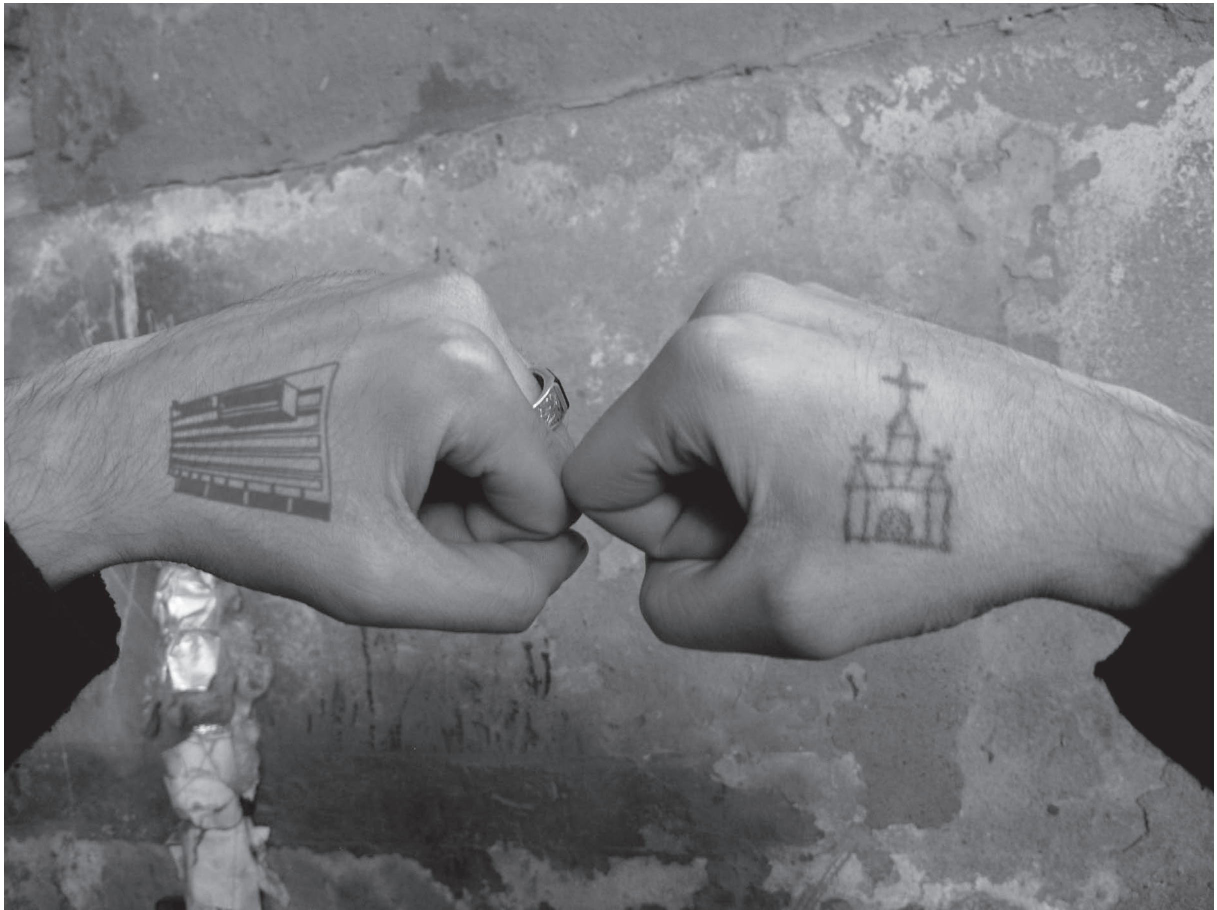

The Specter
of the Soviet Union

This essay began as an enquiry into contemporary art in Eastern Europe—the time of writing being the centenary of the 1917 Russian Revolution (which enabled the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1922). Almost immediately, I was challenged by its definition—what countries make up Eastern Europe today? Looking for such a definition raised as many if not more problems as it did answers.[1] It became apparent that to speak initially of a post-Soviet Europe would be more useful as a beginning. The reason being that the definition of what countries make up Eastern Europe has gone through substantive changes and, to some extent, refinements of definition during the past twenty-five years. Since the end of the Soviet period, this definition has ranged across some twenty-two countries, including what is now referred to as Central Europe and Central Asia.

