

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: FUNCTION VERSUS FORM IN
CZECH CUBISM: ARCHITECTURE
AND FURNITURE DESIGN

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This thesis seeks to negate the idea, prevalent among scholars in the field, that form became more important than function in the works of Cubist applied artists and architects. Cubist theory flourished in these sectors of the arts among young Czech artists who rejected the rationalism of their teachers, Otto Wagner and Jan Kotěra. The work of Pavel Janák, Vlastislav Hofman and Josef Gočár provides the case study by which I argue that Czech architects during the Cubist movement from 1911 to 1925 were not only concerned with the utility of their works, but they also applied new functions to architecture and the applied arts—functions entirely different from mere practical concerns. These included the expression of the artists’ own inner visions and spirituality through formal design, the conveyance of the possibilities of dynamic movement of mass through the creation of space and its outer shell, and, after World War I, the articulation of nationalism through the synthesis of Rondocubist form and decorative folk elements.

FUNCTION VERSUS FORM IN CZECH CUBISM:
ARCHITECTURE AND FURNITURE DESIGN

by

Lyndsay Dolf Bratton

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2010

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Dedicated to
DeWitt Talmadge Bratton, Jr.
&
Teresa Foutz Bratton

Acknowledgements

I sincerely thank my advisor, Steven A. Mansbach, as well as my thesis committee members, Renée Ater and Shannen Hill, for their academic support and advice throughout the process of this thesis project. Without their guidance and advice concerning initial ideas, research, writing and editing, my work would not be possible.

The scholarships I received through Indiana University and the University of Pittsburgh, including a FLAS award in 2008, allowed me to participate for two summers in intensive Czech and Slovak language programs. These language skills proved vital to my research both at the University of Maryland and abroad in the Czech and Slovak Republics. I am indebted to the teachers and program coordinators of the respective schools, as well as my committee members for their recommendations that I gain admission to and monetary support for the language programs.

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Introduction

A theoretical dialogue concerning the interplay between form and function in design principles shaped Czech architecture and applied arts of the early twentieth century. On one hand, the rational functionalists of Otto Wagner's and Jan Kotěra's circles advocated that form be subordinate to functionality.¹ The opposition movement, which developed in response to these teachings, took French Cubist painting as their foundation. For Cubist architects in the Czech lands, concerns of form began to take precedence over those of functionality; however, this paper will argue these designers were not only still very much concerned with the utility of their works, but they also applied, through form, new *conceptual* functions to architecture and the applied arts. The designers believed that architecture and furniture design could serve many functions in addition to their most basic utilitarian purpose, such as three-dimensional representations of the spatio-temporal fourth dimension, as expressions of the artist's inner creative essence, or as canvases for national celebration. The artists strove to achieve these goals without the addition of surface ornamentation, which they considered ineffective to the core form and distracting to the conceptual statements of their designs.

The term "applied art" is often an elusive one that deserves consideration before embarking upon any study of the field. The term itself is conventionally tied to functionality, as applied arts refer to utilitarian and functional creations that have an everyday purpose. Thus, the very field in which they worked limited Czech Cubist

¹ Otto Wagner (1841-1918) constitutes one of the key Viennese architects of the Secession group, and his student, Jan Kotěra (1871-1923), furthered Wagner's teachings at the Mánes Union of Fine Artists in Prague. Kotěra is considered to be the founder of Modern Czech architecture. He trained with Otto Wagner in Vienna from 1894 until 1897, and his work was very much aligned in concept and style with that of his teacher. Both used what Wagner called the "utility style," which focused on the purpose, material and construction of a building. Harry Francis Mallgrave, *Modern Architectural Theory: A Historical Survey, 1673-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 204.

architects and designers in how far they could distance their design principles from concerns of function. Many of the Czech Cubists began their artistic careers working for the Prague version of the Wiener Werkstätte (1903-1932), known as Artěl (1908-1924). Since the English Arts and Crafts movement of the late nineteenth century, new considerations of the artistic possibilities of functional, everyday objects and furniture enraptured architects and designers who feared the degradation of applied arts caused by the Industrial Revolution and mass production. Applied artists considered functionality to be as important as the artistic spirit conveyed through their designs, since the nature of their creations necessitated a strong emphasis on everyday utility. The following study will point out the error in seeing the Czech Cubist applied artists as discounting function for the sake of form, and will demonstrate the serious considerations the designers gave to the usefulness and purpose of their work. The main difference, then, that distinguished the Cubists from their teachers is the repudiation of rationalistic design theories in favor of the transference of an artistic and abstract “metaphysicality” through form.²

In a case study of three artists’ application of the new goals, outlined above, to the realms of architecture and furniture design, I will argue that function was not disregarded, but rather redefined during the era of Czech Cubism. Pavel Janák (1882-1956), Vlastislav Hofman (1884-1964), and Josef Gočár (1880-1945) all designed Cubist buildings, furniture and utilitarian objects according to their own interpretations of the roles of form and function in architecture and the applied arts. Departing from the

² For the purposes of this study, I will use the second of the Oxford English Dictionary’s definitions of “metaphysical” to refer to the Cubists’ goal to transcend mere physical matter in their architecture and applied arts and to convey a sense of their own inner psyche. Metaphysical is defined as follows: “Designating that which is immaterial, incorporeal, or supersensible; surpassing what is natural or ordinary; transcendent.” This definition aligns the meaning of “metaphysical” with that of “spiritual,” which reads, “Of or pertaining to, consisting of, spirit, regarded in either a religious or intellectual aspect; immaterial.” I will adhere to these definitions throughout this thesis in order to discuss the conceptual functions that the Cubists applied to their architectural and furniture designs.

theories of French Cubist painting, while reacting against the architectural developments of the older generation in Vienna and Prague, the young Czech architects envisioned a utopian ideal of the role and capacity of Cubism in the applied arts to revolutionize society and its relationship to art.

