soviet graffiti Sir Norman Foster was so careful to conserve when restoring the Berlin Reichstag, as a perpetual reminder of the difference between the true history of a building and what that building comes to signify.⁸⁶ The ghosts have all been exorcized. The history has been erased by the building's blinding light, air, and clarity, its simple monumental *presence*—exactly as Mies's checkered biography was effaced by images floating in space in the 1947 MoMA retrospective and by the pavilion that now stands in Barcelona as his realized design.

Agata, whose story has periodically intruded itself into my narrative, was the mother of the strangely named Austerlitz, the hero of W.G. Sebald's novel of the same title. Austerlitz grew up in a small town in Wales not knowing who he was. He learns his true history from Vera, whom he tracks down in Prague many years later, still living in his parents' apartment in the Malá strana where he spent his earliest childhood. It turns out that he was a Jewish boy who had escaped the occupied city on one of the "children's trains" organized by the English stockbroker Nicholas Winton, which the German authorities allowed to leave for London in the summer of 1939. Winton rescued in all 669 children, on eight trains. The ninth and largest was due to leave Prague on September 3, 1939, the day that Great Britain declared war on Nazi Germany. "Within hours of the announcement, the train disappeared," Winton recalled later. "None of the 250 children on board was seen again. We had 250 families waiting at Liverpool Street that day in vain. If the train had been a day earlier, it would have come through. Not a single one of those children was heard of again, which is an awful feeling."⁸⁷ Vera saw Agata for the last time that cold winter morning outside Veletržní palác, when Agata asked Vera to walk for her sometimes in Stromovka Park and look for her face in the dark pools.

Austerlitz has a strange affinity—a sense of *déjà vu*, a memory he cannot place—with the waiting room at Liverpool Street station. Like Sebald's Agata, František Zelenka took different trains.⁸⁸ The first left

~~Nádraží Holešovice~~ for Terezín, the old Austrian fortress town that the Occupation authorities had turned into a ghetto for Czech Jews. The second, which Zelenka boarded with his wife and eight-year-old son Martin on October 19, 1944, was one of the last transports to Auschwitz. The exact date of Zelenka's death is not known. He was the stage-set designer, along with Otakar Mrkvička and Karel Teige, for the Liberated Theater's production of Apollinaire's *Breasts of Tiresias*.⁸⁹ He was also a talented graphic designer and architect, some of whose buildings still stand in Prague. Zelenka, I would suggest, is the real point of contact between Prague's immaculately restored Trade Fair Palace and the avant-garde art that nowadays graces its pristine white galleries—a true connection with the building itself, belying the simplicities of what it has since come to signify.⁹⁰ He probably passed through ~~what can now be appreciated as one of the foremost interiors of the heroic period of modern architecture~~ on or around July 13, 1943, on business that had little to do with modernism and everything to do with modernity.

