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THE TRANSITION  
OF THE SOROS CENTERS  
TO CONTEMPORARY ART:  
THE MANAGED  
AVANT-GARDE

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CCCK  
CENTER FOR COMMUNICATION  
AND CONTEXT KIEV

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THE TRANSITION  
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In Eastern Europe the phrase “decade of transition” refers to the 1990s, when the countries of the former Soviet bloc went through a series of radical transformations that touched upon almost every aspect of social life. In visual art this transition was manifested in the shift from a socialist cultural model, with socialist realism as the official doctrine and non-conformism as the un-official, to the new Western paradigm of contemporary art. The idea of “contemporary art” was popularized and implemented by a number of Western NGOs, in particular by the Soros Foundation whose autonomous regional program “Soros Centers for Contemporary Art” (henceforth SCCA) was one of the main mechanisms of this transition. The activity of the SCCAs is most usefully regarded using those concepts and postulates that influenced George Soros – the financial entrepreneur who established the Soros Foundation in 1984.

Over the years the main source of inspiration for Soros remained the writings of his distinguished tutor at the London School of Economics, the influential liberal thinker Karl Popper. The name of the managerial group that coordinated the work of his foundation, the Open Society Institute, points to one of Popper’s best-known works of social theory – the “Open Society and Its Enemies.” The book (first published in 1945) postulated that an open society is a society based on the notion of fallibility, a society where truth arises from an ongoing negotiation between the people and the state through the institutions of civil society that help mediate this process. But an open society cannot fully emerge until the “enemies” of this open society are disposed of. In Popper’s book those enemies are four philosophers whose social thought has contributed to the emergence of authoritarian and totalitarian “closed societies.” The latter are ruled by ideologues who, among other things, believe that the laws of history can be known and understood, and that once they are, the machinery of history can be tuned to accommodate the needs of humankind. According to Popper, such a mistaken teleology inevitably leads to totalitarian politics and to a form of social “tribalism.”

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1 Popper, Karl, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, [Golden jubilee edition] (London: Routledge, 1995). p 260

These ideas, presented here in concise form, became some of the main principles in the agenda of the Open Society Institute. Transferring the concept of open and closed societies to the activities of its SCCA program, one may say that the term “contemporary art,” which these centres popularised in the former socialist countries, stood for the new Western cultural model of the open society. Contemporary art, often regarded as the true successor of the classical avant-garde, was called upon to replace the closed societies’ outdated and ostensibly bankrupt ideals of socialist realism, concerned as they were with a truthful depiction of the process of the domestication of history. The SCCAs, which had opened throughout the 1990s in almost every post-Soviet country and in some former republics of the USSR,<sup>2</sup> were instruments of a transition to a new cultural model, a model formulated on a different understanding of society, of history and of truth. But unlike socialist realism, whose origins and principles have been rigorously studied in both West and East, contemporary art still remains a somewhat mysterious phenomenon, not only in Eastern Europe, where the SCCAs began to implement it, but also in the West, where it originated.

But before one can start a discussion of the possible origins of this new model within the context of Eastern European art in the nineties, one must first explain the concept of “transition.” Why was this concept so popular, even indispensable, for the language of art criticism, of the curatorial and managerial rhetoric of the nineties? How did the concept of “transition” enter the vocabulary of the SCCA officers and march hand in hand with contemporary art? Why were the SCCAs making a transition to “contemporary art” and not to any other kind of art? And why, after 1989, did the non-conformists (the cultural dissidents) begin to be called contemporary artists? Although I cannot completely account for the complexity of these questions in this short space, in the next pages I will suggest some starting points from which an investigation might begin.

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2 Since the early nineties the Soros Centers for Contemporary Art, was a network consisting of twenty-one art centers that has expanded geographically and ideologically from Prague to Alma-Aty. “The first SCCA was established in Budapest by the Soros Foundation Hungary in 1985. In 1992, two additional SCCAs were opened in Prague and Warsaw, and in 1993–94, the network expanded to a total of 16 SCCAs located in 15 countries. By 1998 there were 20 SCCAs located in 18 countries... The SCCAs are open art centers. They maintain information on international grants, scholarships, arts programs, exhibitions and other events. ...The SCCAs support artistic experiments which broaden the aesthetic borders of visual culture.” Quoted from the “SCCA Network” (brochure) published by the Open Society Institute Budapest, 1998.