I chose to look at the work of Janák, Gočár and Hofman in particular due to several reasons. Firstly, they each designed actively within the three fields I originally wanted to research, while many Cubists focused on either architecture or applied arts. Janák and Hofman published a lot of their theories in art journals, while Gočár focused not on writing his own theories, but on putting others' ideas to work in his designs, often bringing Janák's and Hofman's Cubist theories into fruition in the most successful ways. The three artists also represent three diverse backgrounds in their training. This timeline gives insight into the educational training each of my artists received and points to how their unique experiences influenced their work and perhaps each other's work [Figure 1]. It is clear that Janák received the most diverse education, both at home and abroad. He had the opportunity to study under one of the most respected Viennese modernist architects, as well as Wagner's best-known Czech pupil. Janák also received both a technical training and one in the fine arts. Gočár's training was also diverse, but his study at the School of Decorative Arts contrasts with Janák's experience at a Fine Arts Academy. Hofman, on the other hand, worked with neither Wagner nor Kotěra and trained solely within the Czech Technical University. Thus, the three artists received three unique educations in the arts, but were all active in the same artistic groups in Prague, and enjoyed frequent exchanges of ideas at this time.

Part I: Architecture

Architectural Cubism 1911-1914

A major division in dominant strains of Czech architecture occurred decisively in 1911 with the departure of many young avant-garde artists from Jan Kotěra's faction in the Mánes Association.³ The younger figures, idealistic in their outlook, criticized the teachings of their forerunners, Otto Wagner and his pupil Kotěra, for their insistence on architectural realism and rationalism,⁴ as well as their continued use of what the young architects saw as useless ornamentation applied to core forms. Janák, Gočár, and Hofman were among those who helped found Skupina, and both Janák and Hofman were instrumental in establishing and contributing to the group's publication *Umělecký měsíčník* (Artistic Monthly). Gočár never published his ideas in the Skupina journals, choosing instead to focus his energies on implementing his colleagues' ideas in realized building designs. The group allowed for direct exchange between painters, sculptors, architects and applied artists, all of whom explored aspects of Cubism in their work. Through organizing exhibitions of international artists, Skupina members remained informed of contemporary advances among other avant-garde groups across Europe,

³ The Mánes Association, founded in 1887, was an organization of Bohemian artists who fostered the exchange of artistic ideas across cultural and national borders through the mounting of and participation in international exhibitions and the publication of art journals in Czech and several other languages. The group focused on international Modernist trends and attempted to assert a place for Czech art within that scene. The Association was responsible for the ground-breaking 1905 Munch exhibition in Prague, which spawned the founding in 1907 of Osma or The Eight, which eight young and radical Czech modernists joined. Five years later, after several exhibitions of Modern French and German art were held in Prague, the members of Mánes split again, those interested in pursuing Cubism seceding from the Union to create Skupina.

⁴ The "Wagner School" is described as "a school of architecture that would attend to 'the needs of modern life, our century's much expanded constructional knowledge, and the technology of wholly new materials.'" Max Fabiani, "Aus der Wagner Schule," *Der Architekt* 1 (1895), 53, quoted in Mallgrave, 205. Mallgrave quotes Wagner himself to explain how the new style reflects "an emotional and intellectual change" from previous styles insofar as there is "an almost complete decline of the romantic, and an almost all-encompassing appearance of reason in all our works." Mallgrave, 205.

especially in France and Germany.⁵ The group was short-lived, incurring a further division in 1912, but extremely fruitful in steering the avant-garde toward innovative directions before the First World War hampered artistic exchange across borders, both within and outside of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Pavel Janák (1882-1956) was the leader and principal theoretician of the Czech Cubist movement in architecture and the applied arts. In fact, some of his most important contributions to the movement before the war were made in writings and designs on paper, rather than in realized projects. After training in Vienna with Otto Wagner and working in the Prague studio of Jan Kotěra, Janák later rejected these teachers' theories entirely. Janák's chief objection to Kotěra's work lay in his rationalist disregard for expressing the artist's individual creative spirit. Janák proposed instead that formal concerns should dominate design, and the source of creativity in formal design should spring from the artist's inner psyche. This focus on form would not disregard function but would instead lead to constructions that would fulfill the Cubists' new concepts of functionality. Thus, architecture would not only serve as spaces in which to live and work, but also as three-dimensional representations of the concept of a spiritual fourth dimension. Janák explains his views in contrast to the design principles of his teachers:

As soon as thinking about the essence of matter is added to this purely technical way of creating material and building with it, and questions are asked about its necessity, how and where it appears to human senses, how it bears the impact of force and pressure, the materiality of matter is no longer so exclusively recognized and doubts and emotive views of matter arise, which, as soon as they

⁵ Czech artists encountered French Cubism at a relatively early date, mostly as a result of Vincenc Kramář's collecting practices. Kramář (1877-1960), a physician and art historian, bought many works by French cubists through his connections with Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, the foremost dealer of Cubist art in Paris. Working with Kramář and his collection, the artists Skupina also organized ground-breaking exhibitions in Prague in 1912 and 1913 of French Cubist works, including those of Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Juan Gris and André Derain. These exhibitions followed up on the Mánes exhibition almost a decade earlier (1905), which introduced to Czech artists the art of Edvard Munch, Paul Gauguin, and others.

become active, turn into forces penetrating underneath the surface of matter or changing it everywhere where it doesn't appear to suit. A thinking, feeling spirit mostly desires to give matter life [...] and, as a penetrating force it clashes with the very materiality of dead matter, dealing with it by hewing its corners and edges, penetrating into the depths wherever it does not accept matter or does not empathize with it.⁶

These sentiments were influenced by the contemporary philosophies of Theodor Lipps and Wilhelm Worringer,⁷ whose theories of empathy and aesthetic subjectivism advocated for artists to “project [their] selves into the insides of objects.”⁸ Thus, for Cubists, the fourth dimension would become tangible reality through the creative, artistic action of molding space by building outer shells of plastic matter.