Notes

1. See José Quetglas, *Fear of Glass: Mies van der Rohe's Pavilion in Barcelona* (Basel, Boston, and Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2001).
2. The site had itself been altered between 1929 and 1981, giving the reconstructed building a very different setting from the original. See the aerial photograph in Quetglas, 43.
3. So far as that vision can be ascertained. Mies's original drawings left out many of the dimensions. The reconstruction is based on a comparison of the drawings with period photographs. See Ricardo Daza, "Notes about the Drawings of the German Pavilion," in Quetglas, *Fear of Glass*, 183–186.
4. Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (New York: Norton, 1995), 22. The 1995 edition is a reprint of the original 1932 MoMA catalogue, with a foreword by Johnson as well as Hitchcock's foreword to the 1966 edition. I quote here from Hitchcock's 1966 foreword. The 1932 exhibition was definitive in more than one sense: it helped put the Museum of Modern Art, founded in 1929, firmly on the map as a definitive arbiter of the modern; but above all, it gave unity, substance, and definition to the very idea of "the International Style" itself, where no such thing had previously existed. The Barcelona pavilion is pictured on 186–188.
5. Rem Koolhaas, "Less Is More," in Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *S, M, L, XL: Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998), 48–49.
6. As I make clear below, the whole of Koolhaas's "true history" is in fact a fiction. In reality, Mies's pavilion was dismantled with the others. See Barry Bergdoll, "The Nature of Mies's Space," in *Mies in Berlin*, ed. Terrence Riley and Barry Bergdoll (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2001), 91.
7. The *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition opened in Munich in 1937 and toured throughout Germany and Austria over the next four years. Some 600 works were shown which had been removed from museums and galleries throughout the Third Reich. Almost three million visitors saw it. The Los Angeles County Museum staged a (partial) reconstruction in 1991, with 150 of the original works plus contemporary photographs and film footage. See Stephanie Barron, ed., *"Degenerate Art": The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and New York: Abrams, 1991). This is also one of the exhibitions discussed in Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Abrams, 1994). Ironically, this was probably the most widely seen exhibition of modern art ever.
8. W.G. Sebald has written illuminatingly about both the scale of this devastation and the comprehensiveness of its erasure from postwar German public memory. See his *On the Natural History of Destruction* (New York: Knopf, 2003).
9. The Helsinki Olympics, in which the Federal Republic of Germany (but not the German Democratic Republic) was allowed to compete for the first time since the end of the war, became a Cold War battleground. The Soviet Union, competing for the first time, insisted on building its own separate village for East bloc athletes, and fraternization was discouraged.
10. Koolhaas, "Less Is More," 50–61.
11. Mies van der Rohe, "Baukunst und Zeitwille" (1924), quoted in Werner Blaser, *West Meets East—Mies van der Rohe* (Basel, Boston, and Berlin: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1996), 23.
12. I am drawing here both on Walter Benjamin's concept of the dreamworld and his understanding—for which he credits the surrealists—of the pregnancy of the everyday.

See Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia," in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings, Vol. 2: 1927–1934*, 207–221 (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press).

13. See Terence Riley, "Making History: Mies van der Rohe and The Museum of Modern Art," in *Mies in Berlin*, ed. Riley and Bergdoll, 11.

14. Philip Johnson, *Mies van der Rohe* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1947). This was expanded and reprinted in 1953 and again, with an epilogue entitled "Thirty Years After," in 1978.

15. Riley, "Making History," 12. Picasso's *Guernica* has indeed now come to float in space. Painted to protest the bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, it can now be bought, in reproduction, at any IKEA, a timeless signifier of artistic modernism.

16. This is reproduced as the frontispiece to Riley, "Making History."

17. Riley, "Making History," 13.

18. Hitchcock and Johnson, 21.

19. See Zdeněk Kudelka and Libor Teplý, *Villa Tugendhat* (Brno: Brno City Museum/FOTEP, 2001).

20. See Hitchcock and Johnson, 139–41, 147, 172–73, 191–94. Only one Prague building is featured, Ludvík Kysela's Bata Shoe Store. The other Czech buildings, by Otto Eisler, Bohuslav Fuchs, and Josef Kranz, are all in Brno. Brno was a hub of modernist architecture between the wars: see Zdeněk Kudelka and Jindřich Chatrný, *For New Brno: The Architecture of Brno 1919–1939* (Brno: Museum of the City of Brno, 2000).

