Modernist Architecture and Nationalist Aspiration in the Baltic
Two Case Studies

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Modern art developed comparatively late in the eastern Baltic, and then with a variety of meanings, political purposes, and national references different from those to be found elsewhere in western Europe and the Americas. Shaped by specific historical events and determined by distinctive local interests, Baltic modern art and architecture of the early twentieth century was charged with a national mission to reflect the political aspirations of the emergent new states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. That it was the role of artists and architects to articulate and promote a national self-image for both domestic and external political purposes is significant. An assignment of such social, political, and aesthetic magnitude necessarily transformed the role and responsibilities of the modern artist and architect, just as it reconfigured the reception of modernism among its multiple audiences.

Accordingly, the methodologies one embraces to comprehend the meanings, roles, and consequences of Baltic modernism need themselves to be interrogated. And though this essentialist questioning necessarily builds on recent scholarship, its enterprise must extend beyond the limitations of the present article. Nevertheless, it is in this context of rethinking the approach to Baltic developments that the modernist enterprise itself might well be reconsidered. Thus, this endeavor signals more than an extension and examination of the charged practices of modern art to the Baltic. By focusing on the function of architecture in the newly established republics of Lithuania and Estonia during the years following World War I, one can realize two objectives. The first is to understand better how Baltic modern art was employed domestically to articulate a national self-image, and how it was simultaneously implemented internationally to signal the respective nation’s democratic and republican progress. The second is to comprehend these complementary national and transnational functions in order to further an effective model by which to investigate the deeper structure of modern art generally. In other words, mapping Baltic modernism—its objectives, limitations, and reception, as exemplified in Lithuania and Estonia—can reorient and deepen the methodological pathways by which modern art itself might be seen to have been a far more complex, more diverse, and more creative enterprise than conventionally perceived. Through examining developments on the periphery of Europe, as a number of recent studies have done,² one can begin to understand modern art’s inconsistencies and contradictions as authentic virtues rather than shortcomings, as original and valid characteristics rather than as departures from the “true path” that a number of the now canonical twentieth-century modernists powerfully advocated.

Context
The historiography of modernist art and architecture has been decisively shaped by the original ideologues of the modern movement itself. Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, El
Lissitzky, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, J. J. P. Oud, and their confederates from Russia to California advanced a totalizing theory through which to give shape to a new world—and a new humankind to inhabit. Whether overtly metaphysical in their thought or pragmatically materialist in their means, these makers of classical modernism shared a profound belief in the authority of a modern style through which to signal visually the moral, social, and political idealism that undergirded their projected utopia. Thus, one finds in the “progressive” design theory of the 1920s a fixation on rationality, hygiene, and economy as an antidote to the tragic conditions, spiritually and materially, in which Europe found itself in the post–World-War-I era. By means of a style that exemplified and promoted clarity, transparency, and economy, the pioneers of modernism posited a new system of transnational values. With conviction in the moral imperative of these virtues, and in the ability of modern art to incarnate them, the classical avant-garde proclaimed in print and on drafting boards its absolute faith in the style and methods of modernism as essential to global salvation.

This conception of absolute authority—what Antony Kok called in the inaugural issue of De Stijl (1917) “a coagulation of universality”—dominated the critical reception of modernism, and even defined what constituted progressive visual culture, through most of the twentieth century. Not until the 1970s did scholars (and practicing architects) begin to reconsider the originary pronouncements of Gropius, Le Corbusier, Mies, and the Russian avant-gardists, who were themselves only rediscovered in the West in the mid-1960s. Even with the reassessment of modernist claims to universality, the precepts that inspired the design theory of the “machine age” continued to carry enormous popular currency. One need only make a cursory review of twentieth-century art historiography, visit almost any museum of modern art, attend a university introductory art history lecture, or consult most of the post–World War II art history survey texts to become aware of the pervasiveness of this unitary, let us use the shorthand term “Bauhaus,” vision. Yet, by yielding so easily to this single, totalizing perspective, as many recent art and architectural studies have demonstrated, we close ourselves off from a fuller understanding of modern art’s archetypical richness, its creative complexity, and the remarkable inventiveness that flourished outside the canons promulgated by the mandarins of Dessau, Moscow, New York, Paris, and Rotterdam. However, by looking at classical modern art and architecture with a broader perspective, a less restrictive focus, and a more heterogeneous methodology, we may not only better appreciate the unique creativity that flourished on the margins of industrialized Europe, but also reclaim the notably broad foundations of modern art generally. It is within this larger, more inclusive context that the following analysis of modern architecture in the Baltic republics of Lithuania and Estonia might best contribute to the current investigation of less–often–studied sites of modernist invention, as well as further the contemporary reconsideration of modernism as a whole.

Lithuania

For Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the tremendous destruction wrought during the years of World War I extended into the following decade. Civil strife among contending political, ethnic, and national groups, as well as intensive battles with German Freikorps, Russian Bolshevist, and—for Lithuania—Polish irredentist armies, completed the material devastation and social dislocation initiated in 1914. Only around 1920 were all three Baltic states able to consolidate their respective independence. Yet, national emancipation entailed more than a political undertaking as each new republic endeavored to establish cultural sovereignty as well. In the latter civil enterprise, native artists and architects assumed consummate responsibility. To fulfill this national mission, painters, sculptors, designers, and architects creatively negotiated between domestic traditions and foreign expectations, local conditions and international acceptance. Although all three new states shared similar recent histories and faced parallel contemporary challenges, each pursued a singular path in addressing them. Moreover, each country differed sharply from the others in regard to the social practices of modernist aesthetics. Of the three, Lithuania and Estonia pursued the most disparate solutions.

Lithuania became functionally independent in July 1920 on the withdrawal of Soviet Bolshevist regiments from Vilnius. But within months, an invasion of Polish forces overpowered the infant Lithuanian Republic and occupied much of its territory. The Lithuanian government was thus compelled by military force to retreat from Vilnius, the nation’s ancient cultural center and newly established political capital, and, with the greatest haste, to establish a provisional government in Kaunas, some one hundred kilometers to the west. Acknowledging these historical events is crucial to understanding the role of culture—and architecture in particular—in creating a national self-image at a time when the very existence of the new republic was in peril.

In 1921, through an arbitrated settlement brokered by the League of Nations, a Polish–dominated State of Central Lithuania was established with Vilnius (in Polish, Wilno) as
its capital. Dispirited and materially handicapped by the loss of Vilnius, the diminished Lithuanian Republic was under tremendous pressure to assert its legitimacy internationally and to confirm its cultural viability domestically. To achieve this twofold task, so essential to Lithuania’s survival, the
government relied heavily on architecture to construct a public image, as well as to house the bureaucratic organs of the imperiled state. But to accomplish such a monumental task, the embattled republic could draw on only the most modest material resources. The treasury was without funds, and provincial Kaunas itself had few buildings suitable for accommodating the needs of a national government. The solution, dictated more by prevailing conditions than by freedom of choice, was to shape profoundly Lithuanian interwar architecture and modern aesthetics.

Whenever possible, existing buildings were adapted to current governmental needs, less to affirm ideologically the rather modest architectural heritage of provincial (and comparatively culturally impoverished) Kaunas than to house physically the necessary organs of a national state. Thus, with few local historical models deemed worthy of emulation, and in the absence of a compelling ideological imperative for referencing them, it is more important to note here the new buildings that were designed during the first dozen years or so of the short-lived Kaunas-based republic than to discuss the modest indigenous heritage that was mostly ignored. However, the present narrative might best begin paradoxically with a building that was not constructed or even seriously planned: a state parliament by which to signal to potential foreign supporters Lithuania’s dedication to liberal republican principles. Whether because Kaunas was to be only a provisional capital or because of a crisis of political will, the government elected to channel its scarce funds toward consolidating its cultural wealth rather than investing heavily in a representational state capitol. That is, instead of building a monumental parliament as had been contemplated elsewhere in east-central Europe and had actually been realized in Budapest less than twenty years earlier, the embattled political state focused on Lithuania’s cultural capital by commissioning a national art museum (and shortly thereafter an art school) through which modern Lithuanian culture could be shown, created, and honored. The need for a symbolic home for Lithuanian art in Kaunas was of signal importance as so much of the national heritage remained in Polish-occupied Vilnius. Thus, a museum that focused on a modern artist, rather than on a historical collection, might emphasize the republic’s future rather than its lost past.