## TRANSITOLOGY

The word “transition” is unavoidable when one attempts to understand those processes in which most of the former socialist countries were caught up during the 1990s. The popularity of this concept in the region was precipitated, in part, by a new and influential academic and political paradigm known as “transformation studies,” or “transitology.” This discourse followed from the modernisation theories of the late 1940s, which had dominated the political and social sciences during the period of so-called “embedded liberalism.” Transitology uses the concept of “transition” to examine and support a tendency that has evolved in the world politics of the second half of the last century — namely, the fall of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, and their transition to the Western democratic model.<sup>3</sup> Within the social sciences transitology emerged as a new area of research when it broke with the discipline of Area Studies (set up in the late 1940s) as well as with Soviet and Comparative Communist Studies (established at the beginning of the Cold War). Shortly thereafter, the new discipline transcended its purely theoretical nature. In the hands of Western governments transitology became a foreign policy tool used to promote democratic and market reforms in the countries of the Second and the Third World. In its two hypostases (as pure academic discipline, and as practical policy-making) transitology became instrumental in implementing a series of radical political and economic transformations in the post-authoritarian and post-totalitarian states, which may explain why the word “transition” acquired such a special significance especially at the peripheries of the Western world.

The idea of transition is not a strictly political one. Richard Koselleck links the concept of transition to the notion of “epochal threshold” (*Epochenschwelle*) and traces the origins of this concept in the German language through the end of the eighteenth century — for Koselleck, the true beginning of modernity, when a new historical consciousness arose with a new understanding of lived time. This is “epochal consciousness” — an awareness of living in a transitional period, when “history no longer takes place in time, but rather through time.”<sup>4</sup> A transitional stage is experi-

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3 The influential texts that set the path for the new paradigm are: Rustow, Dankwart A., “Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics* 2, no. 3 (1970): 337–63. O’Donnell, Guillermo A. et al., *Transitions from authoritarian rule. Tentative conclusions about uncertain democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

4 See Koselleck, Reinhart and Todd Samuel Presner, *The practice of conceptual history; timing history, spacing concepts* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002) p. 165

enced simultaneously as an end and as a beginning — between an “afterward no longer” and a “beforehand not yet.”<sup>5</sup> Transitional time is like a hinge that lacks an ontological basis of its own; it exists only because it is a point of connection between times understood as past and as future.

Politically one may find the roots of the idea of transition in the concept of progress, at least as some apologists of the European Enlightenment understood it. The Marquis de Condorcet — reflecting at the end of the eighteenth century on the future of progress — expressed this idea in the following rhetorical question: “Will all nations one day attain the state of civilisation which the most enlightened, the freest and the least burdened by prejudices, such as the French and the Anglo-Americans, have attained already?”<sup>6</sup> Perhaps it would have pleased Condorcet to know that two hundred and fifty years later his vision would re-emerge (not in the interrogative but in the indicative mood) to state the main task of the new paradigm of transitology: “The basic premise is self-evidently normative and linear: that the values, structures and political procedures of advanced Western democracies are the most developed and should be transplanted [to the rest of the world].”<sup>7</sup> Transitology thus became a theoretical and practical tool that helped to assure a smooth transition to the ideals of the Western open society; in short, progress for the non-Western world.

But before reaching the final destination a country must pass through the final stage of transition, which in the terminology of the discipline of transitology has been described as “consolidation of democracy,” “post-transitology,” or “normalisation.” Those who reach this stage are countries that can assure a peaceful transfer of power, have developed a number of institutions of civil society, and have fully embraced an economic model based on free-market relations. Ideally this would amount to what Foucault calls a continuously operative process of normalisation, as when he describes the network of power and knowledge that controls society through surveillance and examination in accordance with developmental norms.<sup>8</sup>

As in other transitological regions of the world, in Eastern Europe, throughout the 1990s, this “neo-liberal discourse of radical reform”<sup>9</sup> became a new ideology. It quickly installed itself in the vacuum left after the collapse of Marxism-Leninism, and its working postulates (directed primarily at politics and economics) soon reached into the domain of art and culture, altering not only pre-established artistic and aesthetic conventions but changing also the social status of art in the post-communist society. While in such fields as politics and economy this doctrine has been recognized and accepted from the very beginning as a legitimate discourse — prompting some scholars to call for “the

end of the transition paradigm”<sup>10</sup> — by contrast, in art no analysis has been done on the importance of the notion of “transition” and the impact of transitology. The effect of this paradigm on art, however, was significant. Many individual changes within art resemble the pattern of political and economic reforms to such a degree that one may infer the existence of a “cultural transitology” — a hidden managerial agenda that monitored and implemented reforms in the field of culture.