The first section 'Sovereignty', addresses this issue of mapping an Eastern Europe and the rise of sovereignty. When and how was it first defined? This will lead us back to the Yalta Conference in 1945 that sought to redraw the lines marking the region and make possible a national autonomy in countries that had been under Soviet control. However, it also led to the beginning of the Cold War that would take some forty-five years to end. Eventually, the collapse of the Soviet Union ushered in a new era for Eastern Europe, within which any such discussion included Central Europe insofar as having experienced Soviet occupation or domination, and subsequent liberation.

The second section will look at the 'National' and how it has been defined in the various books and museum exhibitions that have explored contemporary art in both Central and Eastern Europe, its focus on material published since the break-up of the Soviet Union. As noted, added together, these books and exhibitions cover some twenty-two countries but the areas of attention have also changed significantly over the course of this time. The focus of this section is on the different conceptual and theoretical approaches that have been developed more recently, making sense of contemporary art in these countries through a comparative analysis with contemporaneous work elsewhere, while also exploring the 'Inter-local', displacing the international or translational as a concept of analysis.

Such an approach by and large subsumes the national distinction as the means of determining and discussing contemporary art. The idea of the 'national' invokes a prevailing opinion and hence majority of a country's population, the recent English Brexit referendum of 2016 being a good example. National distinctions have served to distinguish one country from another at an international or regional level but, even then, are usually symbolic in nature. Hence the concept of a national pavilion at the *Venice Biennale* is no longer that the art is representative of that country but, rather that the artist has been chosen to *represent* that country, regardless of the artist's nationality.

The local is altogether different. There can be many coexistent local opinions, points of view or ways of doing things that are constituent of and survive in a democracy and have a voice in a larger national forum. In the field of art and culture, the *local* is a means of distinguishing and characterising the particularity of a practice from that of another. This can be then the basis on which to compare with other artists locally, regionally and internationally. These issues will be discussed in relation to recent writings by three authors: Boris Groys, Piotr Piotrowski and Terry Smith.

SOVEREIGNTY

By the end of the 1980s, the fate of Eastern Europe appeared on the verge of irreversible change. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the break-up of the Soviet Union by 1992 and the Balkan Wars leading to the collapse of Yugoslavia and successive independence gained by the former countries of Yugoslavia (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia) through the 1990s, all signalled the end of the Cold War.[2] Yet, the governance and cultures of Central and Eastern European countries in fact, did not radically change. The course of their independence became embroiled in Russia's foreign policy and ambition to assert itself as a regional and global strength. As a consequence, we must acknowledge not only Eastern Europe's historical ties to a Soviet past but to the Russian present.

The recent history of the Ukraine is a pivotal example. Its eastern regions are in an ongoing state of a bloody civil war between pro-Russian and Ukrainian armed forces, as well as Crimea having been annexed by Russia in 2016. These are deeply troubling events and threaten the right to national sovereignty. Recently, the Ukrainian artist, Nikita Kadan, explores this in a work that references the Crimea, once known as a beautiful Ukrainian resort island.[3] With a national flag placed above the artwork, the installation explicitly supports the independence of the Ukraine. In this way Kadan's work directly reminds us of Russia's ongoing aggression against its neighbors, wielding its force again as in the days of the Soviet empire and equally, that the sovereignty of countries remains as fragile as at the end of World War Two.

Addressing the subject of the mapping of Eastern Europe begins with the Yalta Conference in 1945. Seeking to redefine the region and countries under Soviet control, the Yalta Conference sought to lay the ground for a new Europe in which the national sovereignty of much of Eastern Europe was promised. Sometimes called the Crimea Conference, it brought together the three heads of government of the UK, the United States of America and the Soviet Union: Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin respectively, for the purpose of discussing Europe's post-war re-organisation. Convened in Livadia Palace near Yalta in the Crimea, its goal was to shape a post-war peace: the 'Declaration of a Liberated Europe'. The signed declaration pledged, "the earliest possible establishment through free elections governments responsive to the will of the people." Such a promise would allow the people of Europe "to create democratic institutions of their own choice."[4] This peace, it was hoped, would represent not just a collective security order, but also a plan to give self-determination to the liberated populations of post-Nazi Europe.

Germany would be divided into zones of occupation and Stalin agreed to permit free elections in Eastern Europe. At the same time, Stalin demanded both USA and British recognition of a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and postwar economic assistance for Russia. The Soviet Union would join the nascent United Nations, insisting that each of the fifteen Soviet Republics be given a seat. However, only three countries—Belarus, the Ukraine and the Soviet Union were included. Stalin, in return, agreed to enter the Asian war against Japan, for which he was promised the return of land,

in particular Manchuria, lost to Japan in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05.[5] There is very little that survived the initial promises made between these countries. Stalin was to break his pledge given to Churchill and Roosevelt. Instead of allowing the people to establish their own form of governance, the Soviets actively *encouraged* Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and other neighbouring countries to each construct a Communist government.