The strikingly radical and richly symbolist work of the painter-composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911) perfectly suited the current requirement. The artist’s reputation abroad as a pioneer of new forms of transcendent imagery, tending toward abstraction, made him attractive to Lithuanians, whose contingent of progressive artists was quite limited, especially as several of the most internationally recognized—foremost among them Vytautas Kairiūkštis (Witold Kajrećztyśis; 1890–1961)—elected to remain in Vilnius. Moreover, Čiurlionis’s accomplishments as a pianist and an innovative composer, perhaps more widely appreciated than his achievements in the visual arts, made him an ideal figure through which to celebrate the many-sided native talent and modern creativity. Born at the moment of Lithuania’s “national-awakening” movement, Čiurlionis had grown up with a keen interest in reviving native historical, musical, and especially linguistic consciousness—concerns manifested visually in an art that drew on the musical rhythms of folk music and various landscape elements (Figure 1). Within three years of his death in 1911, his highly abstract visual vocabulary of musical tones, forms, and references was celebrated as a Lithuanian national treasure. Moreover, his tragic death (as a consequence of mental illness) just before the outbreak of World War I would prove timely for nationalist purposes. Safely and romantically removed from the contemporary life struggle of the new republic, Čiurlionis fulfilled the need for a modern national icon, one whose personal biography corresponded closely to the cultural conditions of the nation during the last decades of the nineteenth and the first decade of the twentieth century. As a consequence, nationalists campaigned actively to reclaim the artist’s visual legacy (then in

Figure 1 M. K. Čiurlionis, Fugue (from the diptych Prelude and Fugue), tempera on paper, 1908
Dubeneckis's museum for the nation celebrated progressive native genius, while preserving and presenting it within a traditional framework.18

By the end of the 1920s, Lithuania’s national survival was relatively secure; the resulting confidence in the state and its institutions enabled the government and particularly its growing commercial classes to manifest faith in the future by embarking on a remarkable program of building, most often in a style that superficially conforms to international modernism. The Central Post Office (Figure 3) by Feliksas Vizbaras (1880–1970), whose employment of a tripartite façade would become a dominant feature of Kaunas’s version of modernism, relies on locally available materials—granite for the portal and exterior stairs, and a profuse use of wood on the interior—for reasons more of economy than of national ideology.19 Indeed, as political realities made trade with neighboring Poland and Soviet Russia difficult at best, and as the expense of importing building materials from farther afield was prohibitive, the Republic in Kaunas relied on its own resources and freely acknowledged its limitations. Thus the capital development drew on native materials and employed the limited construction technology readily available regardless of building type or use. As a consequence, an impressive number of multistoried apartment houses were built on speculation, though sometimes with government support, in order to accommodate the significant number of bureaucrats, store owners, and middle-class “refugees” who moved to the provisional capital in order to serve the state. Designed by

Figure 2 Vladimiras Dubeneckis, Čiurlionis Gallery, Kaunas, Lithuania, 1924

Russia) and to bring it to Kaunas. And once a large body of Čiurlionis’s work was secured for the state following the war, Vladimiras Dubeneckis (1888–1932) began designs for a commemorative hillside museum and art school (Figure 2).17

It is important to note the contrast between the modernity of the art and the intentionally classicizing character of the architecture, for this visual discrepancy encapsulates the general architectural program of Lithuania during the 1920s. To reassure a worried citizenry of the stability, as well as the legitimacy, of the state, official architecture often drew on classicism, especially when the activities housed by the building had a thoroughgoing modern currency. Thus,

Figure 3 Feliksas Vizbaras, Central Post Office, Kaunas, 1930–31
many of the nation’s most accomplished architects, such as Vytautas Landsbergis (1893–1993) and Vizbaras (Figure 4), the apartment houses immediately established an architectural norm for multifamily structures in the city: a reliance on local materials and a preference for a tripartite façade. The architects’ predilection for a restrained use of ornament, broad, smooth surfaces, and a rational organization of massing enabled them to conform outwardly to what they must have understood as the precepts of the “international style,” examples of which from Berlin, Prague, Stuttgart, and elsewhere were readily available to them in professional journals imported from Vilnius. Whatever superficial affinity these apartment houses bore to the modern exteriors designed by contemporaneous architects abroad, the kinship did not extend to the construction methods or materials, which conformed almost totally to the local tradition of stucco-covered bricks laid by hand, with wood and stone reserved for interior spaces.

The curves to be seen on the twinned projections of the Post Office (see Figure 3) were particularly favored in Kaunas and have little precedent locally. They were, however, widely embraced in the Kaunas Republic mostly as a means of affirming the country’s innovative variations on international modernism, as evidenced in the apartment house designed by Bronius Elsbergas (1901–1998) (Figure 5). Whether modestly present or more forthrightly asserted, as in the multi-apartment buildings in the new sections of the provisional capital, the use of sweeping curves became a signifier of progressive aesthetics on all fronts—residential, commercial, and governmental. This emphasis on a curving façade is most tellingly expressed in the Hotel “Locarno” of 1923 by Eduardas Pejeris and in the remarkable city firehouse of 1929–30 by Edmunds Frykas (1876–1994) (Figure 6).

These Lithuanian variations on “moderne,” functionalist, or rationalist architecture—to employ the descriptive terms that were invoked in the country’s newspaper reviews, cultural journals, and artists’ statements of the period, though rarely with precision or consistency—presented the viewer with the impression that Kaunas was a cosmopolitan capital, despite its small size and provisional charter. Indeed, the government and its supporters hoped that the Lithuanian citizen, the resident foreign diplomat, and especially the visiting economist or technocrat from abroad might see a Kaunas that could be taken seriously as a capital of a progressive republic, one whose triumph over earlier adversities (foreign invasion, economic privation, and the loss of cultural patrimony among them) deserved both international respect and local support. Yet behind these impressive contemporary façades, tradition still held sway. All too
frequently, the stylistically progressive building fronts hid circulation programs and spatial organization that slavishly followed late-nineteenth-century (or earlier) models, as with a number of apartments designed by Dubeneckis in the late 1920s and early 1930s.26 But historical and ideological bifurcation was rarely recognized by Lithuania’s architects (or their patrons) as a drawback; rather, it was frequently embraced as a creative solution to present conditions—as a way to reconcile nativism and internationalism, the national past and the cosmopolitan present. Perhaps nowhere is this imaginative combination more inventively insistent than in the following two representational buildings: the Lithuanian Army’s Officer Club and the National Museum-cum-War-Museum complex.

Lithuania’s army needed to be alert and prepared, given the country’s recent history and present threats; hence the understandable desire of its officer corps for an urban club (Romovės) near the organs of state they were sworn to defend. Although it is not known whether the army explicitly requested its officers’ club be designed in a modern style, as early as 1930 a commission was awarded for a building whose design would at a single stroke affirm the army’s modernity and its loyalty to the noblest traditions of the nation. Within a few years a rationalist structure, adorned with sculptural ornamentation on its cornice, rose just off the principal pedestrian zone of the new quarter (Figure 7). The three statues crowning the tripartite façade hint at the nativist references that can be found on the interior. The sculptural group by Bronius Pundzius (1907–1959) depicts three medieval Lithuanian warriors from a period when the nation was at its military zenith as a European power.27 Here, the citizen of the young republic—or the visiting delegations of businessmen or the resident diplomats—might recognize in the crowning figures the asserted continuity with the army’s—and the nation’s—most significant historical figure, Grand Duke Vytautas Didysis (Vytautas the Great) (1350–1430), and the era of Lithuania’s glory.28 Those Kaunas residents and visitors to the capital who passed by the Romovės, and especially the Lithuanian military officers who would have entered it under Pundzius’s historical figures, would thus have been afforded a symbolic reminder of the nation’s glorious past, while being exhorted to envision its contemporary resonance.
The combination of exterior rationalism, in the broad planes of the Romocés's façade, and national symbolism, intimated through the sculptural ornamentation, is explicitly presented inside. Proximate to one another are a large functionalist auditorium, projecting cannonlike from the corps de logis, and two private chambers, one housing the “Lithuania Room” (Figure 8), and one containing references to Vytautas the Great (Figure 9). In suggestive juxtaposition, then, are the Lithuanian army's twin orientations: to the fully contemporary and functional, and to the noble native past. Significant, too, for present purposes is the selective embrace of the traditional völkische furnishings, with their national references, within a fully modern framework. The carved and inlaid tables, chairs, and wall decoration of the two dark, private rooms for receiving the nation's leaders contrast with the functionalist design and furnishings for the large auditorium lying just beyond. Here in a capacious, light-flooded hall, Lithuania's officer corps would hold their ceremonies in a contemporary environment where at least the appearance of a rational and economic organization of fenestration, seating arrangement, and flexible stage superseded the nativist design and historical references that were reserved for the private official functions in the nearby historical rooms. For the auditorium on the principal floor, in the fashionable café on a lower level, and throughout many of the other rooms in which army officers and their guests would congregate, work, or relax, nativist design elements were mostly absent, being reserved for the building's most intimate spaces and accessible to only the highest representatives of the land. In the Romocés, it is as if the nation's singular history were protected by and given contemporary currency within the context of a progressive architecture.