One of the first points on this agenda was the transition to a Western artistic model, and this was one of the main tasks of the SCCAs. One can set a parallel and compare the role of the SCCA network with that played by such active participants in the process of transition as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. While these international organisations have been concerned in such fields as economics and politics with various aspects of social transformation — disputing such issues as the conversion of planned economies into free markets, or the dissemination of liberal democratic values at the expense of other political doctrines — the SCCAs dealt mainly with the emancipation of art and culture from the ideological, political and economic control of the state. On the aesthetic level this transition was manifested in the attempt to break with the doctrine of Socialist Realism, with its aesthetic and ideological principles; artists were encouraged to work with new media whereas art historians were to write new art histories, which would evolve around the narrative of the formerly suppressed non-conformism. Economically the SCCAs provided expertise for developing local networks of Western-styled private and corporate art institutions capable of accommodating to the logic of the free market. After escaping the ideological and material control of the state, the centres were to help local artists adjust to a new order, devoting a good part of their efforts to cultural management and fund raising.

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5 Ibid. 155

6 Condorcet, Marquis de, “The Future Progress of the Human Mind,” in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin Books, 1995). p. 27

7 Hughes, James, “Transition Models and Democratization in Russia,” in *Russia after the Cold War*, ed. Mike Bowker and Cameron Ross (Harlow, England; New York: Longman, 2000). p. 21

8 See Foucault’s account of normalisation in Protevi, John, *The Edinburgh dictionary of continental philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005). p. 152

9 Bonker, Frank et al., *Postcommunist transformation and the social sciences: cross-disciplinary approaches* (Lanham, Md.; Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002). p. 5

10 Carothers, Thomas, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002): 5–21.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

## CONTEMPORARY ART

The models that transitology implemented in economics and politics have been discussed frequently. Authors have written about the rise of neo-liberalism, its history, and its influential political and economic theories.<sup>11</sup> The cultural model of contemporary art, however, in the name of which the SCCAs carried on the neo-liberal cultural transition, is more obscure. It needs to be stressed that today there is no literature addressing the questions of when, how, why and where contemporary art emerged, and why this art was called contemporary. It is only in France (one of the crucibles of “modern art”) where, in the recent decades, a curious debate called “the crisis of contemporary art” emerged and persisted.<sup>12</sup> But unfortunately the French debate with its array of pros and cons has more of the character of a speculative dispute lacking in those historical details according to which one might understand the model towards which the SCCAs strived. And since a transition is always a transition *towards* something, it may be helpful to have a more clear idea of this model. In my attempt to find a point of departure for the category “contemporary art” and for the institutional model “center for contemporary art” I would like to propose two historical test cases: that of the International Society of Contemporary Music, and that of the Boston ICA, both of which may serve as points of departure for such an inquiry.

In order to be able to talk about “contemporary art” at all one needs always to keep close at hand the expression “modern art,” for the two form a very special relation. A discussion around the origins of “contemporary art” would start from the Anglo-American context where the expression emerged at the end of World War II. The first Institutes of Contemporary Art, as we know them today, were launched in the UK (London ICA, 1946) and USA (the Boston ICA, 1948). Before WWII the expression “contemporary art” was also used sporadically to name artist associations, galleries or publications, but then the phrase did not have the same systematic character that it would acquire after the war, first naming key art institutions, then spreading gradually to become a new global institutional model. It may not be accidental that the term “contemporary” became part of a series of debates (in art and also in music) around the time that “modernism” emerges as a consolidated discourse.

Critical theorists have often referred to the term “modernism” in order to draw attention to a break that took

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12 On the French “crisis in contemporary art” see Michaud, Yves, *La crise de l'art contemporain: utopie, démocratie et comédie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997). Michaud, Yves, *L'art à l'état gazeux: Essai sur le triomphe de l'esthétique* (Paris: Editions Stock, 2003). Sourgins, Christine, *Les mirages de l'art contemporain* (Paris: Table ronde, 2005).



place after WWII — a break that could be also be described as a threshold between modernism and postmodernism. The latter terms are labels that have been used to broadly periodise Western culture. What Fredric Jameson calls the “ideology of modernism,” or “modernism as ideology” is not contemporaneous with the “modern” artistic movements (to which Jameson also refers using the term “high modernism”) but is a belated product, an American invention that emerged after World War II.<sup>13</sup> It was after 1945 that Western culture entered into a new phase and many of those critics who noticed these changes coined terms to describe the processes involved. For Marcuse it was “affirmative culture;” Horkheimer and Adorno spoke about the “culture industry;” later generations of critical theorists spoke of the “institutionalisation of modernism” (Jameson, Eagleton),<sup>14</sup> the “domestication of modernism” (Huysen),<sup>15</sup> and “administrative” or “managerial aesthetics” (Buchloh).<sup>16</sup> These terms refer to a historical process that began in the 1930s but which was fully implemented only in the decades following WWII. Institutionalisation, domestication, administration, and management, in the way that the words are used by these authors, refer to a series of strategies of containment of Western art and culture. In other words, they suggest a way of keeping under control the political activism and the social and aesthetic utopias that were at the heart of the classical avant-garde. Among the signs and results of committing the political impetus of modern art to the past was the emergence of a new type of art institution (the Museum of Modern Art), the development of a series of theories of modernism and of the avant-garde, the appearance of a series of art publications which had the goal of bringing some order into the proliferation of the “isms,” and last but not least, the growing demand for works of “modern art,” which led to the expansion of a large-scale art market.