Whether one believes Roosevelt conceded Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union or that Stalin simply took it, it has remained under Soviet and Russian sphere of influence to this day. Averell Harriman, Roosevelt's Secretary of Commerce, remembers that Roosevelt "didn't care whether the countries bordering on Russia became communised."[6] It is only in recent years that these countries have been named. The post-1945 maps of Eastern Europe left unmarked those countries east of Central Europe and the Black Sea, including those that make up the North and South Caucasus—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Chechnia, Dagastan and Georgia. This anomaly raises the persistent question of how do we define Eastern Europe? Re-drawing the maps and, in particular, rethinking the reality of a post-Soviet history demands a recognition of each of these country's local cultural histories and traditions, as well as their shared histories.

THE NATIONAL

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, various books and exhibitions have explored contemporary art in those countries that were once part of the USSR. As already noted, these books and exhibitions cover some twenty-two countries, including for some writers and curators Central Europe, based on an understanding that many of those shared with Eastern Europe the experience of Soviet occupation or domination and subsequently, a period of post-Soviet liberation. The varying options in approach by cultural historians and curators are significant. For some museums and writers, it has been determined by nation, recognising the formation of independence from the Soviet Union. In the wake of independence, this was particularly important politically and socially. It gave people a sense of their distinction and relative autonomy. Others projects were organised and presented through interlocking themes/subjects/concepts and grouping artists from across Eastern and Central Europe, in some cases, across international lines.

One of the first post-Soviet exhibitions was *After the Wall: Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe,* curated by Bojana Pejic and David Elliott and held at the Modern Art Museum in Stockholm in 1999.[7] Through an exhibition, symposium and catalogue, the project presented twenty-two countries of the former Eastern bloc and newly independent states (NIS), focusing on the period from the mid-1980s until 1999. The curators write that *After the Wall* focuses on this period, marked by many dramatic political and cultural changes in Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union. *Perestroika*, the shattering of the Iron Curtain, the end of the Cold War, the foundation of new states and their progress towards democracy, the reunification of Germany, ethnic cleansing and the Balkan and Chechen Wars all marked this time within the post-totalitarian landscape.

The exhibition and catalogue were organised under four sections: Social Sculpture, Re-inventing the Past, Questioning Subjectivity, and Gender-Scapes. Two catalogue essays were by Bojana Pejic and Piotr Piotrowski[8]—Pejic's 'The Dialectics of Normality' astutely raises the problems associated with the geographic division associated with being 'Eastern European', but equally of being considered as autonomous, while Piotrowski's 'The Grey Zone of Europe' critiques the "centralist character of globalisation and multiculturalism" and its pervasive influence. In its place, he seeks to characterise, through the work of some Eastern European artists, not with a universalist approach

based on a Western modernist concept, but rather around a trajectory of conflicting directions, or a "critical geography", as Irit Rogoff was to define it.[9] Shortly after, in 2000 Rogoff published *Terra Infirma*, in which she articulates her use of the term (elaborated in her earlier essays), "critical geography".[10] She looks at contemporary art in the context of living in a "post-colonial, post-communist world", writing, "Critical activity which locates geography as its field therefore pursues an active form of unnaming, renaming and the revising of such power structures in terms of the relations between subjects and places."[11]

Rogoff explores the "links between, first, the dislocation of subjects, the disruption of collective narratives and of languages of signification in the field of vision, and second, an epistemological inquiry which stresses difference rather than universal truth."[12] With these issues in mind, she looks at contemporary art as part of a "situated knowledge" (a term coined by Donna Haraway some years earlier), and not through a universalist or nationalist lens.[13] As Rogoff writes, this framework enables her to address the "current reality of living in a post-colonial, post-communist world, a world in which the subject of the migrant has made us recognise that the issues of national borders, of belonging and identity are in crisis."[14]

In 2002, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York published *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook of Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*.[15] In some respects, this book followed the model of the earlier and invaluable series *Documents of Twentieth Century Art* (originally edited by Robert Motherwell). Tacitly, the book acknowledged the far-ranging diversity of modernism in Central and Eastern Europe after World War Two, with a strong emphasis on Russia as well to the Balkans, the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia), Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Clearly, these countries share in common historical relations to the Soviet Union era and post-Soviet Russia. However, the reasons for its geographical focus on countries west of the Black Sea remain obscure; missing from the book was an account of art practices in the many countries that lay east of Central Europe. Perhaps, it can be accounted for by the overbearing impact of Russia's continuing control and its lack of recognition of the independence of the Ukraine, Bulgaria and countries of both the North and South Caucasus.