A similar paradigm can be found in the history of the National Museum complex. As mentioned above, the original competition plan and the resulting building was designed by Dubeneckis to house the “national art” of M. K. Čiurlionis (see Figure 2). By the end of the 1920s, both an ideological imperative for a larger representational building and the availability of material resources encouraged progressive designs for a multipurpose complex through which to present to the Lithuanian nation and the world a confident cultural self-image. Following a competition, a winning design was submitted by a team comprising, among other leading local architects, Dubeneckis, Karolis Reisonas (1894–1981), and Kazimieras Kriščiukaitis. The realized program (1936–37; Figure 10) contained an art museum, built around the state's Čiurlionis collection; a war museum; and a series of architectural memorials—the entire complex to be dedicated to Vytautas the Great on the five-hundredth anniversary of his death. It is worth noting the program-
matic concept informing this, the most ambitious building in the history of the Lithuanian Republic. First, the size of the project attested to the significance Lithuania placed both on its culture—the art museum—and on the sacrifice rendered to safeguard it—the war museum and the monuments commemorating native heroism. The architectural focus on the nation’s modern culture—and its defense—required an inventive design program, one that unified disparate viewpoints. The large planar surfaces of the façades, which are bracketed by rectilinear arcades below and flat, stepped roofs above, attest to the architects’ interest in the rationalist architecture of contemporary Italy and Germany, examples of which they knew primarily through reproduction in professional publications that circulated among Kaunas’s intelligentsia. The museum’s internationally contemporary exterior, akin to the Lithuanian Officers’ Club (see Figure 7), houses both historical references and modern artifacts. Although physically separated in different wings, the modern painting collections and the treasury of historical weapons, sculpture, and mementos from the nation’s valorous eras are powerfully juxtaposed. Within the multipurpose building, as in the Officers’ Club, the visitor can easily move—literally and metaphorically—between past and present, between heroic heritage and contemporary international aspiration. It was the singular achievement of Lithuania’s modern architecture to give shelter and form to the nation’s self-image—a bifocal vision of the indigenous and the international, of the historical and the contemporaneous.

**Estonia**

Unlike Lithuania, Estonia had no tradition of national greatness to draw on or to which to make explicit reference. There was no Estonian counterpart to Vytautas the Great or to the triumphant era of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania or of the great Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795) that so decisively shaped European history. Yet, the absence in Estonia of a heroic history was no liability to the young republic. Liberated from the gravitational pull of past glory, the citizens of the emergent state were free to exploit positively the nation’s newness. In particular, they gave artists license to articulate novel forms of modernism(s) by which to present domestically a progressive self-image of the nation. At the same time, advanced art and architecture were creatively embraced as part of a campaign to secure the international respect necessary for membership in a global community of liberal states and progressive cultures.

A modern architecture was being created before the Estonian nation-state was proclaimed in 1918; and, as was true for all the visual arts, it was connected to developments in indigenous music (song festivals), literature (national mythologies), and drama. By the time it achieved independence, Estonia had a corpus of National Romantic buildings, constructed principally under the patronage of the dominant Baltic-German classes and only secondarily under the Russian government, which controlled Estonia until near the end of World War I. As there were few native Estonian architects, most progressive buildings were
designed by Finnish, German, and Russian architects. The Finns were notably active, in part because of the ethnic and linguistic kinship between the two peoples. Moreover, both “nations” were subject to the tsar. And when Estonia became a battleground among contending German imperial, Russian tsarist, and Russian Bolshevik forces, as well as the German Freikorps and various factions of Estonians, troops from Scandinavia, primarily Finnish, volunteered in sufficient numbers to free Estonia from foreign armies and to secure the independence and sovereignty declared originally in 1918. Thus, it is not surprising that progressive Finnish architects were frequently commissioned to execute (or to compete for) buildings that carried national significance for the indigenous people.31

Estonia elected to celebrate its hard-won independence by creatively transforming the traditional seat of government into a modern monument. Toompea Castle, which had dominated Tallinn since the thirteenth century, and which had evolved over the centuries into a complex of medieval, Renaissance, and baroque period buildings serving as the seat of foreign overlords for a good part of a millennium, was preserved for new governmental use. The striking historical façades of the governmental complex were not removed to reveal the native gray limestone that underlay them, despite the official designation of the local material as “the national stone.”32 Within several of the interiors of the Toompea complex, however, historical markers were rejected as inappropriate. Instead of inhabiting the symbolic interior spaces of German or tsarist hegemony, the infant republic sought to create environments congruent with the new national self-image and sympathetic to the practice of democratic government. Toward this end, Herbert Johanson (1884–1964) and Eugen Habermann (1884–1944) were commissioned to design the assembly hall and its notable interior atop the foundation walls of a former convent building (Figure 11).

To house the national assembly and other gathering spaces for the elected representatives of the new nation, Habermann and Johanson designed a façade that reconciled the twin aspirations of the infant republic: affirmation of the indigenous past, and profession of membership in an international league of modern states. This was accomplished by an inventive blend of historical allusion and an attentive emulation of the most advanced Western styles. The former appeared through reference to local buildings, combined with a generous use of architectural ornament inspired by indigenous textile designs. The latter was evident in the flat, white surfaces and regular fenestration derived from the incipient modern movement, which the architects knew primarily from contemporary journals from France, Germany, Italy, and, especially, Scandinavia that circulated among Estonia’s multilingual architects.33 The effective combination of the implied traditional and the rigorously contemporary suggested on the exterior reached new heights in the design for the interior with its striking ultramarine walls. Historicizing decorative motifs were used freely on door and window frames; however, the brilliant yellow ceiling plane was opened up expressionistically to allow debate to ascend, metaphorically transcending the gravitational pull of the building’s long history.

In the comparatively favorable circumstances—political, economic, and social—now ascendant in the young republic, the government and the commercial classes inaugurated an accelerated building campaign.34 For Estonians

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Figure 11 Herbert Johanson and Eugen Habermann, Parliament House (Toompea Castle), Tallinn, Estonia, 1920–22

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this meant seizing new opportunities for development as part of a national effort toward economic modernization and international acceptance. Toward this end, architects, critics, patrons, and politicians turned to forms of functionalism, which by the late 1920s was increasingly identified with progress, democracy, and, significantly, national identity. Indeed, by the 1930s functionalism, as flexibly defined by Estonia’s critics as it was widely embraced by its architects, would itself become a national symbol. Yet within this triad of attributes, there was great latitude for progressive expression and considerable architectural variation. Moreover, many of the country’s most innovative architects readily accepted commissions for traditional buildings, especially when these urban warehouses, village community centers, Lutheran churches, or town halls could be designed in styles interpreted by the public as keeping faith with Estonia’s rural history. References to Estonia’s “nativist” character constituted an important aspect of the national self-image and, therefore, played a role in modern architectural practice. As the indigenous people were, until the beginning of the twentieth century, primarily land-dwellers and of peasant stock, rustic structures carried significant ideological weight in the formation of an Estonian identity. Thus, throughout the interwar era, one frequently finds a single designer embracing functionalist and, equally comfortably, historicizing styles, often within the same building type: post offices, schools, apartment buildings, or hospitals. Although the present article focuses on functionalism as a defining dimension of Estonian national identity, it must be acknowledged that during much of the 1920s and again from the mid-1930s, incipient and then fully developed functionalism contended with an abiding traditionalism. Often, however, the two strains were blended as, for example, in the Parliament House (Assembly Hall) interior decoration by Johanson and Habermann already mentioned; or in the Estonian Legation to Finland (1933), where the rigorously functionalist exterior by Konstantin Bölau (1899–1959) housed haut bourgeois interiors and furnishings.

The oscillation between traditionalism and modernism in Estonian architecture conformed to a model followed throughout eastern Europe during the early twentieth century, by means of which the multiplicity of styles, purposes, and methods trumped the claims for uniformity, rationality, and universality forcefully advocated by modernists in general. In the main, Estonia’s embrace of functionalism rejected the ideological precepts of the Bauhaus, de Stijl, and Russian Constructivism, while adopting the modern movement’s architectural physiognomy. Hence, one might see Estonian functionalism as one essential dimension of the republic’s authentic engagement with both modernity and national identity. As will be illustrated, this endeavor often entailed flexibility and invention in the methods and materials employed to realize the larger objective of constructing a modern nation-state. But to comprehend the progressive character of this strategy, one must bracket the prevailing paradigms first articulated by modern architects and theorists far to the west. Surely, the Bauhaus vision of modern architecture was familiar to Estonia’s comparatively small cadre of progressive intellectuals, although the precepts they drew from it were only contingently embraced. Thus, one can find in Eugen Habermann’s flatiron Rauanit factory (1926–32; Figure 12) a good example of the employment of white façades, animated by regularly placed tiers of geometrically varied windows that were inspired by contemporary international-style buildings in Central Europe. And Robert Natus (1890–1950) found inspiration in Fritz Höger’s Hamburg “Chilehaus” for his own brick corner building (1935–36; Figure 13) in Tallinn. Although these international references attest to the attraction that innovative architecture from the West held for some Estonian architects, in the main, Estonia’s architects chose carefully what to embrace from their Germanic teachers or foreign

Figure 12 Eugen Habermann, Rauanit factory, Tallinn, 1926–32
colleagues," and what to adapt to domestic needs, circumstances, and freshly minted traditions. For present purposes, several general characteristics should be noted.