Once “modern art” was consigned to the museum and to the discipline of art history there emerged an urgent need to create a model for a new institution, a new body that

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13 Jameson, Fredric, *A singular modernity: essay on the ontology of the present* (London; New York: Verso, 2002). pp. 164–165

14 See Eagleton, Terry, “Capitalism, Modernism, Postmodernism,” in *Against the grain: essays 1975–1985* (London: Verso, 1986).

15 Huysen, Andreas, “Mapping the Postmodern,” *New German Critique*, no. 33 (1984): 5–52.

16 Buchloh, B. H. D., “From the Aesthetic of Administration to Institutional Critique (Some Aspects of Conceptual Art 1962–1969),” in *L'art Conceptuel, Une Perspective: 22 Novembre 1989–18 Février 1990*, (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1990).

17 For debates around the term “contemporary” and “modern music” see for instance Kanitz, Ernest, “Today’s Music Teachers and Today’s Music,” *Music Educators Journal* 36, no. 4 (1950): 15–17. Gordon, Philip, “Rehearsing Contemporary Music,” *Music Educators Journal* 37, no. 1 (1950): 38–40.

would deal with the current art. It was at that moment in history that the adjective “contemporary” surfaced to escort the noun “art” in the names of the first institutions that proposed themselves as the new model. But this shift towards contemporaneity did not signal a change only in the field of twentieth century fine or visual arts. In music, for instance, musicians and musicologists debated in the journals of the fifties the difference between “modern” and “contemporary music,”<sup>17</sup> and historians in various Western countries talked about the need to make a clear distinction between “modern” and “contemporary history.”<sup>18</sup> In the United States some works of social and political theory that were published in the late fifties insisted that the term “contemporary society” was only applicable to the United States and to Canada,<sup>19</sup> and in Britain, in the sixties, social theorists launched in Birmingham the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies<sup>20</sup> in order to investigate “contemporary culture and society.”<sup>21</sup>

In art the term “contemporary” came to define not only the recent art (and those artists who were alive)<sup>21</sup> but also a new way of managing this field, and one of the main signs of this re-organization was the advent of the figure of the art manager. I would like to describe further the circumstances in which emerged one of the first Institutes of Contemporary Art in Boston, Massachusetts, which may provide a hint as to the origins of the new model.

On the relation between Modern and Contemporary art, Christine Sourgin writes:

*“The cultural cauldron is an appropriate metaphor to think about Modern and Contemporary art. Let’s imagine our cultural cauldron boiling: the more one heats it, the more*

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18 For various traditions of modern and contemporary history see Koselleck, Reinhart and Todd Samuel Presner, *The practice of conceptual history: timing history, spacing concepts, Cultural memory in the present* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002). p. 155 Woodward, Llewellyn, “The Study of Contemporary History,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 1 (1966): 1–13.

19 See for instance Morison, Samuel Eliot, *Freedom in contemporary society*, [1st ed. (Boston,; Little, 1956). Gabriel, Ralph H., “Book Review ‘Freedom in Contemporary Society’ by Samuel Eliot Marison,” *The American Historical Review*, July, 1957.

20 Hall, Stuart, *Culture, media, language: working papers in cultural studies, 1972–79* (London Birmingham, West Midlands: Hutchinson; Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies University of Birmingham, 1980).

21 But this is not to say that intellectuals in other countries were not concerned with contemporaneity. Even in the Soviet Union during the process of destalinization the more liberal art critics proposed that a reform in the arts should be carried out under the banner of the so-called “contemporary style” [sovremenny’ stil’]. See Dmitrieva, N. “K Voprosu O Sovremennom Stile.” *Tvorchestvo*, no. 6 (1958): 9–12. See also Reid, Susan Emily. “Destalinization and the Remodernization of Soviet Art: The Search for a Contemporary Realism.” Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1996.