In 2005, three years after the *Primary Documents* book, Piotrowski published *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe 1945-1989*[16] which engaged Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Yugoslavia, with 'forays' into Bulgaria. Reminding its audience of the importance of the Yalta Agreement, Piotrowski proposed that the geographic and spatial character of Eastern Europe is, as Michel Foucault had argued "an essential plane for the relations of power".[17] Foucault had written in another context that to deconstruct the relations of power embodied in space, involves not only dividing but also a crossing of borders. Piotrowski uses this idea as the basis upon which to include the eastern part of South Europe as well as Eastern Europe. Piotrowski notes that his book is a comparative analysis in which a "diachronic dimension is therefore established through several synchronic samples."[18] On this basis, his argument establishes a more equal and comparative exchange than that proposed by the 'globalisation argument' or the line of enquiry that has explored modernity as a plurality of modernities, including both minor and repressed. The author's caveat is, nevertheless, that the type of art produced in these countries differs between each other because the communist systems were "different... sometimes contrary [in] character and intensity."[19] Such an approach, sensitive to these country's specific histories and their current relationships with Russia, is vital to understanding the complexities of these particular countries. Georgia is such an example, having resisted two Russian invasions in the past twenty years. Having inherited a Soviet infrastructure, it

wavers between impoverishment and economic stability. As such, Georgia seeks to develop greater access for Europeans, a tourist industry and forms of exchange with other countries across Eastern and Western Europe. All this is seen as vital to its independence, livelihood and growth. Georgia is also a country where many of its finest artists have left to live and work in Western Europe in order that their work be seen and collected. If the concept of a cultural ecosystem incorporates the question of survival, then Georgia is a good case in point.

In 2007 *Afterall* journal published *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, the result of their long research project on Eastern Europe.[20] Edited by the Slovenian art group IRWIN and introduced by museum curator Charles Esche, the voluminous book consists of essays on contemporary art in eighteen countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Essentially, the book stays with national divisions in the post-Soviet era with a focus on particular artists and artworks; the only exception being the final essay 'The Post-Soviet Condition' by eminent cultural historian, Susan Buck-Morss who writes of a universal condition; "we are all in *this* time that is both transient and universal; we share the same contingent history."[21] She then cites an unpublished manuscript by Helen Petrovsky who notes "a human community (or collective) in the making", a "transient social present and 'the shock of non-similar similarity'."[22]

The following year, the Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci in Prato held the exhibition *Progressive Nostalgia*, curated by Viktor Misiano. Dedicated to contemporary art from the former USSR, the exhibition covered eleven countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Krgyzstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia and the Ukraine.[23] It thereby expanded both the MoMA and Piotrowski books to include certain Caucasus countries, and two from Central Asia: Kazakhstan and Krgyzstan. In the introduction, Misiano writes that there is a larger problem at the heart of the matter. He notes, "History is... a drama and a utopia that is today becoming a strategy of resistance... The more authoritarian and corrupted that the ideology stabilisation becomes the more the practice of cynicism and ironic deconstruction (the strategy of resistance that was practiced back in the Soviet years) becomes filled with liberated meaning."[24]

In *Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, edited by Phoebe Adler and Duncan McCorquodale in 2010, presented six essays and some fifty-six artists from sixteen countries, of whom twenty-five are from Poland and Russia.[25] The editors note the artists are chosen based on the "account of their reputation on the international contemporary art scene". They go on to observe, "The work is subsequently arranged by medium, rather than country of origin, paying testament to the fluidity of borders and geographical regions that the book looks to highlight, and furthering creative discussion through the juxtaposition of artist's nationalities and works."[26]

Shortly after, Terry Smith published his book *Contemporary Art*, offering an alternative critical model through which to tackle the contentious issue of distinctions made on the basis of geography.[27] In his introduction, Smith argues that "the contemporary" or "contemporaneity" are quite distinct from "the modern". Drawing on Etienne Balibar, Smith notes Balibar's idea of translation as, "The showing of that which is shared, that which is different, and that which is untranslatable in all spheres of life... Alertness to multiplicity and difference has been and continues to be, at the core of contemporaneity."[28]

In 2014, the exhibition *Fragile Sense of Hope* opened in Berlin. Its ambition, as stated by the organisers, was to "invite visitors to contemplate the fragility of Europe's many private and public hopes."[29] It included artists from the Balkans, notably Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosova, Macedonia, Albania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and the Ukraine.