Unlike the canonical modernist architecture of Germany and western Europe or nearby Russia, Estonian functionalism was almost entirely *asocial*; that is, it typically eschewed the social (one might better say "socialist") programs that lay at the heart of Hannes Meyer’s radicalized Bauhaus, J. J. P. Oud’s adaptation of de Stijl, or the various Soviet formations of Constructivism. As a result, one finds almost no emphasis on low-cost housing for workers, just the opposite of what one would have encountered in a visit, say, to contemporary Berlin, Moscow, or Rotterdam. Instead of focusing primarily on the needs of factory workers, Estonia’s modern architects endeavored to satisfy the private ambitions of the factory owners, who—unlike their newly wealthy peers elsewhere—evinced a remarkable interest in industrial design. In 1930, Olev Siinmaa (1881–1941) designed a villa for the industrialist Mark van Jung in the heart of Tallinn whose exterior geometrical forms are forcefully articulated (Figure 14). Not to be outdone, Oskar Kerston commissioned Edgar-Johan Kuusik (1888–1974) to provide the family with a perfectly composed suburban retreat (1935–36, 1939–40); but it was Erich Jacoby (1885–1941) who provided the most dramatic domestic solution through which to affirm the industrial elite’s commitment to rational design and forms, especially in the wooded suburb of Tallinn-Nõmme (Figure 15). As representative as these private homes for the republic’s industrialists may be, our purposes are better served by a more intimate examination. For it is beneath the surface effects that Estonian functionalism best reveals its nationalist character.

Several of the large villas were constructed of wood and then plastered to give the appearance of concrete. But many more, especially those designed for the middle classes, forthrightly forsook smooth white surfaces with their simulated concrete for an authentic emphasis on native materials. Although using unadorned wood was rare, Herbert Johanson made creative use of the inexpensive local timber in a city home (1931; Figure 16), whose functionalist character is straightforwardly revealed in its cubic design and window treatment, as well as in its economy of construction, relying as it does on stacked stone foundations supporting wood slats. At roughly the same time (ca. 1933), Eugen Sacharias (1906–2002) designed a home (on Pärnu Road 169, Tallinn-Nõmme) whose wooden structure is clad in local brick. But by far the most dramatic assertion of Estonia’s singular modernist architecture is to be found in the widespread use of limestone, most always quarried on site, dressed by hand, and laid in courses by teams of masons.
The functionalist buildings constructed for the newly established industrial leaders were essentially representational. That is, their exteriors were designed to impress the public with the progressive vision of their owners. In almost every instance—the exception being those houses designed for the architects themselves—the interiors of these villas were furnished with traditional trappings (and frequently the clutter) of the haute bourgeoisie, whose conventional tastes in interior design were emulated by the Estonians. Just as Johanson had designed houses for industrialists and for middle-class patrons, so too did he receive commissions for more spiritual purposes, as is most strikingly evident in his Metsa Cemetery Chapel (1935–36; Figure 17). Here, basic cubic forms are surmounted by a pyramidal roof, which introduces geometrical forms and configurations at every level and on each plane. The architect had used a slightly less sloping roof a year earlier for his Liiva Cemetery Chapel in the Tallinn suburban district of Nõmme (1934–35), which also expresses its functionalist design in local limestone. In this context, it is important to note the significance of church design during this period of the Estonian Republic. Religion continued to play an instrumental, though complicated, role in the formation of national identity, just as it had during the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the “national awakening movement” was ascendent. On the one hand, Lutheranism remained the prevailing religious confession of the nation; however, its traditional association with the dominant Baltic-German social and economic strata had to be confronted. Thus, Lutheran churches, so long the architectural symbol of Germanic political and spiritual dominion, constituted a type both singularly appropriate and challenging to the new nation’s architects. The issue became one of making the structures of German Lutheranism representatively Estonian. Of the 113 new churches, congregational chapels, and prayer houses of the principal religions built during the Republic, a full half were erected in the period 1930–35; and of these, a consequent number were in the functionalist style.43

It is important to recognize that the embrace of limestone seemingly transcended building types, and was not
hewn from the foundation trenches themselves, transportation expenses were reduced. Moreover, unlike bricklaying, building with limestone blocks, frequently undressed, was carried out in winter, thereby enabling day-laborers and skilled stonemasons to be employed year-round. Such handwork might well entail high labor expenditure in other countries; but in Estonia, with a mostly nonunionized work force, the use of manual labor for construction proved affordable, while helping to ensure high employment.

Thus for economic, symbolic, and political reasons, Estonian functionalism mostly eschewed technical innovation and advanced construction methods. This meant in practice that the innovative processes, materials, and techniques promoted by many Western modernists did not find a sympathetic reception among Estonia’s thoroughly modern architects, nor among its progressive industrialists, civic authorities, or middle-class patrons. Instead, local building traditions, indigenous materials, and time-honored procedures were utilized in the construction of a modern republic.

To a large measure, Estonia’s modernist impulse was the result of a nationalist imperative in which economic conditions, social patterns, and geological and climatic realities played contributive roles. Even in their leisure time spent attending sports events or relaxing at the country’s newly developed oceanfront resorts, Estonians could find recreation in a functionalism scaled to their comfort and expectations: publicly, for example, in the athletic stadium designed by Olev Siinmaa and Anton Soans (1885–1966) or at the fashionable Ranna Beach Hotel (1935–37; Figure 20), both in the seaside city of Pärnu;44 or privately, for instance in a number of vacation homes Siinmaa designed for Pärnu, including one for himself (1931–33; Figure 21).45

limited to functionalist sacred or domestic structures. As the declared “national material” of the young republic it was employed for the schools (Figure 18) in which the new citizens would be educated for democratic life; for fire stations (Figure 19) and civic buildings, as well as for warehouses, commercial establishments, and entertainment facilities. The widespread use of local stone surely carried symbolic importance for the construction of a modern Estonia; but one should not lose sight of its more material advantages, which were also congruent with the nation’s modernist aspirations and economic limitations. A use of dressed stone allowed the builder to avoid costly plasterwork. Further, because much of the stone was quarried on site, frequently
Despite the effects of the worldwide depression during these years, there was a significant improvement in Estonia’s economic life generally. From the mid-1930s, there was a notable increase in the number and scale of impressive new structures erected in seaside resorts or as villas nestled in the wooded suburbs of the capital. Moreover, the government involved itself more actively in promoting construction projects—principally representational buildings and modestly sized apartment houses for the middle classes—as an essential aspect of a concerted social action program through which to secure its popular support. Significant in this context is the role architecture played in the changed Estonian environment from roughly 1934, when the government assumed an authoritarian character and pursued a course of national chauvinism.

Akin to other European nations, Estonia witnessed an alarming rise in extremist formations of the right. A League of Veterans of the Estonian War of Independence (Eesti Vabadussõjalaste Liit) assumed the structure and attributes of its foreign models: German Nazis, Italian Fascists, and, especially, the Finnish Lapua adherents. Under Estonian president Konstantin Päts (1874–1956), a series of measures was taken to suppress the League of Veterans and other extralegal organizations, principally through the imposition of martial law beginning in 1934. Capitalizing on the League’s chauvinist celebration of Estonianism, Päts took over many of its least extremist properties in order to promote the interests of “true” Estonians. Among the first programs implemented was a cultural “era of silence” (vaikiv ajastu). This thoroughgoing Estonian version of a rappel à l’ordre effectively dampened the sometimes strident voices of the literary and artistic avant-garde; yet architectural modernism was allowed to be expressed, albeit in new idioms.

The Päts regime exploited progressive architecture to demonstrate the government’s own claims to modernism with a purpose not unlike that of Italian Rationalism under Mussolini. Thus one finds a significant number of essentially functionalist commissions awarded through government-sponsored competitions (even if not always funded from the public coffers). Many of these winning designs were entered by modernist architects who had been active during the preceding decade, and who continued working in a generally constructivist vein. The distinction between their pre- and post-1934 designs is less a matter of general style than one of emphasis, which can best be detected in the sources of reference or orientation, often manifested through the choice and blending of materials, as well as the employment of a decorative program on the principal façade. As the authoritarian government itself turned more and more toward accommodation with powerful European dictator-
ships rather than looking to the Scandinavian democracies on whose support the nation had earlier relied, so too did the republic’s architects gaze admiringly at the modernist architecture of Germany and, especially, the rationalist architecture of Italy.46 In a number of projects directly on Tallinn’s central Vabaduse (Freedom) Square, or not too distant from it, Herbert Johanson, Elmar Lohk (1901–1963), and Anton Soans and Edgar-Johan Kuusik erected schools, commercial buildings, and a central Art Hall (Kunstihonne, 1933–34; Figure 22), respectively, that drew on design elements from Italy’s reactionary modernism. But appended to the rationalist framework of these buildings were distinctly local elements: granite revetment on ground floors, dolomite decorative motifs on cornices, and limestone niche sculpture by native artists, for example.47 In blending the cosmopolitan (style) with the indigenous (materials, methods, and ornamentation), Estonia’s advanced architecture of the Päts “era of silence,” at least initially,48 proclaimed the nation’s reconciliation of the progressive and the retrospective, the transnational and the native.49