*the liquid burns up and becomes troubled. Let's say this represents Modern art. Then, with one more dose of heat, the liquid becomes vapor, which becomes Contemporary art.*"<sup>22</sup>

I would like to keep Sourgins' cauldron close at hand while telling the story of the Boston ICA, for this institution was not launched from scratch but remade, as it substituted one adjective in its name for another. On February 17, 1948, two top officers of the Boston Institute of Modern Art released a provocative statement, in which they announced their intention to change the name of their institute to the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art (henceforth ICA). In this statement the managers explained their decision in the following way:

"Modern art failed to speak clearly... the characteristics of a few inspired innovators were so distorted by others less competent, and their real contributions so debased, that there emerged a general cult of bewilderment. This cult rested on the hazardous foundations of obscurity and negation, and utilized a private, often secret, language which required the aid of an interpreter."<sup>23</sup>

Those signing the *Statement* also accused "modern art" of abusing artistic expression, of exploiting art for the purposes of propaganda, sensationalism, double-talk, and chicanery. They stressed that the expression "modern art," which had simply denoted the art of our times, had come to signify for millions something unintelligible and even meaningless: "it has become both dated and academic."<sup>24</sup> Under the new name the managers of the Boston ICA proposed the following set of goals: 1) to narrow the inevitable gap which existed between the artists and the public, by means of conscientious and forthright interpretation; 2) to attempt to distinguish good from bad, sincere from sham, and perceptive from obtuse art by proclaiming "standards of excellence which the public may comprehend," 3) and to help the artist resist some of the excesses of modern art (e. g., world chaos and social unrest) and to encourage instead a clear affirmation of truth for humanity and a culture able to counteract the trend toward "world dissolution." Finally, the directors called to cease judging art "in terms of an intellectual revolution which, from all indications, appears to have been brought to a close by the outbreak of war in 1939," promoting instead a culture that draws on both experiment and tradition. The final paragraph of the *Statement* I will quote at length:

"Our endorsement will take the form of exhibition, publication and, where possible, the effective integration

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22 Sourgins, *Les mirages de l'art contemporain*. p. 11 (translation mine)

23 Institute of Contemporary Art (Boston, Mass.), "[Statements]," (1948).

24 Ibid.

of art with commerce and industry. In order to give full emphasis to these objectives, and in order to disassociate the policy and program of this institution from the widespread and injurious misunderstandings which surround the term “modern art,” the Corporation has today changed its name from The Institute of Modern Art to THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART”<sup>25</sup>

The signatories of the *Statements* chose February 17<sup>th</sup> — the day that, in 1913, New York hosted the Armory Show, ushering modern art into America — in order to announce in 1948, the arrival of another cultural paradigm: contemporary art. Two years later (in 1950) the ICA Boston released another official paper, a manifesto entitled “Modern Art — 1950.”<sup>26</sup> ICA Boston’s two parental institutions — the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Whitney Museum of American Art — joined forces, and brought the number of signatories to seven, releasing what may be regarded as the first art managerial manifesto.<sup>27</sup> The year in the title of “Modern art-1950” is as imposing as a grave marker, suggesting the abrupt end of Modern art. But in fact it announces a new way of perceiving, organizing and containing art. It is a managerial statement that suggests that art must be administered, managed, and controlled like any other form of production.

Both statements provoked a public debate within the U. S. art establishment. Bard College (New York) took the initiative and summoned a cohort of art educators, from several private liberal art colleges located on the East Coast, soliciting them to comment. Most of the commentators were critical of both the substitution of the adjective “modern” for “contemporary,” and of the arguments offered. Some criticised the Corporation’s<sup>28</sup> apparent intent to discourage artists’ political engagement, arguing that it was perhaps too early to claim that the year 1939 was the terminal point of modern art, and “that the artist can now relax in the bosom of a Contemporary Faith Unmilitant;”<sup>29</sup> others saw a danger in the Institute’s liberal proposal to set a new standard of excellence at the level of the general public’s comprehension, suggesting that “perhaps this august body might more convincingly porter their cumbersome princi-

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25 Ibid.

26 See Plaut, James S. et al., “Modern Art — 1950,” *College Art Journal* 9, no. 3 (1950): 338–40.

27 The manifesto was signed by James Plaut, Frederick S. Wight, (ICA, Boston), Rene D’Harnoncourt, Alfred H. Baar, Andrew C. Ritchie (MoMA, New York) and Hermon More, Lloud Goodrich (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York). Ibid.

28 The word: “Corporation” refers to MoMA and the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York) — the parental institutions of the Boston ICA.