The modern social and cultural history of the Caucasian countries was and remains not so different from others, such as the Ukraine or Romania. There had been equally vital avant-garde movements, even though their respective, unfolding histories were distinct in regard to the presence of the Soviet Union and the Cold War.[30] As noted earlier with Georgia, many artists only live occasionally in their countries of origin, preferring to produce and exhibit their work primarily in Western Europe. Hence, a writing of their histories cannot be adequately mapped within the context of their country of birth, nor country in which they live. The 1990s was a period of tremendous hardship for Georgian people and contemporary art had begun to change. A new generation of artists emerged but many subsequently left to live and work in Europe. A good example of this was the 2016 exhibition *Here There: Matters of Location, Contemporary Georgian Art* at Karvasla, Georgian National Museum[31] which included the artwork of Mamuka Japaridze, focusing on the subject of an imagined utopia and dystopia, and Lado Darakhvelidze, who explored the competing national histories of the region by using texts and images drawn from local student textbooks. For some of these artists, their work engaged aspects of the cultural history and traditions of Georgia. For most participating artists the sense of materiality was tied to installation practices, allowing them to combine both an international language of form with the specificity of the local. For example, Sophia Tabatadze's wall and curtain installation captured the power structures dividing the European region, and Tamar Chabashvili, whose work utilised the traditional blue tablecloth used by Georgian women, to develop a broader dialogue about women's everyday lives.

A regional perspective is another response to moving beyond the local without negating it. This was the aim of the exhibition *Across the Caucasus*, finding a common language between artists while addressing local issues, and including one artist from each country: Taus Makhacheva (Dagastan), Aslan Gaisumov (Chechnya), Vajiko Chachkhiani (Georgia), Ali Hasanov (Azerbaijan) and Vahram Aghasyan (Armenia). I wrote at the time that the exhibition sought to present,

> …*the differences of their cultural heritages and current day condition. Their recent heritage was of course, determined by the Soviet era during which they were made subservient to Soviet rule. But this has changed, and the landscape of their countries has reasserted its presence with, at times, an ironic twist. Marks and indelible traces can be found in their black humor or wry ironies that reflect the condition of contemporary life in the Caucasus. The exhibition shows objects and videos that poignantly capture a life coming out of darkness, pending an unknown future.*[32]

THE INTER-LOCAL

This final point of focus, on the different conceptual and theoretical approaches underlying some of the books and exhibition projects highlighted in the previous section, moves beyond the national and addresses the inter-local (distinct from the inter-national) as the organising concept around which to look at and evaluate contemporary art not only from Eastern Europe but rather, those post-Soviet Union countries—and this means also Central Asia—that remain outside the sphere of influence of and exchange with Western Europe.

ГРАМОТА
amber

This approach by and large subsumes the national and regional distinctions as the means of determining and discussing contemporary art. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, writers were beginning to look more closely at the concept of the *global*. Hans Belting had argued that contemporary art is global by definition, "engaging with the issues important to the whole world, while its critique aims at the processes which shape the present time everywhere. Consequently, what is local has become global."[33] While true, I would give pause to a global perspective without recognising its co-option into a global cultural economy and employing some means of differentiation informed by the recent and current political framework that has defined Eastern and Central Europe.[34]

Until recently, Eastern Europe had been neither defined by geographical nor social reasons but rather, first and foremost, by political and economic factors. This was critical in distinguishing features of post-Soviet countries as distinct from Western European culture and art. For many of these contemporary artists, geography is a highly charged term, at one time, *nation-bound*. However, national distinctions are understood as no longer the basis of comparison, but a point of reference. At the same time, we can no longer base our reading on a universalism that was the underlying principle of modernism. As Piotr Piotrowski notes, this was oriented around the "centre-periphery distinction and constituted a vertical and revisionist history of art", hence raising issues of locality and difference. He likened this approach to Edward Said's characterisation of orientalism. Moreover, reflecting on the "global turn" in the humanities, Piotrowski observed in 2008 that the type of locality related to the structure of nation states and the modernist form of nationalism "is now changing on account of the process of globalisation", specifically with "the transformation of nation-states into more cosmopolitan organisations."[35] In its place, Piotrowski proposed a horizontal approach, rather than a universal reading of contemporary art.