In April 1938, Päts was elected president in the last free national vote of the young republic. In less than eighteen months, the secret protocols of the Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact, negotiated in August 1939 between Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia, were invoked as Soviet armies invaded the three Baltic nations, as they had almost precisely twenty years before. And with the outbreak of war, during the course of which both Estonia and Lithuania became areas of lethal conflict and sites of genocide, modern architecture went into hibernation. With the end of the hostilities, the free Baltic republics, for which distinctive forms of modern architecture had originally been articulated in order to assert and shelter a national identity, had themselves ceased to exist, as each was forcibly absorbed into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and subordinated to the aesthetic dictates of Moscow.50

Notes
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1. In the last decade, a number of studies have promoted a helpful perspective through which to reassess the meanings and purposes of modernist architecture. Many of those treating “national” histories of modern architecture have appeared under the rubric of Docomomo (International Working Party for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement). Most are premised on the concept of a pluralistic modernism, that is, a methodological strategy that holds that progressive architectural forms and uses defy any unitary categorical imperative. In contrast to the dominant interpretive uniformity that characterized the plurality of architectural studies from the 1930s through the 1980s, they attribute to modernism a heterogeneity of meanings and intentions. Representative of the current historiographical orientation are Hubert-Jan Hencket and Hilde Heynen, eds., Back from Utopia (Rotterdam, 2002); Hilde Heynen, Architecture and Modernity: A Critique (Cambridge, Mass., 1999); and Universality and Heterogeneity, Proceedings from the Fourth International Docomomo Conference (18–21 September 1996) (Bratislava, 1997). For these bibliographical references and other helpful advice, I am grateful to the JSAH’s anonymous reader.

Antedating the revisionism of architectural historians was the engagement of architects. Designs from the 1960s for a postmodern architecture may rightly be understood as a critique of the theoretical claims and formal vocabulary of classical modern art and architecture. In this context, the appearance of Robert Venturi’s Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture (Garden City, N.Y., 1966) initiated a series of debates and publications by practicing architects on the merits and limitations of the unitary modernism promoted by affiliates of the Bauhaus, de Stijl, and Russian Constructivism.

It must be further acknowledged that architectural history and the history of art have not been historiographically coterminous apropos of revisionist studies of classical modernism. Art historians, who have interrogated during the 1970s the originary precepts of modernist painting, sculpture, and the decorative arts, tended to challenge the totalizing aspirations of and claims for modernist art as historically and conceptually untenable. (For an early example of such studies, see S. A. Mansbach, Visions of Totality: Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Theo van Doesburg, and El Lissitzky [Ann
Arbor, 1980]). Architectural historians have often attended closely to the functions, materials, techniques, and patronage of modernist architecture, as well as to the education of modern architects.


3. For an explication of those conditions characterized as “tragic” by leading figures of the avant-garde, see Mansbach, *Visions of Totality*, esp. chs. 1 and 2, and the section “Critical Reflections.”

4. “Modernism” (and its adjectival variants) is generally employed here—as in much of the contemporary scholarship on modern art—in the reductivist sense of its meaning(s) and associations, as referring to those totalizing philosophical, aesthetic, and stylistic precepts promulgated between roughly 1913 and the late 1930s by the theorists and artists of the classical avant-garde. Nonetheless, the present discussion of the modern architecture of Lithuania and Estonia is intended to illustrate the essential limitations of the reductivist concept and definition of modernism. In this regard, the present study promotes the more expansive definition of modernism that is emerging from current scholarship on the modern art and architecture of lesser-studied regions, such as the southern Balkans, East Asia, and South America. See, for instance, Ljiljana Blagojević, *Modernism in Serbia: The Elusive Margins of Belgrade Architecture, 1919–1941* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); Djur? and Šuvaković, *Impossible Histories; Weisenfeld, MAVO*; and Mari Carmen Ramírez and Héctor Olea, eds., *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (New Haven, 2004), esp. the section “Progression and Rupture.”


6. Among a host of recent studies reassessing critically the claims made by the ideologues of the avant-garde from the early twentieth century, the following book continues to generate intense debate: David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture Revisited* (Chicago, 2001).

7. For an examination of the inhibiting effects on the study and practice of the history of modern art and architecture exercised by Central European émigré intellectuals and their American cultural counterparts, see S. A. Mansbach, “Reconsidering the History of Modern Art History” (forthcoming May 2006), and “Reconsidering Modernist History” (forthcoming May 2006). Particularly germane to the present article is the discussion of the role of the art history survey books intended for World-War-II American veterans, many of whom took advantage of the G.I. Bill to matriculate at colleges and universities.

8. The role of painters and sculptors in constructing a national self-image differed from that of architects; as a consequence, the history of painting, sculpture, the graphic artist, and design followed a different line of historical development in the Baltic from that of architecture. In part, this difference can be attributed to the places where artists and architects trained and the allegiances they established there. For example, whereas many modern Estonian painters studied locally (in Tartu, where a school of drawing was established as early as 1803) or in Russia (at the Imperial Academy in St. Petersburg), travel fellowships were sometimes made available for further education in Berlin, Paris, and Vienna. Lithuania, whose long-standing connections to Poland and Polish culture were manifested in artistic education, sent many of its aspiring painters and sculptors to the School of Fine Arts in Warsaw or to the Cracow Academy of Fine Arts, and only secondarily to the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg. By contrast, until the early 1920s, there were no local schools in which Estonian or Lithuanian architects might train formally. As a consequence, many would-be architects enrolled in the academies in the Russian imperial capital; and a few attended comparable institutions in Berlin, Darmstadt, Dresden, Paris, and Vienna. In addition to training in different centers and forging different personal links, artists and architects affiliated differently on returning to their native lands. Whereas painters and sculptors often founded exhibiting societies and participated in literary associations, architects were frequently discouraged from membership, this despite the modest number of intellectuals in either country and the small size of Kaunas and Tallinn (and Tartu). For a discussion of the practice of modern painters and sculptors (and to a lesser degree graphic artists) in the Baltics during this period, see Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe.*

9. Although Latvia had been by far the most economically dynamic—and with regard to the history of architecture, the most innovative—of the three Baltic lands throughout the nineteenth century and up to World War I, the material and social destruction of the war and the subsequent civil strife was devastating to a degree well beyond that suffered by either Estonia or Lithuania. Latvia’s infrastructure was almost totally destroyed. In addition, the country lost to war and its consequent emigration almost 40 percent of its population, which fell from 2.6 million in 1914 to a census figure of 1.6 million in 1920. Riga, the cultural, industrial, commercial, and political capital, lost 50 percent of its inhabitants during the same period. The precipitous decline was particularly dramatic among the left-leaning cultural intellectuals and architects. Thus, in spite of Riga’s eminence as an international center of Art Nouveau architecture (executed by architects from a host of Central and East European lands), there were comparatively few architects remaining, relatively modest opportunities for them, and proportionally fewer resources available to would-be patrons on the founding of the Republic of Latvia. As a consequence, the singular challenges confronting Latvia’s construction of a modern political state and culture differed essentially from those facing both Lithuania to the south and Estonia to the north, despite many shared wartime experiences. For the most comprehensive single-volume study of Riga’s distinctive Art Nouveau architecture, see Jānis Krastniņš, *Jugenstadt in der rigischen Baukunst* (Michelstadt, 1992). For a brief, general treatment in English of Art Nouveau in Latvia, see the relevant chapter in Jeremy Howard, *Art Nouveau: International and National Styles in Europe* (New York, 1996). For a discussion of the cultural and historical conditions under which Latvian art developed in the second, third, and fourth decades of the twentieth century, see Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe*, ch. 3, “The Baltic States of Latvia and Estonia.”

10. The original proclamation of Lithuanian independence on 16 February 1918 had been met almost immediately by an invasion of various warring parties, Polish, Lithuanian, and Bolshevikist among them. The territory of the new nation was one of the principal theaters of conflict during the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–20, which witnessed much of the country occupied and reoccupied serially by the Red Army, Polish regular and irregular forces,
and various Lithuanian units (both Bolshevik and anti-Soviet). By 1920, Soviet Russian forces, who had been defeated in their attack on Warsaw, were sufficiently weakened to yield Vilnius and the surrounding territory to Lithuania; but an undeclared war continued between advancing Polish troops and Lithuanian defense forces. A cease-fire was soon negotiated. However, on 8 November 1920 Polish general Lucjan Żeligowski captured the capital and embarked on a thoroughgoing “polonization” of the city and the surrounding territories, which were unilaterally declared the Republic of Central Lithuania. The League of Nations was able to persuade the parties to accept a plebiscite, and on that basis an armistice was concluded on 30 November 1920. Finally, in March 1921, direct negotiations between Lithuania and Poland were conducted under the auspices of the League, which resulted in an arbitrated settlement through which a Polish-dominated State of Central Lithuania was reluctantly acknowledged by the League’s member states. Not until 27 October 1939 did Lithuania recover Vilnius, and this only as a consequence of Stalin’s pressure on the Lithuanians to sign a mutual assistance pact through which Soviet troops and bases could be stationed on the country’s territory.