21. The most important catalogues of relevant exhibitions in western Europe and the United States include: *Czech Functionalism 1918–1938*, ed. Vladimír Šlapeta (London: Architectural Association, 1986); Jaroslav Anděl, ed., *Czech Modernism 1900–1945* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1989); Zdenek Primus, ed., *Tschechische Avantgarde 1922–40: Reflexe europäischer Kunst und Fotografie in der Buchgestaltung* (Münster: Vier-Türme-Verlag, 1990); Rostislav Švácha, ed., *Devětsil: Czech Avant-Garde Art, Architecture and Design of the 1920s and '30s* (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art and London: Design Museum, 1990); Jiří Švestka et al., eds., *Kubismus in Prag 1909–1925: Malerie Skulptur Kunstgewerbe Architektur* (Düsseldorf: Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, 1991); Claude Petry, ed., *Le Cubisme à Prague* (Paris: Jacques London, 1991); Alexander von Vegensack, ed., *Czech Cubism: Architecture and Design 1910–1925* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 1991); Suzanne Pagé et al., *Šíma/Le Grand Jeu* (Paris: Musée de l'Art Moderne, 1992); Jaroslav Anděl, ed., *The Art of the Avant-Garde in Czechoslovakia 1918–1938* (Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio Gonzales, 1993); Vojtěch Lahoda, Karel Srp, and Rumjana Dačeva, eds., *Karel Teige: Surrealist Collages 1935–1951* (Prague: Středoevropská galerie, 1994); Manuela Castagnara Codeluppi, ed., *Karel Teige: Architettura, Poesie—Praga 1900–1952* (Milan: Electra, 1996); Jacqueline Menanteau, ed., *Prague 1900–1938: Capitale secrète des avant-gardes* (Dijon: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1997); and Timothy O. Benson, ed., *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930* (Cambridge: MIT Press and Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2002). See also the catalogues of exhibitions within Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic cited in n. 29 below. Other relevant literature in English includes Michal Bregant, ed., *Cubist Prague* (Prague: Středoevropské nakladatelství, 1995); Rostislav Švácha, *The Architecture of New Prague 1895–1945* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); Wojciech Lenikowski, ed., *East European Modernism: Architecture in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland between the Wars* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996); Ivan Margolius, *Prague: A Guide to Twentieth-Century*

Architecture (London: Ellipsis, 1996); Eric Dluhosch and Rostislav Švácha, eds., *Karel Teige 1900–1951: L'Enfant Terrible of the Czech Modernist Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999); Vladimír Birgus, *Czech Photographic Avant-Garde 1918–1948* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); and the recent translations of Karel Teige's works cited elsewhere in these notes.

22. The LACMA 2002 exhibition was pathbreaking because it took these exchanges as its point of departure. See Benson, *Central European Avant-Gardes*; and the very valuable accompanying collection of primary documents, Timothy O. Benson and Eva Forgacs, eds., *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930* (Cambridge: MIT Press and Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2002). The LACMA exhibition went on to Munich and Berlin.

23. Karel Teige, “Poetism Manifesto,” *ReD* 1, no. 9 (1928); trans. in *Between Worlds*, ed. Benson and Forgacs, 593.

24. Born in Brno in 1870 and trained in Dresden, Loos moved to Vienna in 1896 and thence to France. He took out Czechoslovak citizenship in 1930. Karel Teige treated him as a bona fide Czech architect and claimed Loos's own authority for doing so. See Karel Teige, *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia*, trans. Irena Zantovska Murray and David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001), 301.

25. See Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 5–17.

26. For instance: the “Founders of Modern Czech Art” exhibition staged by Miroslav Lamač and Jiří Padrta in Brno in 1957 and Prague the next year; and its 1958 Brno successor on the interwar avant-garde, shown in Brno but not in Prague. See Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, 255, for further discussion and references.

27. See Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, 292–94, for examples.

28. This series of sixteen exhibitions ran from 1984–1989, covering the period from the 1890s to after World War II. The twenties were covered in exhibitions 11 and 12, the thirties in 13 and 14; all four exhibitions occurred in 1989. There were no catalogues, only cyclostyled press releases with commentary by Jiří Kotalík and lists of artists and number of works included, but not individual works. Karel Teige remains absent throughout.