Janák, like many French and Czech Cubists, was also influenced by a new understanding of geometry in his concept of a spatial fourth dimension. Apollinaire wrote in 1913, “Geometry is for the plastic arts what grammar is for the art of writing. [...] The painters were quite naturally, as if by intuition, drawn toward dealing with possible measures of space, which in the language of modern studios are commonly and concisely referred to as the fourth dimension. [...] It is space as such, the dimension of

⁶ Pavel Janák, “The Prism and the Pyramid,” *Umělecký měsíčník* 1 (1911-1912) 162-170, in Timothy O. Benson and Eva Forgács, *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-gardes, 1910-1930* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art: Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 89-90.

⁷ It is likely that the Czech Cubist architects knew of these writers' theories through the art historians Vincenc Kramář and Václav Velém Štech. Benson and Forgács, *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-gardes, 1910-1930*, 45. Worringer's seminal text and doctoral thesis, *Abstraction and Empathy* (1907), was widely read by avant-garde artists and intellectuals throughout Europe. His theories were heavily influenced by Theodor Lipps, whose work the Cubists found especially important. In Worringer's introduction, he defines empathy and links his work to Lipps' when he writes, “Modern aesthetics, which has taken the decisive step from aesthetic objectivism to aesthetic subjectivism, i.e. which no longer takes the aesthetic as the starting point of its investigations, but proceeds from the behavior of the contemplating subject, culminates in a doctrine that may be characterized by the broad general name of the theory of empathy. This theory has been clearly and comprehensively formulated in the writing of Theodor Lipps.” Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy* (New York: International Universities Press, 1953), 4.

⁸ Ivan Margolius, *Cubism in Architecture and the Applied Arts: Bohemia and France 1910-1914* (London: David & Charles, 1979), 12.

infinity, it is this which gives plasticity to objects.”⁹ In order to visually convey this dimension, Janák looked to the diagonal. Petr Krajčí and Rostislav Švácha write, “this third, oblique movement, which Janák saw as an active intervention by the creative mind, became from 1912 onwards the structural basis of the architect’s further work. The outer shell and the inner life of a building were to become a dynamic interplay, a mixture of matter and space.”¹⁰ It is interesting to note that at the same time Janák and other Cubists were confronting these issues of plasticity in space and matter, Albert Einstein was formulating his theory of relativity (1908-1915) which refutes Newton’s concept of absolute time and space.¹¹ He spent three semesters in 1911 and 1912 lecturing at Prague’s German University, drawing audiences from the Czech University and the intelligentsia at large.¹² It is likely that some of the young avant-garde artists attended these lectures, or at the very least, read and heard about them within their artistic and intellectual circles.

Janák’s remodeling project for a house in Pelhřimov in 1913 is one of his first realized projects that demonstrates his Cubist architectural theories. The project further shows how Cubist theory could be achieved in harmony with past historical styles [Figure 2]. Dr. Fára’s house was initially built in the Baroque style, and Janák’s task was

⁹ Guillaume Apollinaire, “Les Peintres cubistes,” (1913), in Milena Lamarová, “Texts and Contexts,” in Alexander Von Vegesack, *Czech Cubism: Architecture, Furniture, Decorative Arts* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 12.

¹⁰ Petr Krajčí and Rostislav Švácha, “Prague, 1908-18,” in Eve Blau, ed., *Shaping the Great City: Modern Architecture in Central Europe, 1890-1937* (New York: Prestel, 1999), 118.

¹¹ Miroslav Lamač, *Modern Czech Painting: 1907-1917* (Prague: Knihtisk, 1967), 94. As Milena Lamarová concisely explains, “Einstein’s discovery that the spatio-temporal continuity is interrupted by the movement of matter implied new ways to approach spatial reality in terms of the activation of matter and shape, which would reciprocally affect space. This new spatio-temporal dimension became one of the basic points of departure for theoretical considerations about cubism as the means of ‘making matter dynamic.’” Lamarová, “Cubism in Applied Arts and Design,” in Von Vegesack, 53.

¹² Rostislav Švácha, *Cubist Prague, 1909-1925* (Prague: Central Europe Gallery and Publishing House, 2004), 203.

to remodel the façade in keeping with the overall original look. As Ivan Margolius points out, this architectural example “reinforced the Baroque tendencies of Cubism. The additional excited dynamics of the exterior fully fill in the gap between the styles rather than providing contrast with the new work.”¹³ The shape of the façade remains Baroque, but Janák added the Cubist faceted planes to the upper gables and to the buttresses under the balcony and corner window that juts over the street. In addition to the Baroque overtones, the main portal exhibits Gothic influence in its composition and aesthetic [Figure 3]. The influence of both Baroque and Gothic styles is easily discernible in many cubist works. The Czech Cubists’ attraction to these specific historical styles likely sprang from both Czech architectural heritage and the emphasis on spirituality in both Baroque and Gothic architecture—a theme which the Cubists found important in their work. Janák was particularly inspired by the intricate vaulting in southern Bohemian Gothic churches due to their “dominant geometrical arrangement, sharp edges, and oblique, constantly touching lines,” all of which are present in the Fára House portal.¹⁴

Cubist architects often used the architectural façade as the focal point upon which to demonstrate many of the theoretical goals of Cubism. Janák wrote on the importance given to the façade:

The visual point of view thus created in architecture has a specific and characteristic entity: the façade. [...] All the other walls of the cube and the building are, of course, neglected, as if the entire content of the building were drawn into the façade and the gable. [...] So far, we know only that to make a space cubic, three-dimensional, is not, in our opinion, the creation of space, because it is no more than reality; creating the means to extract more than was here before—that is, creating volume and space—is achieved, above all, by

¹³ Margolius, 51.