11. There is not a large bibliography on Kaunas architecture, or on modern architects active in Kaunas. The standard treatment remains Kauna Architektūra (Vilnius, 1991), whose greatest virtue is an extensive number of photographs of buildings with their ground plans. The text, more descriptive than analytical, contains a one-and-a-quarter-page summary in English. For a helpful introduction to the modern architecture of Lithuania (in both Lithuanian and English), see Lietuva Moderno Pastatai/Lithuanian Monuments of Modern Movement (Vilnius, 1998). The best survey of Lithuanian visual culture from the period is Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, Daile ir Valstybė: Dailes Gyvenimas Lietuvos Respublikoje, 1918–1940 (Art and state: The art scene in the Lithuanian Republic, 1918–1940) (Kaunas, 2003). Although focusing principally on painting, sculpture, graphic art, and design, there is some discussion of Art Deco architecture in Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, ed., Art Deco Lietuvoje (Kaunas, 1998). For comparison in Vilnius, see Nijolė Lukišiūtė-Valvienė, Istorizmas ir modernas Vilniaus architektūroje (Historicism and modern style in the architecture of Vilnius) (Vilnius, 2000).

12. The negotiated settlement with Poland, brokered through the League of Nations, failed to win over popular opinion in the diminished territories of Lithuania. For twenty years following the treaty, Lithuania refused to grant adequate legal protections to the Polish minority (of about 8%) within its constricted borders; and Poland continued its relentless cultural “polonization” within its self-declared State of Central Lithuania and, especially, in multi-cultural Wilno (Vilnius). So intensive was this cultural “cold war” that the two countries accounted for a full third of the complaints filed with the League of Nations for violations of ethnic minority rights (of Poles, Lithuanians, Russians, and Jews) supposedly guaranteed under the League’s charter. It is in this charged atmosphere that one needs to recognize the importance for Lithuania of securing international support. Toward this end, the young republic sought to curry favor both with leading League of Nations member states and with the United States, which had not joined the League. Numerous official delegations were sent from Kaunas to enlist political and commercial support from the Western democracies through which the embattled Lithuanian Republic hoped to secure its physical and fiscal survival. On 27 July 1922, the United States conferred on Lithuania political recognition, and with its, the legal right of associations of Lithuanian-Americans to raise funds in support of the new nation.

13. With the loss of Vilnius and its wealth of historic architecture, the Lithuanian Republic had little interest and no possibility of recreating in its provisional capital at Kaunas an architectural simulacrum of the former (and hoped-for future) capital. The acceptance of contemporary political reality discouraged, at least in Kaunas, a strong nativist revival or an adoption of a neo-baroque style (to recall the eighteenth-century magnificence of Vilnius). Moreover, the pervasive anti-Polish sentiment prevented the revival (and even preservation, see n. 16 below) of architecture associated with the Polish landed aristocracy. Nonetheless, native forms, styles, and techniques were actively cultivated in music, literature, and especially in the decorative arts and crafts. On the latter, see Giedrė Jankevičiūtė, “Creating National Style: The Revival of Traditional Crafts in Lithuania, 1900–1950,” Centropa 4 (Sept. 2004), 254–66.

The persistence of church-building under the Lithuanian Republic represents a special case. The Roman Catholic heritage was deemed crucial to the national patrimony and was readily acknowledged in the building programs promoted by the state. In general, and in opposition to the practices observable in contemporary Estonia (see n. 43 below), most of the interwar designs for parish churches followed traditional models. Among the important exceptions, however, were Algirdas Šalkauskis’s 1936 project for the Church of the Holy Heart of Jesus and those by Karolis Reisonas: in particular, the (unfinished) Church of the Resurrection in Kaunas (1933–40) and the Evangelical Reform Church, also in Kaunas (1937–40). See Karolis Reisonas, Architektas (Kaunas, n.d.), and Jankevičiūtė, Daile ir Valstybė, 246–51.

14. Imre Steindl had designed for Budapest a truly enormous Hungarian Parliament House (1885–1904), with a 265-meter-long façade and towering central cupola, the largest parliament in the world, and one that surpassed in scale the royal castle complex rebuilt and expanded (in the eighteenth century) on the Buda side of the newly united city.

15. Artist formations and associations were organized in Kaunas as early as 1921, soon after the city became the provisional capital. However, by 1925 most of them, especially those that were engaged in art education—such as the Art School, the Drama Theater and School, the Music School, and the Art Gallery—were taken over by the state. By 1926, as a consequence of the coup d’état, the centralizing efforts of the government were enhanced, and the Ministry of Education assumed responsibility for all artistic education. With a limited middle and upper class, there was little opportunity for visual artists to secure private patronage. The exception was in the area of domestic architecture, in particular the private development (though at times with indirect governmental support) of apartment houses in the new areas of the capital, where governmental offices were located.

16. Although a number of manor houses, several with their centuries-old collections intact, survived World War I and the ensuing civil strife, their contents did not, in the main, enter the national collections of the nascent state. For many politicians and nationalist intellectuals, the manor house was too closely associated with the long-established Polish (or “Polonized”) Lithuanian aristocracy. This ideological dismissal of manor house culture—and its rich architectural patrimony—as “foreign” and politically inappropriate for a nation whose territory had been occupied by an irredentist modern Poland had material consequences. Important secular art objects were not integrated into the national collections, and the (“Polish”) manor houses were themselves not necessarily protected under the preservation laws or monument-conservation programs. The Department of Cultural Affairs (established only in the mid-1930s) focused its scarce resources on ethnographical collections and archeological excavations and cataloguing through which nativist culture might best be preserved and publicly presented, especially in the M. K. Čiurlionis Museum in Kaunas, the “Alka” museum in Telšiai, and the “Aušra” museum in Šiauliai. See Jankevičiūtė, Daile ir Valstybė, esp. ch. 5.

17. For a consideration of the initial plans Dubeneckis submitted for the museum and art school, see Lietuva TSR Istorijos ir Etnografijos Muziejus, Vladmiras Dubeneckis (1888–1963, 1932, VIII.10) (Vilnius, 1988).

18. A similar bifocal vision of harmonizing classical references and contem-
porary needs is evidenced in the program for the National Bank, designed by Mykolas Songaila (1874–1941), whose classicizing exterior shelters the spaces of modern financial statecraft. See J. Barlauskas and E. Gužas, “V. Dubeneckis ir M. Songaila—Įžymūs Lietuvių Architektūros Kūrėjai” (V. Dubeneckis and M. Songaila–Prominent Lithuanian architects of the first half of the twentieth century), in Lietuva TSR Architektūros Klaussniai (Vilnius, 1978), vol. 5, 101–34 with a short bibliography of items published by and on the two architects, mostly during the 1930s or late 1950s. On the Bank of Lithuania, see also Lietuvos Banko Kauno Sklyras (Vilnius, 2002).

19. The absence of a “national stone,” or an explicit ideology of materials, differentiates architectural practices of the Lithuanian Republic from those characteristic of contemporaneous Estonia. See n. 32 below.

20. For a discussion of Landsbergs, see Jolita Kaničienė and Jonas Minkevičius, Arsitektas Vytautas Landsbergo–Žemkalnis (Vilnius, 1993), with English summary and full bibliography to 1991. As was true for all his contemporaries, Landsbergs received his architectural education outside Lithuania; and like most, he pursued his formal studies in the Faculty of Architecture of the Riga Polytechnic Institute.

21. As was the case throughout eastern Europe, Lithuania’s intellectuals, and especially its artists and critics, employed a host of terms, rarely consistently, to characterize advanced art and aesthetic aspirations. “Futurist” was the label most widely utilized in the contemporaneous literature, though variations on “progressive,” “modern,” and “contemporary” are frequently encountered.

22. As was true for architects and artists in Estonia, Latvia, and Poland, Lithuania’s architects were, by and large, multilingual. Moreover, the associations to which they belonged in Kaunas and sometimes in Vilnius subscribed to or received gifts from foreign embassies and from sympathetic foreign artists myriad professional and cultural journals from France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and the United States, in addition to those from the other Baltic nations, and especially from Poland. Lithuania’s architects, and especially the nation’s painters and sculptors, did contribute to Polish-, German-, and Russian-language periodicals abroad, and to Yiddish-language periodicals in Vilnius (Vilne in Yiddish) in order to reach a wide and diverse audience. They also published occasional cultural commentary, art and architectural reviews, and aesthetic opinion in local Lithuanian newspapers and cultural periodicals. The most prominent Lithuanian-language organs were the following: Menas (Art), Kaunas, 1928–40, a newspaper issued by the Lietuviu Meno Kūrejai; Menas (Art), Šiauliai, 1934–35, an art journal; Menas ir Literatūra (Art and literature), Vilnius, 1934; Musa Menas (Our art), Kaunas, 1937–38, a biweekly art journal; Naųjų Romuva (New Romuva), Kaunas, 1931–40, a weekly cultural journal; Savivaldybė (Self-government), Kaunas, 1923–40, a monthly with occasional articles devoted to urban affairs; Statybos Menas ir Technika (Building arts and techniques), Kaunas, 1922–25, issued monthly by Lietuvos Atstymo Komisariatas; Technika ir ūkis (Technology and husbandry), Kaunas, 1929–40, a journal of the Lietuvos Inzinerio Draugija; Vairas (The rudder), Kaunas, 1923–24, a weekly devoted to cultural matters; and Vairas, Kaunas, 1929–40, a monthly journal dealing with cultural issues. I am indebted to Paul Kestutis Zygys for these references.