Despite his enthusiasm at the time, Piotrowski was still hesitant to accept that *locality* had disappeared as an identity marker. 'The nation' seen from a postmodern perspective is deprived of its essential features. Post-colonial scholarly practice however, relies on the essence of the nation to define its critical strategy and resistance to 'the centre'. Using an international horizontal art history, operating with the notion of 'the nation', there must be a defense of the (national) subject. It is thus closer to the post-colonial interpretation than to the postmodern. In this regard, the concept of geography becomes critical. As Rogoff has written in *Terra Infirma*:

> *Geography is at one and the same time a concept, a sign system and an order of knowledge established at the centres of power... Geography as an epistemic category is in turn grounded in issues of positionality, in questions of who has the power and authority to name, of who has the power and authority to subsume others into its hegemonic identity.*[36]

We can say that the suppressed unconscious of art history, namely, national art histories, was interfering with the idea of a horizontal art history. Ten years ago, the question of nation-building and nationalism seemed a distant and obsolete issue, but much has changed since—the rise of a populist and reactionary nationalism that has turned its back on refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers, or waged political, religious or ethnic repression against others. Poland, Hungary and The Netherlands have seen the rise of right-wing political parties. The genii of xenophobia, hatred and racism have returned. In such a climate the cause for any kind of regionalist, internationalist or universalist approach has been swiftly rejected as irrelevant, if not denounced as threatening to local interests and needs.

The changing political landscape of Europe has additionally altered the rhetoric, urgencies, alliances and agencies of academic discourse. The attempt to apply a regional perspective at a time of pervasive nationalism also reflects Piotrowski's project of subverting the hierarchical position of different art histories by positioning them horizontally. Borders are being closed, but they continue to be crossed throughout the continent. It can no longer be simply the embrace of the national and with it, the sense of national self-definition, but rather the argument for and defense of some form of transnational values.

This position left Piotrowski with two issues. First, the key problem of horizontal art history is the problem of localisation: "We have the 'history of modern art' with no local specification, while on the other hand (outside the centre) we have all kinds (of) adjectives specifying the regional."[37] Secondly, he was conscious of the paradox that equality might come at the price of losing local, and especially national histories, specificities, peculiarities, and subtle distinctions. He writes of the need to recognise local canons and value systems which often contradict those of Western art centres. In so doing one does not produce a single meta-narrative which would adhere to the West-centric, universal, vertical model of art history, but a horizontal, polyphonic, and dynamic paradigm of critical art-history analysis.[38]

Seeking to syncretise the two streams in his vision, he stated that "horizontal art history written from a micro perspective... has to make a critique of the essence of the national subject, has to deconstruct it, in order to defend the culture of the 'Other' against the national mainstream." He developed the solution of transnational, regional art history narratives which negotiate values and concepts along lines other than the opposition between national and international.[39] This changed orientation of the positioning, literally inverted the loci of the region's art history and challenged the centric position of the canon. Piotrowski offered a positive solution as to how to overcome the limitations of binary opposition, juxtaposing the diverse art histories of the centres and margins and placing them on the same level, removing any hierarchical or subordinate relations between them. According to this theory, the necessary act of levelling should be twofold; the manoeuvre of "localising" the centre should go hand-in-hand with an analogue process on the other side, namely, "The Other must also take a fresh look at itself, define its position and the place from which it speaks."[40] In other words, the local becomes the means of and source for distinguishing and characterising the particularity of a practice as distinct from another, by and large, regardless of national boundaries. As if in response, Boris Groys, in his introductory essay, 'Haunted by Communism' to the book *Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, wrote:

> *Can this art be said to possess a distinct character? Is it possible to speak about Eastern European art as a cultural phenomenon that crosses the borders of individual national cultures and unifies, to a certain degree, the Eastern European cultural space—being at the same time distinctive from that of other regions. Indeed, the Eastern European cultural space is extremely heterogeneous... In fact, there is only one cultural experience that unites all Eastern European countries and at the same time differentiates them from the outer world—it is the experience of Communism of the Soviet type.*[41]

Groys continues that for post-Communist artists "the socialist alternative is not only a utopian, idyllic dream project into the future but also a nostalgic and simultaneous traumatic memory of their recent past.[42] In this sense, it is simultaneously utopian and dystopian. Furthermore, many shared an ambivalent artistic attitude of the post-Communist period and used irony to distance themselves from the official ideology.