¹⁴ François Burkhardt, “Czech Cubism Today,” in Alexander Von Vegesack, *Czech Cubism: Architecture, Furniture, Decorative Arts* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 98-100.

spatial modeling of the surface areas; that is, we are leaning toward the expression of matter not centrally, but frontally.¹⁵

Thus, his theories of surface modeling could be applied to any wall of a structure, inside or out; however, in many circumstances only one exterior wall was available, and rendering the interior in a Cubist manner posed problems of practicality. Šváchá writes that early twentieth century Prague offered itself readily to Cubist theory since “the city prided itself on the impressive facades of its streets and squares, creating an image perceived in a two-dimensional perspective. But as you walk on, the image is multiplied, transforming itself into a kaleidoscope of views and dimensions that constantly produce new sensations.”¹⁶ This is also true of the smaller towns and cities in Bohemia at the time. The Cubist design in the Fára House was indeed all concentrated in the façade, while the floor plan of the interior spaces remained traditionally conceived for the sake of livability. Margolius writes, “The architect was fully aware of the destructive nature of the style which would make the resulting volumes difficult to live in.”¹⁷ In most Cubist projects, architects remained tied the issue of functionality and livability and thus, had to find ways to implement their ideas without forsaking the comfort and practicality of the creation for its inhabitants.

Unlike Art Nouveau architects and Viennese Secessionists who concentrated on curved forms found in nature, the Cubists “exulted in the force and dignity of the straight line.”¹⁸ The crystal in particular held special resonance with Cubist architects like Janák, just as it had been a point of departure for German Expressionist architects. During the

¹⁵ Pavel Janák, “Renewal of the Façade,” *Umělecký měsíčník* 2 (1912-13), 85-93, in Milena Lamarová, “Texts and Contexts,” in Von Vegesack, *Czech Cubism: Architecture, Furniture, Decorative Arts*, 17.

¹⁶ Rostislav Šváchá, *Cubist Prague, 1909-1925* (Prague: Central Europe Gallery and Publishing House, 2004), 12.

¹⁷ Margolius, 51.

¹⁸ Margolius, 24.

late nineteenth century, the crystal “became a symbol of another, unreal world; its configuration was the symbol of the spiritual world, it played the role of a mediator in the battle against historicism—it was a symbolic transmitter in the move towards abstraction as the revelation of absolute truth.”¹⁹ In essence, the crystal exemplified the concept of the fourth dimension with which Cubists found themselves so enthralled. Alois Riegl, whose theories were seminally important for Wilhelm Worringer, Otto Wagner and most of his pupils, saw crystallization as a cosmic force uniting art and nature, which “constitutes the first and most eternal law of form in inanimate matter, and comes closest to absolute beauty (material individuality).”²⁰ Cubist architects were especially spellbound by this magnificent anomaly existing in the natural world—the one instance of dead matter “growing” under the extreme forces of nature. In his highly influential article, “The Prism and the Pyramid,” Janák wrote:

All other geometrically more complex shapes appearing in an inorganic nature come into being as a result of synergy of a third force [...]. The most beautiful example of this process is crystallization: here, the merging force (the force of crystallization) is so disproportionately strong in comparison with gravity that—it can be almost said—the weight of the matter has no impact on crystallization; the force of crystallization seems to be a kind of gravity of matter concentrated into it, so strong that it is realized in all circumstances into a world centered in itself.²¹

Thus, many of his unrealized designs are monumental crystalline masses that were perhaps too extreme or unlivable for production [Figure 4]. Janák’s interior designs, especially, “reveal that he conceived of these spaces to be like the inside of crystals;”²² however, they were usually too idealistic and fantastic to provide comfortable dwelling

¹⁹ Lada Hubatová-Vacková, “Crystal and Kaleidoscopic Abstraction: Scientific Photography and Cubist Design,” *Centropa* 9, no. 1 (Jan. 2009) 36.

²⁰ Worringer, 19.

²¹ Pavel Janák, “The Prism and the Pyramid,” *Umělecký měsíčník* 1 (1911-1912), 162-170, in Benson and Forgács, *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-gardes, 1910-1930*, 89.

²² Krajčí and Švácha, in Eve Blau, 118.

spaces. Designs such as this *Monumental Interior*, which never existed beyond sketches on paper, highlight the extent to which Cubist architects considered functionality necessary in their architectural realizations. Whether that was a choice made out of free will or requirement is inconsequential here, since the argument is that function always remained a vital concern to the designers in the end.

Janák's design in the 1913 competition to build the Žižka Monument in Prague demonstrates the possibilities in Cubist architecture when concerns of livability were not present, and architects were entirely free to convey their artistic sensibilities without restraint [Figures 5 & 6]. Designed in collaboration with Cubist sculptor Otto Gutfreund, the proposed structure in fact brought architecture into the realm of sculpture. Given that history and concerns for universal understanding play a dominate role in the design of such a monument, Janák's construction must have seemed too abstract to symbolize a figure such as Jan Žižka, a Czech general and leader of the Hussites during the fourteenth century. The winning design for the project conforms to the more traditional equestrian statue to commemorate the war hero. Had Janák's monument been built, it would have resembled a giant crystal into which people could enter. The artist's creative spirit would have been immediately discernible from both the exterior and interior points of experience.