29 Stefan Hirsch et al. “From Bard College” in Institute of Contemporary Art (Boston, “[Statements].”

ples under the name «Institute of Popular Art» – for such would seem to be their objectives;<sup>30</sup> still others condemned the top-down institutional model and the attendant restrictions on the artist.<sup>31</sup> Debates and comments over the substitution of the adjective “modern” for “contemporary” kept appearing in the US press over a number of years.<sup>32</sup> The Boston ICA in the meantime – re-organised and with a new managerial and cultural strategy – organised shows sticking to the principles that had been put forward in the *Statement*. In the meantime, *Art Digest* reported that in Frankfurt a society called “German Friends of Contemporary Art” had been formed, setting itself the task of familiarising the local artists and the public with American art by distributing American art magazines, as well as informing other countries of the progress in German art.<sup>33</sup>

### INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSIC (ISCM) 1922

The story of the emergence of the Boston ICA may be one point of departure for re-constructing a genealogy of the model of the “contemporary art center” that the SCCAs implemented in the nineties. According to the Boston ICA scenario, with the process of the institutionalisation of modernism entering its late phase in the second half of the forties, there arose an urgent need to develop an institutional model that could safeguard post-WWII visual artists from the aesthetic and political extremism of their avant-garde predecessors. But there may also be another version of this narrative, one that begins in the same geopolitical region where the first SCCA was established in the mid eighties in Budapest.

In music the expression “contemporary music” was known among some musicians and their small but elite public long before WWII, and this was due first of all to an international society founded in Austria in the early twenties. The International Society of Contemporary Music (henceforth ISCM) was a network launched in Salzburg that soon opened branches in other European capitals.<sup>34</sup> As in the case of the Boston ICA, the initiators of the ISCM announced the new network by substituting the adjective

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30 Albert Mullen et al. “From Goddard College” Ibid.

31 Paul Feeley et al. “From Bennington College” Ibid.

32 See “Modern Into Contemporary,” *Newsweek* 31, no. 9 (1948). Lawrence, Dame, “Regarding Boston,” *Art Digest* 24, no. 13 (1950), “News Reports,” *College Art Journal* 7, no. 3 (1948): 226–54.

33 Hofer, Karl, “German Friends of Contemporary Art Seek U. S. Material,” *Art Digest* 25, no. 2 (1950): p. 11.

34 The seat of the ISCM was established in 1922 in London and its name has been used since then mostly in English. The German section of the newly organized ISCM was formed in Berlin on 17th of October 1922. The first festival of ISCM opened on August 2nd 1923 in Salzburg. Slonimsky, Nicolas, *Music since 1900*, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1937). pp. 230–37

“contemporary” for “modern” in its title.<sup>35</sup> The story of this enduring four-letter acronym (for the ISCM is still active) is the following: at a meeting held after the conclusion of the first International Festival of Modern Music in Salzburg (1922) it was decided to form an International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM). “[The society] was conceived as a network of independent national organizations that shall draw to itself all those interested in new music, that is to say contemporary music, regardless of tendency.”<sup>36</sup> Logistically the ISCM set their main objectives towards a widened exchange of information (books, periodicals, music scores and programmes), in short anything that might help spread the knowledge of contemporary music. In addition it was decided that the newly formed ISCM would organize each year a Festival of Contemporary Music in different European locations starting from 1923 with Salzburg.

One might say, comparing the program of the 1923 festival of Contemporary Music to the preceding 1922 festival of Modern Music, and surveying the ideological and aesthetic disparities between the two, that the cauldron of modern music had come to a boil and released its steam in the form of the contemporary. In 1922 the Modern festival program enlisted such composers as Richard Strauss, Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Béla Bartók, whereas the 1923 program, now contemporary, opened its edition with a new work by Alban Berg, followed by a work of Arnold Schoenberg. What first appears different in the program of the contemporaries from that of the moderns is that the majority of those present in 1923 were composers who had adopted or had been influenced by Schoenberg’s twelve-tone technique, along with Schoenberg himself. Music theorists would later use the opposition hierarchy/homogeneity to describe the differences between the modern and the contemporary techniques of music composition. The former has been described as being a hierarchical system, for here the work is submitted to the logic of the central tone in the same way that the musicians in the orchestra obey the orders of the conductor.<sup>37</sup> The Schoenbergian twelve-tone technique, which steps forward as the epitome of contemporary music, is regarded as an absolute solid structure, a totality, which obeys only its own immanent laws.<sup>38</sup> The difference between the two kinds of music has also been expressed in more political terms: “With contemporary music it will be found that

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35 The Germans and Austrians renamed the *Internationale Gesellschaft für Neue Musik (IGNM)* into *Internationale Gesellschaft für Zeitgenössische Musik* substituting thus *Neue* (modern) for *Zeitgenössische* (contemporary). Ibid. p. 228

36 Ibid. pp. 228–9

37 Gordon Philip “Rehearsing Contemporary Music,” *Music Educators Journal* 37, no. 1 (1950): 38–40. p. 40

38 On the aesthetics of twelve-tone music see Theodor Adorno and Robert Hullot-Kentor *Philosophy of new music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2006)

more democratic procedures produce better results. In a piece of contemporary music we are all exploring together.”<sup>39</sup> The above quotes are from the debates that took place on the pages the *Music Educator* (USA) and *Tempo* (UK) in the fifties, when some musicians insisted that the difference between “modern” and “contemporary music” could be compared to those between authoritarianism and democracy. Thus contemporary music, which uses a technique in which all twelve tones are given equal importance, is proposed as a model of democratic music, in the same way in which contemporary art promoted by the SCCA network in the nineties was suggested to be the art of the democratic open society.