> *Today the art scene is a place of emancipatory projects, participative practices, radical political attitudes but also a place of memories of the social catastrophes and disappointments of the revolutionary twentieth century. In this context Eastern European art plays an important role because the revolutionary past is its own past. Just as the demise of Eastern European Socialist regimes left a vast territory and resources for private appropriation, the simultaneous death of Socialist humanity left a vast empire of feelings, a huge emotional estate released for individual artistic appropriation.*[43]

Groys goes on to discuss the emergence of the Western art market and commercialisation and commodification of Eastern European art as the result of the Cold War, characterising the latter as "post-Communist art". This, for him, is the only way to speak of art from these countries as a whole, over and above specific national identities. As a result, socialism's legacy is that the avant-garde in the East has not been charged by utopian perspectives. Rather, it has primarily worked from a collective perspective, as distinct from the individualist characteristic of the West. Moreover, this avant-garde was founded and functioned in a transgressive, non-academic manner, venturing into uncharted territories, innovating and challenging the status quo and creating different life conditions.

One may ask why Groys avoids including Central Asia in this summary of a post-Soviet condition. In fact, it is clear that the same conclusion can be applied to countries such as Kazakhstan or Krygystan. If we study the past three generations of Kazakh artists, there has been an increasing shift away from a Soviet ambit and ideas towards individuality. Young contemporary Kazakh artists align themselves with Western artists in spirit where their personal lives and experience are more important than the idea of a collective or national identity. Moreover, they don't seek to establish some link to their past or traditions of the land or popular culture. This is why too, Misiano includes Central Asia, recognising the post-Soviet experience as the defining principle rather than only Eastern Europe in understanding the character of contemporary art in all those countries once controlled and defined by the Soviet Union, and Russia. As he writes, "history (is a) drama and a utopia that is today becoming a strategy of resistance... The more authoritarian and corrupted that the ideology stabilisation becomes the more the practice of cynicism and ironic deconstruction (the strategy of resistance that was practiced back in the Soviet years) becomes filled with liberated meaning."[44]

Terry Smith in *Contemporary Art* proposes an alternative critical model through which to tackle this issue of the local/national/international.[45] As noted earlier, Smith argues that "the contemporary" or "contemporaneity" are quite distinct from "the modern". But this does not mean that it is an even playing field or, that every country is on the same economic or socio-cultural footing and is therefore comparable with one another. While citing Piotrowski's work on Poland, Smith does not discuss the author's elaboration, first proposed in 2008, of the concept of "horizontality". Piotrowski was pointing to the clearly perceived need to shift positions as defined in the late 1990s, from defining a specific space for the region to placing it in a critically nuanced global perspective.[46] Piotrowski's concept of horizontality accommodates the concept of "contemporaneity", providing a comparative means of evaluating contemporary practices. The promise of the "now-time" of "a human community (or collective) in the making... of (a) non-similar similarity" lies before artists of both Eastern European and Central Asian countries.[47] And yet, the chronic lack of a local infrastructure, of resources and support for contemporary art in almost all these countries needs to be recognised as issues to overcome in order to make possible their cultural development. It is, if nothing more, the reason why artists of these countries work in, if not move, to Western Europe or elsewhere and, why the critical value of "horizontality" remains an unrealised promise.

Notes

[1] See Éva Forgács, 'How the New Left Invented East-European Art', *Centropa* Vol. 3, No. 2, 2003, pp. 93-104

[2] In 2003 the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel held the exhibition *In the Gorges of the Balkans: A Report*. Its focus was exclusively the Balkans and hence is not discussed in this essay

[3] Nikita Kadan has made a series of work using the Ukrainian flag, included in the exhibition *From the Shores of the Black Sea*, September 2016. See *From the Shores of the Black Sea*, *Contemporary Art Gallery*, Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi History Museum: 2016, pp. 48-51

[4] See Yalta Conference; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yalta_Conference

[5] Soon after the Conference, Roosevelt died, to be succeeded by Harry Truman, the Cold War began, Stalin died in 1953, and successive Russian governments followed

[6] Harriman served Roosevelt as special envoy to Europe, and as the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union and Great Britain

[7] *After the Wall: Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe*, Bojana Pejic and David Elliott eds, Stockholm: Modern Art Museum, 1999

[8] *After the Wall: Art and Culture in post-Communist Europe*, ibid. See Bojana Pejic, 'The Dialectics of Normality', pp. 16-28 and Piotr Piotrowski, 'The Grey Zone of Europe', pp. 35-41. Piotrowski's essay was later republished in *Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010, pp. 199-206. There were other catalogues and books published during these years on the subject of East European art not discussed here. I have confined myself to Western languages including translations. See for example, Attila Melegh, *On the East-West Slope*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006

[9] Piotr Piotrowski, *Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, ibid.