29. The most important catalogues, relating to the period discussed in this essay, were František Šmejkal, Rostislav Švácha, and Jan Rous, ed., *Devětsil: česká výtvarná avant-garda dvacátých let* (Prague: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, 1986); Karel Srp, ed., *Tvrdošíjní* (Prague: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, 1986); Karel Srp, ed., *Tvrdošíjní a hoste* (Prague: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, 1987); Karel Srp, ed., *Aventinská mansarda: Otakar Storch-Marien a výtvarné umění* (Prague: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, 1990); Hana Rousová, ed., *Mezery v historii 1890–1938* (Prague: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, 1994); Karel Srp, ed., *Karel Teige 1900–1951* (Prague: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, 1994); Lenka Bydžovská and Karel Srp, eds., *Český surrealismus 1929–1953* (Prague: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, 1996); Vojtěch Lahoda, ed., *Zdenek Rykr 1900–1940: Elegie avantgardy* (Prague: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, 2000); and Karel Srp, ed., *Toyen* (Prague: Galerie hlavního města Prahy, 2000). The catalogues of other important Prague exhibitions on Czech avant-gardes included Josef Kroutvor, ed., *František Zelenka: Plakáty, architektura, divadlo* (Prague: Uměleckoprůmyslové muzeum, 1991); Lenka Bydžovská and Karel Srp, eds., *Štyrský, Toyen, artificialismus, 1926–31* (Prague: Středočeská galerie, 1992); Michal Bregant, ed., *Expresionismus a české umění 1905–1927* (Prague: Národní galerie 1994);

Vojtěch Lahoda, Rumana Dačeva, and Karel Srp, eds., *Karel Teige, Surrealistické koláže 1935–51* (Prague: Středoevropská galerie, 1994); František Šmejkal, ed., *České imaginativní umění* (Prague: Galerie Rudolfinum, 1996); and Vladimír Šlapeta, ed., *Jan Kotěra 1871–1923* (Prague: Municipal House/Kant, 2001). The 1991 German exhibitions *Kubismus in Prag 1909–1925* and *Czech Cubism* also showed at the Czech National Gallery, as did the Valencia exhibition *The Art of the Avant-Garde in Czechoslovakia 1918–1938*.

30. Philippe Soupault, quoted in Serge Faucherau, “Quelques semaines au printemps de 1935: L’Internationale Surréaliste,” in *La Révolution Surréaliste*, ed. Werner Spies (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2002), 406.

31. See Srp, *Karel Teige 1900–1951*.

32. Bydžovská and Srp, *Český surrealismus 1929–1953*.

33. On this exhibition, see Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí, and Surrealist Exhibition* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

34. André Breton, “Introduction to the Work of Toyen,” in André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2002), 210.

35. Steven A. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

36. Hitchcock and Johnson, 14.

37. Alfred H. Barr Jr., ed., *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936).

38. Kenneth Frampton, “A Modernity Worthy of the Name: Notes on the Czech Architectural Avant-Garde,” in *The Art of the Avant-Garde in Czechoslovakia 1918–1938*, ed. Anděl, 231; emphasis in original.

39. On the history of the collection, the institutions that have held it, and the century-long search for adequate space to display it, see Roman Musil et al., *Moderní galerie tenkrát 1902–1942* (Prague: Národní galerie, 1992); and Lenka Bydžovská, Vojtěch Lahoda, and Karel Srp, eds., *Czech Modern Art 1900–1960* (Prague: National Gallery, 1995), 11–19. The latter is the catalogue of the exhibition of the modern collection at Veletržní palác installed in 1995. The installation has since changed with the move of the National Gallery’s nineteenth-century collection, formerly held at Anežský klášter, to Veletržní palác.

40. See Radomíra Sedláková, *Jak fénix: Minulost a přítomnost Veletržního paláce v Praze*, exh. cat. (Prague: Národní galerie, 1995).

41. See Quetglas.

42. Karel Teige, *Výbor z díla, I: Svět stavby a básně*, ed. Vratislav Effenberger, Květoslav Chvatík, and Robert Kalivoda (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1966), 533. Almost the entire edition of volume 2 of this edition of Teige’s selected works, *Zápasy o smysl moderní tvorby*, 1969, was destroyed before it made the bookstores. I was fortunate enough to obtain one of those copies that survived. Volume 3, *Osvobozování života a poesie*, was not published until 1994 (Prague: Český spisovatel/Aurora).