23. An example of these is a 1933 apartment house by Bronius Elsborgas on V. Putvinskių g. (illustrated in Jankevičiūtė, Art Deco Lietuvoje, 29).

24. Given the visual and, I submit, ideological prominence of curves as a decisive feature of Kaunas’s modern architectural self-image, it is remarkable that the scholarly literature makes little reference to them, and provides no explanation for their frequency and inventiveness. Although there may be little architectural precedent for the emphatic use of curves in Kaunas itself or even in much more culturally diverse Vilnius, one might identify a possible source. Because the plurality of architects who were active under the Kaunas Republic had pursued their education in Riga’s Polytechnic Institute, whose Architectural Faculty was established in 1869, it is not unlikely that Latvia’s celebrated Art Nouveau architecture may have provided an inspiration. Though handled quite differently from those of post–World War I Kaunas, curves are a salient feature of such Riga buildings as E. Laube’s apartment house at K. Valdėmara 167 (1909), J. Alksniš’s apartment house at Brūvības 110 (1902), and A. Malve’s apartment house at Tallinas 330 (1913), among a number of other multi-apartment and commercial buildings that would have been easily accessible to students of architecture at the local Polytechnic.

25. It was politically important to the Lithuanian government that foreigners see in the new republic a progressive state. Advanced architecture was enlisted in a concerted campaign to persuade visiting delegations of technocrats, as well as the resident diplomats from Europe and the United States, to recognize in the new buildings a cultural cosmopolitanism that might counter the charges lodged in the League of Nations against Lithuania (see n. 12) as a nation that yielded to age-old ethnic and national prejudices against Poles, Russians, and Jews. As a consequence, several of the most ambitious government-sponsored building programs in Kaunas relied on a modern architectural idiom to affirm symbolically the republic’s commitment to a socially liberal internationalism rather than a traditional secessionist. Nativist forms and references were frequently sanctioned for religious structures, ethnographic museums, and civic buildings erected in provincial towns. See n. 16.

26. One example is Dubeneckis’s apartment house for J. Daugirdas at Vytauto pr. 30 (1929–30).


28. Vytautas, who had been made vice-regent of Lithuania by his cousin Władysław II Jagiełło in 1392, took full advantage of his office and soon assumed the functions of ruler of Lithuania (as Grand Duke). An experienced warrior and master tactician, he suppressed militarily the rebellious nobles in his territories; and, as a consequence, he was able to unite his realm with Poland, ruled by Władysław. This new Union of Lithuania and Poland (1401) elected Vytautas its king in 1429; and under his crown the combined state became one of Europe’s greatest nations in territory, military strength, and economic might.

29. See Karolis Reisonas, Arbiteritas (see n. 13). Little is known regarding Kristiukaitis’s biography or architectural practice.

30. An Estonian Architects’ Association was established in 1921. Its membership roster did not exceed fifteen for most of the decade.

31. In this context, one might cite, to name two of the best known architects, Armas Lindgren (for example, his Vammevine Theatre in Tartu [1906] and the Estonian Theater in Tallinn, with Wivi Lönn [1913]) and Elie Saarinen (his competition entry for the Tallinn City Hall [1913], the Mutual Loan Society building in Tallinn [1912], and the general plan for “Greater Tallinn” [1913]). Even in the mid-1920s, with competitions such as those for bathing pavilions in the seaside resort of Pärnu, fully half of the entrants were Finnish. With the changed political circumstances of the mid- and late 1930s, Alvar Aalto’s Finnish background disqualified him from a number of commissions, despite his periodic presence in Estonia and his influence among the country’s architects.

32. As in Germany, limestone was embraced as a national symbol. To quote the German ideologue Julius Langbehn (Rembrandt als Erzieher [Leipzig, 1890])—as cited in Karin Hallas, “National Stone, Limestone,” in Estonian Art 2 (1997), 14—“Granite is a Nordic and Germanic stone” and should be opposed to the Greek embrace of marble culture.

33. Among the domestic, Estonian-language cultural, political, and profes-
sional periodicals, which the nation’s architects read and to which they contributed, were the following: AGU. Kirjanduse, Kunsti ja Kultuuri Ajakiri (DAWN: A literary, art, and cultural journal), Tallinn; I.LO. Kirjanduslik kuuakiri (BEAUTY: Literary monthly), Tartu; I.LO. Es imene ja ainus este tilise kultuuri magazin Eesti (The first and only journal of aesthetic culture in Estonia); I.LU. Etno, Kunsti ja kultuuri Ajakiri (Journal of art, life, and culture), Tallinn; Sisu (Bluebird), Tallinn; and AEG. Politikka, Kirjanduse, Jääkunsti, Ajakiri (TIME: A journal of politics, literature, and the arts), Tallinn. Also important was the Estonian journal published in Finnish, TAIE. Eesti Kunsti Asjakiri (ART: A journal of Estonian art). Subscriptions to foreign architectural and cultural journals were held by a number of Estonia’s foreign-trained architects as well as underwritten by the national Cultural Endowment from at least 1931.

34. The bibliography on Estonian modern architecture is considerable, and much of it is available in English editions or in Estonian-language texts with English summaries. Among the most reliable, for their descriptions, analyses, and manifold illustrations, are the following: Liivi Künnapu, Estonian Architecture: The Building of a Nation (Helsinki, 1992), with a helpful bibliography; Eesti Arhitektuur XX Saajand (Estonian architecture in the twentieth century); Estonian Architectural Review, nos. 24, 25, 26 (1999); Mart Kalm, Eesti Funktsionalsism (Functionalistion in Estonia) (Tallinn, 1998); the essays by Leonard Lapin (“Twentieth-century space”), Ants Hein (“The leap towards Europe, 1900–18”), Sigrid Ahilne (“Relating on traditions, the 1920s”), and Kart Kalm (“The 1930s: Functionalism and the surfacing of it”), among others, in Eesti XX Saajandi Ruum (Space in twentieth-century Estonia) (Tallinn, 2000); and Karin Hallas-Murula, Funktsionalism Eestis/Functionalism in Estonia (Tallinn, 2002). Historiographically, the most helpful publication, more for its photographic documentation than for the accompanying essay by Hannu Koppus, remains 20 Aastat Ehitustide Eestis, 1918–1938 (Tallinn, 1939).

35. See Hallas-Murula, Funktsionalism, 49, and n. 1, for further bibliographical references.

36. The national government took seriously the needs of the countryside, and it supported with public funds numerous construction enterprises, as well as building departments in agricultural associations. With governmental support, Estonian farmhouses, barns, and threshing buildings were conserved or built, many creatively combining new construction methods with romantically traditional architectural features. This is to be understood in contradistinction to the often large country estates of the long-enrenched Baltic-German aristocratic and commercial classes. See August Volberg’s two-volume compilation of rural buildings (1927 and 1930), as discussed in Karin Hallas, ed., August Volberg, 1896–1983 (Tallinn, 1996).

37. A similar intercourse between modern design and local or nativist traditions is evident in western Europe and elsewhere, as well. Indeed, a number of scholars have recently pointed out instances of national or regionalist romanticist architecture—in Scandinavia, in Germany, as well as in the United States and France—which an inventive mixing, if not always a convincing integration, of the progressive and the retrospective can be ascertained. What distinguishes the practice in eastern Europe is most likely the degree to and frequency with which artists would oscillate between working in a modern idiom and embracing a revivalist vocabulary or set of historical references. Although often practiced simultaneously, modern and traditional styles were less frequently combined on the same canvas, stage set, or sculpture. However, in the modern architecture practiced during the 1920s and 1930s in eastern Europe, inventive—and often symbolically or ideologically charged—combinations of rigorously contemporary and emphatically retrospective design are united in the same project, as the present article suggests.

38. In this regard, one is reminded of similar aspirations from elsewhere in central and eastern Europe, many likely known by Estonia’s notably well-read artist-intelligentsia. Of particular suggestiveness in this regard was Jan Kotéra’s advocacy of a distinctively Czech modern style by means of designing “in response to our own climate, using our own construction methods, and our own materials.” See Jan Kotéra, “O novém umění” (On the new in art), Ústí Směřy, no. 4 (1899–1900), 189–95.