While Kotěra's "concept of spatial arrangement was based on the grouping of simple right-angled elements in contrast to the predominantly curved forms of the previous period,"²³ the diagonal provided the Cubists with a solution to their desire for dynamism of form. The juxtaposition of diagonal, horizontal and vertical planes

²³ Margolius, 12.

produced a sense of movement in architectural matter, a plasticity which was enhanced by the play of light and shadow across the multitude of opposing facets. Janák theorized:

This ratio between the natural primary shape of stillness and a dramatized shape provides the means by which matter is conquered artistically, since the artist's intentions, although psychologically more complex, are in principle the same as the forces penetrating, permeating and moving natural matter and its natural shape. What we can conclude from it about the nature of artistic creation is this: if dead matter is to be artistically overcome, that is, given spirit so that something happens in it, this occurs by means of a third plane added to the natural biplane shape.²⁴

Janák exhibited this use of the diagonal to the extreme in his design for the Žižka Monument. Janák's Fára House and Žižka Monument design both represent prime examples of the complex interplay between function and form in Cubist architecture. At the same time, the romantic idealism of Cubist architecture becomes apparent in Janák's project. Janák and other Cubist architects were extremely innovative, but their goals were often too idealistic. As the architects explored new functions for architecture in trying to tackle problems of space and plasticity in matter, they were still tied to the everyday concerns of practical functionality—a lack of freedom which impeded the extent to which their ideas could become reality. The extremes of their romantic goals to manifest the artist's creative spirit within the fourth dimension often rendered buildings too fantastical for residential use; however, even some of the most radical designs suited well the realm of monumental architecture, evidenced by the Žižka Monument.

Vlastislav Hofman (1884-1964), like Janák, contributed many articles to the theoretical dialogue of the Czech Cubists. His training was quite different from that of Janák or Gočár, as he studied structural engineering at the Czech University of Technology rather than pursuing his studies in Vienna under the influence of Wagner or

²⁴ Pavel Janák, "The Prism and the Pyramid," *Umělecký měsíčník* 1 (1911-1912), 162-170, in Benson and Forgács, *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-gardes, 1910-1930*, 89.

in Prague with Kotěra. His philosophy on the importance of form is best summed up in his statement that “form overpowers matter and does not strive to affect through the quantum of material; it creates a plastic element, achieved by intellect.”²⁵ Hofman’s published works show his indebtedness to the theories posited by Alois Riegl. Worringer explains Riegl’s theory of artistic volition in *Abstraction and Empathy*:

Riegl was the first to introduce into the method of art historical investigation the concept of ‘artistic volition.’ By ‘absolute artistic volition’ is to be understood that latent inner demand which exists per se, entirely independent of the object and of the mode of creation, and behaves as will to form. It is the primary factor in all artistic creation and, in its innermost essence, every work of art is simply an objectification of this *a priori* existent absolute artistic volition.²⁶

Perhaps drawing from Worringer’s own theories,²⁷ Hofman felt that “to conquer matter means to impart to it one’s own spiritual movement [which] occurred whenever styles arose or grew [...] independently of one another, as happened in Egypt, the Orient, India, the Gothic and the Baroque, as opposed to the classicist principle or times of decadence.”²⁸ Czech Cubist architects, while originating from French Cubist painting, thought their new art to be capable of joining this list. The Cubist architects were inspired by the concepts and aesthetics of Picasso and Braque, but applying those same principles to architecture turned out to be an idealistic fantasy. Nevertheless, Czech architects developed a style unique to their specific time and place, which they believed to be applicable to the future.

²⁵ Vlastislav Hofman, “Contribution to the Character of Modern Architecture,” *Umělecký měsíčník* 1, no. 8 (1912), 228-231, quoted in Vladimír Šlapeta, “Cubism in Architecture,” in Von Vegesack, *Czech Cubism: Architecture, Furniture, Decorative Arts*, 41.

²⁶ Worringer, 9.

²⁷ The following quote becomes Worringer’s mantra throughout *Abstraction and Empathy*, and it is easy to imagine the statement constituting a sort of mantra for the Cubists, as well. “Aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment. To enjoy aesthetically means to enjoy myself in a sensuous object diverse from myself, to empathise myself into it. [...] The crucial factor is, therefore, rather the sensation itself, i.e. the inner motion, the inner life, the inner self-activation.” Worringer, 5.

²⁸ Šlapeta, 41.

Hofman's architectural designs remained on paper more often than they were carried through. Margolius writes, "His building projects [...] were stretched to the limit of possibility and as a result very few of them have been realized. Nevertheless Hofman's projects showed the wide base of the style where no building type or object escaped the attention of Cubists wishing to prove their skill."²⁹ His designs were thus better suited to public buildings such as monuments and churches, rather than private or commercial spaces. One such public work before the war, the D'áblice Cemetery in Prague (1912-1914), demonstrates the common disparity between plans and realizations in Cubist architecture [Figures 7-10]. The end result was much more subdued and rather less interesting or successfully Cubist than the plan Hofman originally had in mind. The project represents Hofman's first completed design belonging to his Cubist work, and the first of several engagements in the field of funerary architecture. Hofman was not alone in these Cubist funerary endeavors—Bedřich Feuerstein, Pavel Janák and others would also design and build Cubist crematoria, cemeteries, and funerary tombs and urns. It is perhaps the very spirituality present in Cubist theories, as well as the lack of the requirement of livability, which allowed Cubist architects to adapt their ideas to this morose realm of architecture.

Hofman began preparing designs for the cemetery at D'áblice in 1911; however, the structure was not completed until 1916 when, even then, the end result differed strikingly from Hofman's early sketches. While Janák's early work shows heavy influence of the ideas of Baroque architectural mass, the structures that Hofman originally conceived for D'áblice reveal his deep interest in Gothic architecture [Figures 7 & 8]. The theories of both Gothic and Baroque architecture, mentioned earlier, lent

²⁹ Margolius, 52.

much weight to the expression of spirituality through the form of architectural masses. This attraction, as well as the strong emphasis on the idea of upward motion conveyed in dematerialization in Gothic architecture, led Hofman's work to explore Cubism while keeping an eye directed toward the Gothic past. The design for the Mortuary at D'áblice, which was never built, displays between the repetitive window units the Cubistic beveled masses slanted at several angles; however, he utilized the Gothic concept of an exposed skeletal structure and "transformed it into a membrane stretched between the structural components of the frame. The supporting piers and the supported beams of this skeletal system were slanted. Elsewhere, he narrowed them in a conical fashion from the inside out, so that they began to resemble Gothic buttresses."³⁰ The main entrance, also never built, looked to Gothic precedents as well. In the end, only a side entrance was built which consisted of three sides of a polygonal shape, marked on either end with a round and beveled structure with glass windows, each bearing resemblance to the proposed mortuary. The sketches thus demonstrate Hofman's Cubist work better than the resulting structure that stands today.