43. Le Corbusier, “Défense de l’architecture,” *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui*, 10, Paris, 1933, originally published in Czech as “Obrána architektury: odpověď Karlu Teigovi,” *Musaion*, 2, Prague, 1931.

44. Karel Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, trans. Eric Dluhosch (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 181.

45. See Miroslav Masák, Rostislav Švácha, and Jindřich Výbiral, *Veletržní palác v Praze* (Prague: National Gallery, 1995), 34.

46. Klaus Spechtenhauser and Daniel Weiss, “Karel Teige and the CIAM,” in *Karel Teige 1900–1951*, ed. Dluhosch and Švácha, 235.
47. Quoted in Karel Teige, “Le Corbusier v Praze,” in Másak, Švácha, and Výbíral, *Veletržní palác v Praze*, 41.
48. Teige, *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia*, 179.
49. See Rostislav Švácha, “Before and After the Mundaneum: Teige as Theoretician of the Architectural Avant-Garde,” in *Karel Teige 1900–1951*, ed. Dluhosch and Švácha.
50. Alfred H. Barr Jr., “Preface,” in Hitchcock and Johnson, *The International Style*, 29.
51. Hitchcock and Johnson, 14.
52. Teige, *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia*, 153, 155.
53. Švácha, “Before and After the Mundaneum,” 130.
54. Švácha, “Before and After the Mundaneum,” 130. See also Jean-Louis Cohen, “Karel Teige and the Crisis of Russian Constructivism,” in *Karel Teige*, ed. Codeluppi; and Igor A. Kazus, “The Cathedral of Soviets and the End of Avant-Garde,” in *Karel Teige*, ed. Codeluppi.
55. Teige, *Zápasy o smysl moderní tvorby*, 664.
56. Teige, “Velkoměsto a podzemní dráha,” *Světlozor* 37 (1937), quoted in Švácha, “Before and After the Mundaneum,” 132. As Švácha comments, Teige had a true surrealist’s eye here.
57. Teige, “Poetism,” in *Karel Teige 1900–1951*, ed. Dluhosch and Švácha, 70.
58. Karel Teige, “Constructivism and the Liquidation of ‘Art,’” *Disk* 2 (1925); trans. in *Between Worlds*, ed. Benson and Forgacs, 583–86.
59. Karel Teige, “Surrealismus není uměleckou školou,” in *První výstava skupiny surrealistů v ČSR: Makovský, Štyrský, Toyen* (Prague: SVU Mánes, 1935), 3; emphasis and centering in the original.
60. Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, 6, 12.
61. Teige, *The Minimum Dwelling*, 195.
62. *The Green Guide: Prague* (Watford: Michelin Travel Publications, 2000), 214–15. While noting the “unsuitable uses” to which Veletržní palác was put during the communist period—storing scarce Western consumer goods—the *Guide* does *not* mention the building’s use during World War II; whether out of fear of putting off tourists or because that use has already been so “forgotten” that the authors are ignorant of it, I don’t know.
63. Breton, “Introduction to the Work of Toyen,” 209.
64. For further discussion of Prague’s changing (and crystallizing) “national” composition in relation to the census, see Derek Sayer, “The Language of Nationality and the Nationality of Language: Prague 1780–1920,” *Past and Present* no. 151 (1996), 164–210.
65. S.K. Neumann, “Otevřená okna” (1913), in Jiří Padrta, ed., *Osmá a Skupina výtvarných umělců 1910–1917: Teorie, kritika, polemika* (Prague: Odeon, 1992), 138–40.
66. See Jan E. Svoboda, Zdeněk Lukeš, and Ester Havlová, *Praha 1891–1918: Kapitoly o architektuře velkoměsta* (Prague: Libri, 1997), 13–14.
67. Josef Teige, “Vývoj kral. hlav. města Prahy od roku 1848–1908,” in *Katalog pavilonu kral. hlav. města Prahy a odborních skupin městských* (Prague, 1908), 8.
68. Teige, *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia*, 89; emphasis in original.
69. Teige, *Modern Architecture in Czechoslovakia*, 60.
70. I have discussed this exhibition in much more detail in *The Coasts of Bohemia*, 124–27.