39. Most of Estonia’s architects who were active during the first republic had trained abroad. As had been the case for Lithuania’s aspiring architects, many Estonians studied at Riga’s Polytechnic Institute. However, a significant number pursued their education in Germany (in Hanover, Dresden, Karlsruhe, Constance, and especially Darmstadt) or in Russia (principally St. Petersburg), where long-standing practices as well as financial incentives provided by Baltic-German associations, Estonian artist societies, and Imperial Russian governmental agencies supported the training of young architects from Russia’s “Northwestern Provinces.” See Hallas-Murula, Funktsionalism, 52.

40. Although the idea of Germany’s Stiilungen held some appeal for Estonia’s progressive architects, I know of only one completed example of model housing. The co-operative “Uus Täre” (New cottage), the result of a Tallinn-sponsored competition of 1931 won collectively by Erich Jacoby, Edgar Kuusik, Elmar Lohk, August Volberg, and Franz de Vries, resulted in a series of mostly semi-detached houses for middle-class dwellers such as lawyers, bankers, professors, and writers, rather than for a unionized working class.

41. Significantly, there were very few examples of Estonia’s industrialists acquiring modern painting or sculpture by the nation’s progressive artists. This pattern runs counter to that in much of central Europe, where the emergent owners of industry and the newly successful commercial upper class often commissioned architects to design large villas congruent with accepted “taste,” before filling the drawing rooms and dining rooms with modern paintings. One might contrast, for example, the grand Budapest bourgeois home of Georg Lucaa’s banker father, with its numerous canvases by Hungary’s most progressive painters, with the interiors of the modern villas designed in Estonia by Kuusik, many of which originally displayed academic art or reproductions of European masterworks.

42. Toward the end of the 1930s, during the authoritarian rule of Konstanin Päts (see below), inmates of the Murru Prison were sent to quarry stone, producing building slabs, planed stairs, and socle plates that were used to help fulfill the large construction program sponsored by the state. See figures from “Valitsusasutiste tegevus” (1937/38) cited in Hallas-Murula, Funktsionalism, 83.

43. Egle Tamm suggests that many of these functionalist churches derived stylistically from the simplified forms of Early Christian sacred architecture found in rural regions of Italy. See the exhibition catalogue Modern Churches: Estonian Sacred Buildings of the 1920s–1930s, compiled by Egle Tamm and ed. Karin Hallas (Tallinn, 2001). For a visual survey of the range of church styles from this period, see 20 Aastat Ehitustide Eestis, illus. 58–68.

Also worthy of mention in the context of religious structures and nativism is the rise from ca. 1928 of Taarist (Taarism), an artificial “revival” of a nativist religion of paganism and contemporary science. Organized originally by a group of intellectuals (mostly anthropologists) who had studied in Germany and Russia, the Taarists endeavored to create modern rituals that drew on national romantic traditions of the latter nineteenth century. Their objective was to supplant the Christianity (Catholic, Orthodox, and Reform) imposed by Estonia’s conquerors with religious rituals congruent with native song, zither playing, and nature worship. Although never able to count more than a few thousand adherents, the new paganism did exert an influence far beyond what its modest numbers would suggest. The siting of many of the new republic’s churches in forests, and the pop-
ularity of forest chapels themselves, may be linked to the various forms of nativism propagated by the new religious cults and encouraged by the government, though officially the government did not provide funds for church building.

Not coincidentally, there was a revival of pagan religions in Latvia and Lithuania, each with a pronouncedly nationalist character. 44. In addition to the large hotel, constructed by the city with loans from the state, Siinmäe designed the nearby Beach Café (1938–39), which was among the comparatively few structures to be built of reinforced concrete, more the result of the architect's desire to exploit the material for its decorative effects on the original interior than to adhere to Le Corbusier's ideologically motivated advocacy of the material.

Beach resorts and urban bathing pool facilities were favored building types for Estonia's modernists. In addition to the impressive structures built in seaside Pärnu, consider the strikingly functionalist beach pavilion by R. Ederma and E. Ottin for Narva-Jõesuu (1935) or that for Kuressaare by E. Haamer (1936).

45. For both the Ranna Beach Hotel and its own home, Siinmäe endeavored to plan green spaces to correspond to the functionalist character of the principal structure. This was in contradistinction to many of the modernist villas situated in the wooded suburbs of the capital, where progressive architects often sought to integrate modernism quite literally into Estonia's forested landscape. Estonia's individualistic approach to modern landscape design merits further study. I am aware of very few realized modernist villa gardens, apart from that by F. Vencach for a private patron in Tallinn-Nõmme and that by Anton Soans for the grand home designed by Siinmäe for the van Jung family on Tallinn's Roosikrantsi Street. Scholarly attention to Estonian modern landscape and garden design is still in its initial phase. For an accessible recent overview, see Tiina Tammet, “Searching for Garden [sic] in the 1920s–30s,” at the Web site: http://maja.arhitektuur.ee/arhiiv/1999_3/english/aiaotsing_eng.html (accessed in Oct. 2004).

For a general introduction to central and east European modern landscape architecture and garden design (with helpful bibliographical references), see Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn and S. A. Mansbach, eds., The Modern Landscape in Central Europe, special issue of Centropa 4 (May 2004). 46. Although several of Estonia's leading architects of the interwar years had pursued their professional studies in Germany, the pervasive residual antipathy toward Baltic Germans in the post-1918 republic had discouraged relations between the countries. Moreover, continued skepticism of Soviet Russia's intentions toward the small Baltic republic hampered cultural relations between the communist and the liberal democratic states. With official discouragement of contacts between Estonia and the two great cultures of modernist experimentation, both of which had traditionally dominated Estonia's native population, artists and architects were inspired to pursue contacts with Nordic nations, especially the Swedes, Finns, and Danes had helped to secure Estonia's sovereignty around 1918. The change in Estonia's political orientation in the mid-1930s gave license to the country's cultural elite to reconnect to Germany. However, in view of the persistent Estonian suspicion of Germany's cultural and economic intentions, authoritarian Italy provided an attractive alternative. Moreover, Italian fascism's perceived endorsement of modernist building was accepted in Tallinn as a possible model to be emulated locally.

47. In 1937, statues of "work" and "beauty" by Juhan Raudsepp (1896–1984), one of Estonia's most accomplished sculptors, were placed in the two niches flanking the Art Hall's central four-story window block. It is likely that the inclusion of Raudsepp's figurative images was an attempt by the (Estonian) Artists' Club and the Cultural Foundation, who originally commissioned the building, to demonstrate congruence with the authoritarian government's post-1934 conservatism. See Kalm, Eesti Funktsionalism, 62 (see n. 34). For a contemporaneous, somewhat ambivalent critical assessment of the building, see Hallas-Murula, Funktsionalism, 71 n. 3. Hallas-Murula quotes from a review of 3 Oct. 1934: "The art building itself is a stone house, but the façade has more glass than wall, like a greenhouse or a huge photo shop . . . . Whole walls facing the square are mostly windows. It can hardly be very comfortable there in summertime. But what's the point of complaining—modern architecture does not always consider comfort, there must be a touch of style as well."

48. Pits himself signaled the era's ambivalence about modern architecture, especially its putative "internationalist" aspect. At the inauguration of the modestly modernist Bank of Estonia building, he cautioned that in "erecting future state buildings there should be no running after everything that is modern" in order to follow foreign models. (See "Rüütvanne eman- sused pangategelastele" in Vaba Maa [15 Apr. 1935], as quoted in Hallas-Murula, Funktsionalism, 73.) Henceforth, branches of the national bank in Tartu, Pärnu, and elsewhere were designed in a more traditional "Estonian" architectural vocabulary employing gabled roofs and ornamental motifs.

49. Although there is little evidence to suggest significant or sustained contact between the architects of Estonia and Lithuania during the 1930s, parallel stylistic characteristics and comparable ideological commitments among Baltic modern painters and sculptors were visible to audiences who attended the large exhibitions of Lithuanian art mounted in Estonia as well as in Czechoslovakia, France, and Scandinavia in 1937. See Jankevičius, Dailë ir Vėžybë, 286–87 (see n. 11).

50. The role and freedom of architecture under Soviet suzerainty differed between the Lithuanian and Estonian Socialist Republics. Although a rather monumental form of classicism was favored by the authorities universally, as early as the mid-1950s modernist impulses were manifested in Estonia beginning with the all-important "stadium" by Alar Kotti and Henno Seppmann (1957–60) in which the Song Festival was held in Tallinn. Under Nikita Khrushchev, functionalist elements were expressed in the design and construction of numerous cafés, schools, small apartment buildings, and especially cinemas.

For Lithuania, where functionalism did not take firm root in then-Polish Vilnius (Wilno) during the interwar years, progressive architecture akin to the range of modern styles evidenced in Western Europe, Japan, and North America was seldom practiced until recent years in the great capital, where baroque eloquence set the tone for architectural discourse until Lithuanian independence was restored at the beginning of the 1990s.

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