Like Janák, Hofman also submitted a design to the competition for the Žižka Monument in 1913 [Figures 11 & 12]. His plan consisted of a zigzag path of Cubist-inspired landscaping on the face of Vítkov Hill, which would culminate in a Cubist structure dedicated to the Czech hero. Rostislav Švácha writes that, like other Cubist architects, Hofman:

Downplayed the nationalist aspect in the concept of the Žižka Monument and treated it rather as an abstract manifestation of will, strength, and energy. On the other hand, he did not hesitate to include in his work a contribution from a sculptor and figure painter, Ladislav Beneš. He did so even though it was

³⁰ Rostislav Švácha, "Hofman the Architect at the Intersection of Time and Place," in Mahulena Nešlehová, *Vlastislav Hofman* (Prague: Vlastislav Hofman Society, 2005), 42.

questionable whether figurative sculpture was suited to the terse soliloquy of Cubist architecture.³¹

This point is certainly interesting given the nationalistic architecture that would appear after the war, in Janák's, Gočár's and other Cubists' work—projects which almost always included sculptural programs.

Hofman's *Design for a Monumental Building* demonstrates his intended style better than any of his realized architectural projects [Figure 13]. On paper, Hofman was free to let his artistic visions flow without much regard for setting or livability. Thus, like Janák, he conceived of architectural structures that approached sculpture. He amassed geometric forms in monumental crystalline contours; however, Hofman also tended toward curved outlines to contribute to the sense of movement, unlike Janák or Gočár. The *Design for a Monumental Building* shows how innovative his designs were. The cemetery gates and design for the Žižka Monument, on the other hand, demonstrate the highly limiting effects of the concerns of public reception on architectural design of the early twentieth century.

Josef Gočár (1880-1945) trained under Kotěra at the Prague School of Applied Arts and began his career in 1906, working for two years in the studio of his former teacher. He soon departed from the Wagnerian school of thought and, after joining Skupina in 1911, he realized in designs and constructed projects some of the earliest examples of Janák's theories. The first was the Bohdaneč spa in Pardubice [Figures 14 & 15]. Gočár applied Janák's idea of molding form so as to produce the sense of movement in still matter. This was achieved mainly in the repetition of opposing diagonals in the register of recessed ground-floor windows, as well as in the semicircular end and center-

³¹ Ibid, 53.

pieces of the façade which enhance the undulating effect of the windows. It is difficult to know whether Gočár set about the Bohdaneč Spa project with the express intention of using his inner spiritual movement to create plastic matter, as Janák and Hofman advised, since Gočár never published any writings during the prewar Cubist period. He certainly expresses a unique style in his work—one that differs from Janák and Hofman, and his work lacks the romantic idealism of Janák's *Žižka Monument* or Hofman's *Design for a Monumental Building*.

One of the best-known examples of Czech Cubist architecture is Gočár's House of the Black Madonna in Prague [Figure 16-20]. Despite his usual adherence to Janák's theories and preferences, the Black Madonna House "displays the architect's respect for Classicism which prevailed in the period around 1800, known as Empire in the Czech Lands. The sturdy main cornice [...] and the motif of the portal framed by two massive columns point to the Classicist tradition."³² The main portal, however, like Janák's *Fára House* door, is linked to the Gothic tradition [Figure 18]. Unlike the Bohdaneč Spa, whose plan remained conventional, the House of the Black Madonna was one of the first projects in which Cubist principles were carried beyond the façade and into the interior [Figure 19]. The interior spaces of the House reflect the façade's angular facets, and Gočár employed Cubist buttressing in the corners of upper-level rooms. The manner in which the stories are stacked creates a pyramidal effect. The undulating facets of the façade employ the rhythmic force of the diagonal to convey the fourth dimension, underscoring Gočár's understanding of, and agreement with, Janák's article "The Prism

³² Marie Platovská, *Josef Gočár: House of the Black Madonna, Prague* (Florence: Alinea Editrice, 2001), 11.

and the Pyramid.”³³ This structural shape is in turn reflected in the interiors—the walls slant on the diagonal plane in juxtaposition to the horizontal floors and ceilings and the vertical central walls. Furthermore, the Cubistic rendering of ironwork elements present on the façades of many of Gočár’s buildings [Figures 14, 15 & 18] is carried into the interior of the House of the Black Madonna to the tear-shaped central spiral staircase [Figure 20]. In this way, the applied arts are put to use in both the interior furnishings, as well as the exterior structural embellishments. While these iron implements may be seen as applied ornamentation, once again concerns of function enter the Cubist architectural oeuvre. Window grates and balcony and staircase railings are necessary additions to the core forms of functional public and private buildings. In the end, Gočár came closest to realizing Janák’s and Hofman’s newfound functions for architecture during the prewar Cubist movement. His façades and interior walls convey plastic dynamism in architectural matter, while his creative vision is made visible in the overall cohesive monumental forms. Furthermore, Gočár successfully integrated Cubist principles into historical surroundings, just as Janák had urged architects to do and as he had done himself in the Fára House.