71. K. Klusáček et al., *Národopisná výstava československá v Praze 1895* (Prague: Jan Otto, 1895), 540–43.

72. See Jana Brabcová, *Luděk Marold* (Prague: Odeon, 1988), 66–74.

73. Quoted in Masák, Švácha, and Výbiral, 6.

74. See Sedláková, 49.

75. Quoted in Masák, Švácha, and Výbiral, 31. “Work, work, and work!” was a slogan of Czechoslovakia’s first president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

76. *Nová Praha*, 6 September 1928, quoted in Masák, Švácha, and Výbiral, *Veletržní palác v Praze*, 33.

77. One picture, “The Omladina Youth Taking the Oath beneath the Slavic Linden Tree,” was not exhibited at Veletržní palác for lack of space. On this cycle, see *Alfons Mucha: Das slawische Epos*, ed. Karel Srp (Krems: Kunst.Halle.Krems, 1994).

78. See Mucha’s undated letter (c. 1900), quoted in Jiří Mucha, *Alphonse Maria Mucha: His Life and Art* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 145.

79. See Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, 18–21, 147–53.

80. Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, cover. The chart is also reproduced in Francis Francina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), plate A.

81. Hitchcock and Johnson, 24.

82. This and the earlier epigraphs are taken from W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 178–180.

83. Le Corbusier, “Défense de l’architecture,” quoted in Alena Kubová, “Les liens entre Karel Teige et Le Corbusier,” in *Prague 1900–1938*, ed. Menanteau, 232.

84. Rem Koolhaas, “Typical Plan,” in Koolhaas and Mau, *S, M, L, XL*, 243.

85. The catalogue of the exhibition *Jak fénix*, an official publication of the National Gallery, states categorically that “During the Second World War the Palace lost its initial function since one part was turned into offices and another became a departure site for Jews who were assembled here before being taken to concentration camps” (57). The same catalogue contains an extract from Ferdinand Peroutka’s *Oblák a válčík*, describing Jews being assembled within the Great Hall and passing the night there until woken by the gray light of dawn through the glass roof, at which point they were marched off to Holešovice station (24). Peroutka himself spent the war in German camps. Inquiries at the Prague Jewish Museum suggest, contrary to this, that the Jews were not actually housed within the palace building itself—though they might have initially been summoned to assemble there—but in huts across the street (but still within the Veletržní compound), on the site of the present Park Hotel, where there is now a commemorative plaque. I am grateful to Jindřich ~~Tomaš~~ for this information. What *is* beyond dispute, however, is that Veletržní palác had a much different significance for Jews in Nazi-occupied Prague than it has taken on today. They were not summoned “*na shromaždiště ve Veletržním paláci*” [to the assembly point in Veletržní palác; Peroutka], to admire modern art and **architecture**.

86. See Norman Foster, *Rebuilding the Reichstag* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2000), ch. 1.

87. Quoted in *Jewish Virtual Library*, www.us-israel.org/jsource/biography/Winton.html. See also Muriel Emanuel and Vera Gissing, *Nicholas Winton and the Rescued Generation* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2001).

88. I am alluding here to the composer Steve Reich’s work *Different Trains* (1988).

89. See *František Zelenka: pláky, architektura, divadlo*, ed. Josef Kroutvor (Prague: Uměleckoprůmyslové muzeum, 1992).

90. Zelenka is not the only such link. Among other Czech modern artists who perished in Nazi camps and whose works the visitor might see in Veletržní palác are Emil Fritta, Vojtěch Preissig, and Josef Čapek. The first president of Devětsil, the writer Vladislav Vančura, was one of those shot by the Nazis in reprisal for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich. Jiří Weil, who was Jewish and got the summons to Veletržní palác, escaped by faking death. See Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia*, 228–30.