

The aim of the project is to investigate archival practices of the neo-avant-garde in Central-Eastern Europe. Specifically, my research aims to investigate the term “avant-garde archive” in itself, by tracing unconventional approaches to legacy recording during the 1960s and 1970s.

The project will explore new approaches to defining the relationships between avant-gardes and institutions. In his influential volume, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), Peter Bürger notes how in the past vanguard artists destroyed institutions and refused all connections with them. However, my initial research has indicated quite the opposite; in fact, I argue that artists were constantly creating avant-garde schools (such as the Bauhaus, the Vkhutemas or the Műhely), offices (such as the Bureau of Surrealist Research), as well as galleries and museums (such as the Kabinett der Abstrakten, the First International Dada Fair or the Museum of Art in Łódź). According to Bürger, Marcel Duchamp’s critique of museums is a universal model; however, even the few examples listed above reveal how many complications arise when considering the case of avant-garde institutions.

The principal objective of the project is to undertake a detailed examination of Central-Eastern European legacy-keeping institutions in order to investigate the term “avant-garde archive” as an alternative to the model of relationships between avant-gardes and institutions as outlined by Peter Bürger. Selected cases will be compared and contrasted in order to answer the following research questions: How do we define an “avant-garde” archive? How has avant-garde art changed the way in which archives are formed? What is the functionality of documenting experimental art which is, by definition, against norms, traditional historical narrations and conservative institutions? What type of theoretical exchange concerning archives are visible between Eastern-Central European avant-gardes in their archives established in the 1960s and 1970s?

The term “avant-garde archive” is understood here to mean an institution, in a similar way to schools, offices, galleries and museums, one which embodies avant-garde ideas in its organisational principles and which presents a new model for the distribution of archival materials. In order to demonstrate how archives achieved vanguard goals or employed experimental aesthetics within collections, I will analyse the topologies of selected archives (their structures), as well as the life-writing experiments stored in such institutions and the theoretical manifestos which accompanied the establishment of such archives. My fundamental research hypothesis suggests that neo-avant-garde artists, art curators and collectors employed vanguard legacy as a platform with which to challenge conventional institutions and traditional representations in history. In so doing, they reflected on the relationship between experimental art and archives, as well as on subversive documentation, historical storytelling and unconventional art institutions.

The project employs a chronological framework that encompasses the 1960s and 1970s, thus revealing the enterprises that were established decades prior to the proliferation of “the archival turn” in humanities during the 1990s (Stoler 2002), and the subsequent outbreak of experimental, so-called, “archival art” in the 2000s (Callahan 2022, Foster 2004). On the one hand, I situate my project within the context of these trends, as they have significantly affected not only my own research field, but the wider humanities in general, fundamentally altering the foundations of contemporary analytical methodologies and the scope of usefulness of archival sources in both the arts and sciences. On the other hand, the project’s temporal framework is justified by the significant increase in avant-garde institutions established in Central-Eastern Europe in the late-1960s and subsequent years (Grůň 2018). Limiting the scope of the project to a particular region arises from the broad discussion on the differences between artistic output by Western and Central-Eastern European avant-gardes (Piotrowski 2009, 2011, Kemp-Welch 2018, IRWIN 2006, Szczerski 2018).

The methodological foundation for the current project will be both the modern approaches to archival heritage (“life writing studies”), as well as the “cultural history of avant-gardes”.

The main output of the proposed project will be a monograph in English, which will present the final results of the research. It will hopefully have a significant impact on both avant-garde and archival studies, since it will encompass a wide and varied range of examples, as well as demonstrating an innovative approach towards the overall history of neo-avant-gardes.