The Cubist period leading up to the First World War was one of optimistic idealism. Had the war not interrupted and ultimately shattered this optimism, Czech Cubists may have realized their goals more fully. As it were, Cubist architects did not have the financial support, ability or opportunities to put into being some of their most innovative designs—some of which provided answers and solutions to the architects’ problems with space, matter and plasticity. Vlastislav Hofman’s writings highlight the

³³ Pavel Janák, “The Prism and the Pyramid,” *Umělecký měsíčník* 1 (1911-1912), 162-170, in Benson and Forgács, *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-gardes, 1910-1930*. See footnote 3.

loftiness of some the Cubists' goals. "We find in new art a kind of dualism: a striving for fully objective reality and a striving for full ideality of form. The new law of modern art is that it must achieve such an ideality of form so as to become a complete and synthetic substitute for objects."³⁴ Perhaps Cubist architects strove to accomplish too much in their era, but it is likely that they could have fulfilled their goals more fully had World War I not descended over Europe in 1914, nearly annihilating every artistic endeavor for four cataclysmic years.

Postwar Cubism and National Identity

After the shock of World War I, Czech Cubists were unable to continue their explorations into the problems of space and matter with the same youthful fervor of the prewar period. The political atmosphere had changed drastically in the artists' homeland due to the creation of an independent state for the Czechoslovaks. Architects were called upon to help the nation recover from war, and entirely new needs emerged with the birth of a democratic Czech state, such as schools and government buildings. Architects thus sought a more "democratic" and essentially "Czech" style during the 1920s.³⁵ In this search for a democratic national style, what resulted was the phenomenon often referred to as "Rondocubism." According to Vojtěch Lahoda, this was a pejorative term used contemporaneously with the movement.³⁶ He writes that "enlarged arch stones give dynamism to the façade of the building, emphasizing its strength and mightiness and at

³⁴ Vlastislav Hofman, "The Spirit of Change in Visual Art," *Almanach na rok* (1914), in Benson and Forgács, *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-gardes, 1910-1930*, 114.

³⁵ Vojtěch Lahoda, "Searching for a 'Democratic' Shape in Czech Modernism at the beginning of the 1920s," *Centropa* 8, no. 1 (January 2008), 26.

³⁶ Lahoda, 28. There is a conflict in the scholarship on this issue, as Nicholas Sawicki states that the term was introduced in the late 1960s by the architectural historian Marie Benešová: "Writing the History of the 'Czechoslovak Official Modern': Karel Teige as Historian of the 'Cubist' Generation." *Centropa* 8 no. 1 (January 2008), 4.

the same time giving it a sort of quasi-ancient style, as though modernism were courting Tuscan Renaissance, Czech rural wooden cottages or the vernacular baroque of the South Bohemian farms of the 19th century.”³⁷ He calls this “folk modernism” or “civil decorativism,” explaining that the elements of the style were chosen based on a sociological study of Czech family structures and social customs. Supporting the first Czech President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk’s rejection of Cubism as an inappropriate style for the new republic, “it is not strange therefore that the basis of the new ‘national style’ [...] is no longer diagonals and sharp edges attacking the spectator or expansive crystalline form that weigh down the façade as in the case of Czech Cubist architectural forms before 1914.”³⁸ Thus, while many scholars dismiss Rondocubism as a purely decorative style created as a naïve reaction to the shock of war, its founders developed the style out of postwar concerns with more profound purpose and content. “In the unified transmission of elements of folk architecture [...] it uses certain signs and techniques to create an unified whole conveyed in an intelligible, non-abstract language, which is less intellectualized than cubism—that is, a transition from the avant-garde approach to the vernacular, which was better understood by the people.”³⁹

Gočár’s Legiobanka in Prague is the most fully realized example of the short-lived style [Figure 21]. The repetition of simple and undulating forms is reminiscent of prewar Cubism, but Gočár decreased his reliance on the straight line in exchange for circular and cylindrical shapes. Rondocubist architecture, like prewar Cubist designs,

³⁷ Lahoda, 28.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Burkhardt, 96. The description “non-abstract” is not an accurate one, given that the bulk of Rondocubist decoration consisted of simple geometric forms. Perhaps Burkhardt refers to the addition of non-abstract sculptural programs such as in the examples discussed below: Gočár’s Legiobanka and Janák’s Palác Adria.

approached the ideal of a Gesamtkunstwerk, but the postwar style differed in this respect from its predecessor. Rondocubist exteriors usually included decorative sculptural programs, and the interior ornamentation closely echoed that of the exterior façade. This cohesion is immediately apparent when one compares the exterior of the Legiobanka with a photograph of its interior [Figure 22]. The distinctively Rondocubist rectangles pierced by circles, appearing on the façades of several buildings during the period, also line the interior walls and columns of the bank. This decorative repetition is reminiscent of Czech folk architectural styles, while the geometric quality displays the influence of Classicist architecture. It is interesting to note that these Rondocubist buildings were usually painted in national colors which would have added to the universal appeal for the average citizen of the new republic.⁴⁰ Rondocubism thus departs from the insular and individualistic ideal of imbuing a building with the artists' inner spirituality, and instead transfers the focus to the evocation of a nationalist spirit.

In order to heighten the nationalistic and intended universal appeal of Rondocubist structures, most architects hired other artists to design sculptural programs for the exteriors. The frieze by Cubist sculptor Otto Gutfreund, on the façade of the Legiobanka, depicts a homecoming of soldiers of the Czechoslovak Foreign Legion after the war [Figure 23]. The fact that Czechs voluntarily fought on so many fronts for the Allies during World War I led to the agreement by Allied powers to grant the Czechoslovaks statehood.⁴¹ To celebrate the contributions of average citizens, Gutfreund's frieze shows figures dressed in simple, everyday clothing that the common Czech villager would wear. The figures' proportions are a bit skewed a folk style, and

⁴⁰ Penelope Curtis, "Oto Gutfreund and the Czech National Decorative Style," *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 4 (Spring 1987), 41.