The two networks share not only the same geopolitical birthplace, both emerging and spreading on the ruins of what was once the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with ISCM originating in Austria, and the first SCCA implemented sixty-three years later in Hungary. These two networks also share, across a time span of seven decades, almost identical objectives and goals.

#### **ISCM Network “Plan” (1922)**

- 1) “In each country either an existing body, or one to be created for the purpose, shall draw to itself all those interested in new music, that is to say contemporary music...
- 2) These national organizations pledge themselves to mutual aid by the transmission of information, of books, of music, of programmes, and of anything further that appears likely to spread the knowledge of contemporary music.
- 3) There will be an annual Festival, provisionally at Salzburg. Wherever it takes place, it will be under the control of the ISCM”

#### **SCCA Network “Mission” (1998)**

- 1) “...The SCCA Network supports the development and international exposure of contemporary art in Eastern and Central Europe, the countries of the former Soviet Union and Central Eurasia as a vital element of an open society...
- 2) ...The SCCA Network links all the SCCA offices, facilitates communication exchange and information exchange between them, offers educational opportunities and professional training network-wide, and promotes artistic collaboration throughout the region.
- 3) Most SCCAs organize an annual exhibition of local contemporary art and offer grants for the local artists...”

The goals of both ISCM and SCCA<sup>40</sup> are: 1) to promote contemporary art or music 2) to exchange information among its members 3) to organize an annual festi-

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39 Gordon Philip “Rehearsing Contemporary Music,” *Music Educators Journal* 37, no. 1 (1950): 38–40. p. 40

40 For the ISCM “Plan” see Slonimsky, *Music since 1900*. pp. 228–9 For SCCA “Mission” see Soros Centers for Contemporary Art Network Annual Report, (1998).

val or exhibition. It seems as if the SCCA network has adopted the same three-point plan set by the ISCM committee in 1922. Moreover, the layout of the annual budget of each of the twenty SCCAs was structured according to these three main objectives. There were three major lines of expenditure: there was first an implementation budget for administration, which included public relations and the promotion of the idea of contemporary art. Secondly, there was money for documentation and information, which was spent building databases and creating comprehensive documentation of local artists in order to help them connect with the major hubs of the international art world. This line of the budget also included publication of catalogues, subscriptions to major contemporary art periodicals, and the exchange of information with other centers. Finally, a third line of budget was dedicated to the main event of the year — the SCCA Annual Exhibition and its copious catalogue.

Could the ISCM's "Plan" set in 1922 have somehow served as a framework for the annual budget of the SCCA network in the 1990s? Could the three-step program of a Society, the ISCM, have turned into a budgetary device of an institution introduced from abroad as an instrument of transition? The organisational principles of the ISCM, after all, resembled those of a community of artists united by common aesthetic and political beliefs, like many other artists associations that emerged before and after WWII, or like the non-conformists of the sixties and seventies who formed artistic fellowships (*tussovkas*) at the margins of the official Soviet culture. How might one formulate the relationship between the activities of a society of musicians and, seventy years later, the strategies of those registered non-governmental entities that administered visual art through a grant distribution apparatus constructed within the limits of each country's internal taxation and fiscal regulations? And finally, following all this, is it possible to propose the SCCAs' budget and mission as an example of that institutionalisation, administration, and domestication of modernism—that managed avant-garde, the model of which could have been provided by the Boston ICA?

## CONCLUSION

The differences between the ISCM, on one hand, and the Boston ICA and the SCCA, on another, point to a shift that occurred in the last century in the field of art production. In Popper's words this process may be described as a transition from the authoritarian personalism of the closed societies towards the institutionalism of the open society. The "impersonal institutions," which act indirectly within a clearly pre-established legal framework, are better suited for



large-scale democratic politics.<sup>41</sup> One could transpose this dichotomy to culture and say that most of the modernist artist associations were indeed “personalized institutions”, gathered as they were around the shining charisma of various distinguished artists who directed the initiative from within these communities outward. After the war, with the increased influence of corporations and the increased administration and control of every aspect of social life, the dynamics of artistic production were increasingly channeled through the contemporary art center controlled by the impersonalized figure of the art manager, curator, agent, and producer — a figure that, as in the entertainment industries, now oversees the politics of art.