[10] Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000. Here we should mention Edward Soja who developed the concept of a critical geography more broadly applied in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London: Verso, 1989

[11] Ibid., p. 21

[12] Ibid., p. 12, xiii

[13] See 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' in Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, New York: Routledge, 1991

[14] Irit Rogoff, op cit., p. 20

[15] *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook of Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002

[16] Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe 1945-1989*, London: Reaktion Books, 2009. First published in Poland in 2005 and later in English

[17] Piotrowski, ibid., p. 15. See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge, Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Colin Gordon (ed.), New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. See also *Foucault and Space, Knowledge and Power, Foucault and Geography*, Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden eds, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2007

[18] Piotrowski, op.cit. See Fn.16, p. 9

[19] Ibid.

[20] *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, IRWIN (ed.), London: Saint Martin's College of Art and Design, 2007. The essays devoted to individual countries were first published as a part of *Afterall* journal in 2002

[21] Susan Buck-Morss, 'The Post-Soviet Condition', *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ibid., p. 498

[22] Ibid. Helen Petrovsky, unpublished manuscript. Petrovsky is a Senior Research Associate in the Department of Analytical Anthropology in the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy, Moscow

[23] *Progressive Nostalgia: Contemporary Art from the Former USSR*, Prato: Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci, 2007

[24] Viktor Misiano, 'Progressive Nostalgia', ibid., p. 12

[25] *Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2010

[26] Foreword, *Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, ibid., p. 7

[27] Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, London: Laurence King, 2011

[28] Etienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe: Reflections on Transitional Citizenship*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 115

[29] *Fragile Sense of Hope – Art Collection Telekom*, me Collectors Room/Olbricht Foundation, Berlin, Germany, 10 October–23 November 2014. The exhibition was curated by Nathalie Hoyos and Rainald Schumacher, and organised in conjunction with me Collectors Room/Olbricht Foundation

[30] If we consider Georgia as one of the key countries of the Caucasus that has time and again resisted Russian domination, then we might also look at its history over the past one hundred years. See my essay 'Redrawing East of the East,' *Contemporary Art Gallery*, Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi History Museum, 2016, op.cit., pp. 11-16

[31] Ibid., pp. 53-70. See also Khatuna Khabuliani, 'Between Art and Contexts', ibid., pp. 21-23

[32] Ibid., pp. 70-90, and for my introduction, p. 70

[33] See Hans Belting, 'Contemporary Art and the Museum in the Global Age', *Contemporary Art and the Museum: A Global Perspective*, Peter Weibel and Andrea Buddensieg eds, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007, pp. 16-38. Also Hans Belting, 'Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate', *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums*, Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg eds, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009, pp. 38-73

[34] Anthony Downey has written recently an excellent critique of the cultural economy of globalisation. See Anthony Downey, 'Future Imperfect: Focus on Visual Culture in the Middle East', published in *di'van | A Journal of Accounts*, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 110-119

[35] Piotr Piotrowski, 'On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History', *Umeni/Art*, Vol. 56, Issue 5, 2008, pp. 378-383

[36] Rogoff, op cit. See Fn. 10, p. 21

[37] Piotrowski, 'On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History,' op.cit., p. 381

[38] Ibid., pp. 378-383

[39] Ibid.

[40] Edit Andras, 'What Does East Central European Art History Want: Reflections on the History Discourse in the Region since 1989', *Extending the Dialogue*, Berlin/Vienna: Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory ERSTE Foundation/Archive Books, 2016, p. 60

[41] Boris Groys, 'Haunted by Communism', *Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe*, op.cit., p. 18

[42] Groys, ibid., p. 21

[43] Groys, ibid., pp. 20-21. Groys offers as examples the work of the Russian artists Komar and Melamid and Slovenian group IRWIN

[44] Misiano, op. cit. See Fn. 23, p.12

[45] Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, London: Laurence King, 2011

[46] Piotr Piotrowski, 'East European Art Seen from Global Perspectives: Past and Present', Galeria Labirynt, Lublin, Poland, 24-27 October 2014

[47] Helen Petrovsky, op.cit. See Fn. 23