One of the more dramatic effects of transition can be observed in those countries where it was enforced by right-wing military regimes. In some countries of South America, where in the seventies under the slogan of “transition to democracy” military juntas implemented free market regulations, artists and writers accounted for these historical processes by discussing in ample detail the “art of transition” and the new neo-liberal cultural model.<sup>42</sup> In Chile, for example, sociologists, philosophers, artists, and art critics have been debating the results of transition for more than two decades, describing it in terms of a capitalist or a counter-revolution (Tomas Moulian) or suggesting that, under the banner of transition to democracy, tasks have been accomplished which, earlier in the century, might have been enacted by the modernist avant-garde. These include the critique of representation, the radical assault on established codes of signification, and the endorsement of the exception that suspends the norm (Willy Thayer).<sup>43</sup>

In Eastern Europe, where the transition to new models, codes, and forms of representation cannot compare in its intensity and dramatism to the transition in Chile, so far artists and writers have been reluctant to start a critical appraisal of the cultural transition of the nineties and its major mechanisms. One of the main reasons for this is that the origins and the main features of the contemporary art model in the name of which the cultural transition took place are still enveloped in clouds of obscurity, even in the places where this model has originated. And because a transition, as a hinge between two phases or eras, lacks an ontological basis of its own, one begins to understand it by first understanding those phases, those before and those after, that compose it.

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41 Popper, Karl, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* p. 126 and 360

42 See for instance Masiello, Francine, *The art of transition: Latin American culture and neoliberal crisis*, Latin America otherwise (Durham N. C.; London: Duke University Press, 2001).

43 See Thayer, Willy “El golpe como consumacion de la vanguardia” *Extremoccidente*, no. 2 (Año I): 54–58

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## SPEAKING OF A GAP CAN CAUSE DOUBLES

CCCK  
CENTER FOR CONTEXT  
AND COMMUNICATION KIEV  
A project by Ingela Johansson  
and Inga Zimprich  
With Sönke Hallmann

The Center for Context and Communication Kiev (CCCK) was founded in August 2006 in Kiev, Ukraine by Ingela Johansson, Volodymyr Kuznetsov and Inga Zimprich. Its intention has been to brainstorm on the history and perspectives of the Center for Contemporary Art, Kiev (CCA) by means of a publication, exhibitions and debate. Since the current CCA Kiev is one of the former Soros Centers for Contemporary Art, we focused in particular on the relation between artistic production and its financial stakeholders. Gradually the CCCK came to extend its research towards other former Soros Centers, amongst which include the former SCCA Odessa and K:SAK Chisinau.

During the 1990s, twenty-two Soros Centers for Contemporary Art (SCCA) were established in twenty countries in eastern and central Europe and in central Asia. Coinciding with a turbulent political period, the newly founded art centers established a model of how contemporary art could be produced and exhibited. Equipped with ample budgets, the SCCAs asserted procedures of organising, managing and promoting contemporary art. In several countries the art advocated by the Soros centres came to replace the formerly state-promoted socialist realism. Previously unacknowledged non-conformist positions were accorded to the status of the contemporary artist, helping to establish the contemporary art centre as a site of critique, provocation and exchange. Though culture has played only a minor part in the entirety of George Soros humanitarian programmes, values assigned to the arts in contemporary democratic society play an important role in the underlying concept of the open society, and are underpinned in today's European art funding schemes.

Within the current phase of the CCCK project we have come to focus on those procedures of

managing art inherent to the SCCA and their normative influence on artistic production. The development of curatorial concepts, annual exhibitions, publications and art management training mark a professionalisation of the arts sector in several countries of Soros activity. Next to establishing artist documentation, fostering local audiences and artistic production, the circulation of its products amongst the SCCA network and international presentations have been part of the SCCA's uniform mission.

With this also politically connoted set of relations embodied by the Soros Centers of Contemporary Art we may ask to what extent the restructuring of the field of visual arts influences what we would term here as 'social' or 'cultural literacy'. 'Literacy' in this sense could refer to our culture's ability to relate to the recent past, as much as its culture of memory, or its possibilities of critique and expression. Within the system of showing and exhibiting we comply with the complex rules that determine that which may eventually gain visibility and appear as readable cultural text. Within the contemporary art centre or museum, and making use of the Soros Art Centers network as an exemplar, we are able to watch the institution's own progressive writing.

Aiming to address that language at work in the contemporary art institution, its administrative procedures and logics such as that of exchange, archiving and documentation, it was however unforeseen how much our focus would apply to our own articulation as artists.

In Speaking of a gap can cause doubles we have withdrawn from the idea to represent one or several Soros Art Centers and their productions. Instead we aim to assemble a series of gestures which amongst each other might unfold a space inviting further enquiry into the modes of institutionalisation.