⁴¹ Lahoda, 28.

they are portrayed wearing contemporary peasant dress.⁴² Gutfreund's postwar style reveals almost nothing of his previous Cubist sculptural work.

Another Rondocubist example, the Palác Adria, was designed by Pavel Janák and Josef Zásche between 1923 and 1925 [Figures 24 & 25].⁴³ As in the Legiobanka project, several artists contributed to the decorative program of the Palác, which was designed to celebrate the everyday work of ordinary Czechoslovak people.⁴⁴ The figural sculptures are rendered in a much more Classical style than in the Legiobanka frieze. Indeed, Janák's version of Rondocubism is more deeply rooted in Classicism than Gočár's conception of the style. In fact, parallel with the French "retour à l'ordre" after World War I, Rondocubists attempted to associate the newly created Czechoslovak Republic with past great republican powers, such as those in Italy.⁴⁵ Margolius writes, the Palác Adria "is remembered for its Renaissance expression but was undertaken without the use of historical details."⁴⁶ It is true that the overall structure is reminiscent of a Renaissance chateau, but the flat ornamental motifs of simple shapes show the beginning of Janák's transition from the Cubist concern of dynamic modeling of core forms to a purist and functionalist aesthetic.

Vlastislav Hofman, who had returned to the Mánes Union before the First World War, did not make the transition with Janák and Gočár into the Rondocubist style. Instead he continued his prewar Cubist style immediately following the war, introducing

⁴² Gutfreund's frieze represents the "return to order" that occurred among many avant-garde artists across Europe after the First World War. One can contrast the folksy and primitivized figures in the Legiobanka frieze with Gutfreund's prewar Cubo-Expressionism, as seen in the highly abstracted sculpture *Viki* (1912) [Figure 18].

⁴³ Josef Zásche (1871-1957) was an architect of German nationality who trained and worked in the Czech lands for most of his career, also collaborating with Jan Kotěra.

⁴⁴ Lahoda, 29.

⁴⁵ Lahoda, 28.

⁴⁶ Margolius, 103.

Purist elements to the beveled Cubist forms and historical elements. In 1919, he won the competition to build a crematorium in the cemetery at Moravská Ostrava (destroyed in 1980) [Figure 26]. The structure's plan is reminiscent of a Romanesque rotunda, and the Italianate campanile that forms the entrance to the chapel is juxtaposed with Purist right angles. The Cubist details are concentrated in the chimney's outer structure, as well as in the interior design [Figure 27]. In this project, Hofman was able to bring Cubist principles to the structure of the interior, as Gočár had in the House of the Black Madonna. The function of a crematorium requires less conformity to interior structural standards and decoration than a residential space. In fact, the spiritual qualities of Cubist theories and design were especially appropriate to the funerary purpose of a crematorium and chapel. Hofman did not realize his Cubist theories in the crematorium any further than he had during the prewar period. He would eventually limit his architectural work to bridges by the forties, but the Ostrava Crematorium, among several other similar unrealized design projects, demonstrates his continued interest in Cubism's spiritual role immediately following the war, especially as it lends itself to funerary architecture.

Rondocubism had little to do with the prewar Cubist phase, except for the fact that it was developed by some of the same Cubists. The exploratory functions of Cubist architecture—the issues of space and plasticity that Janák, Hofman and Gočár had been working to solve—gave way to the socially-oriented function of bolstering nationalism in the new republic. It was, in the words of Miroslav Šik, “A national style of the republican Czechoslovaks, which avoids the whole area of church and sacred architecture, instead analogizing the earthy rural Baroque with its two-tone façades with a

folk character.”⁴⁷ He puts the style into a personal perspective by adding, “If our aristocracy, bourgeoisie and Catholics abandon us for centuries, the simple people will turn to their healthy roots to preserve themselves.” Indeed, Rondocubism was the culmination of over a century of nationalism in Czech art. After struggling for decades to assert Czech nationality, it was appropriate and even necessary that architects celebrated in their work the birth of the first official Czech state. By the mid-1920s, Rondocubism fell out of favor, and Czech Cubist architects ironically gravitated toward the rationalism that they had reacted against before the war. Ladislava Horňáková explains that “this nationalist movement remained purely at the outer surface of phenomena [...] it was however already an anachronism in its own time. It was Functionalism that became the ‘new art.’”⁴⁸ Given that the nationalistic goals inherent in Rondocubism were already achieved in 1918 with the establishment of the Czech Republic, the style served more of a celebratory purpose in the aftermath of this event. Thus, the Rondocubist phase turned out to be a transitional period from Cubism to Functionalism; however, the style was not without consequence or significance in Czech architectural history.

Before progressing into a discussion of Cubist furniture design, it is worth considering the ways in which the Czech Cubist architects failed in reacting against everything for which their teachers Wagner and Kotěra stood. A revealing source of Wagner’s influence arises in the Cubists’ reworking of historical styles, “impressing upon them the stamp of a new artistic consciousness,”⁴⁹ just as Wagner had advocated in his Byzantine-inspired and pseudo-Renaissance designs. Secondly, it is interesting that

⁴⁷ Miroslav Šik, “Modernism anti-Modernism: Bohemian Cubism, 1910-1920,” *Domus* 782 (May 1996), 68.

⁴⁸ Ladislava Horňáková, “Architecture,” in Alena Potůčková, ed., *Folklorisms in 20th Century Czech Art* (Prague: The Czech Museum of the Fine Arts, 2004), 108.

⁴⁹ Walter Zednicek, *Otto Wagner* (Vienna: Grasl Druck & Neue Medien, 2002), 14.

while the Cubists proclaimed to reject all applied and unnecessary surface ornamentation, the Purists would criticize Cubism for its decorative nature. A third influence of Wagner from which the Cubists did not stray was the adherence to the idea of a Gesamtkunstwerk, which could not be viewed simply with the eyes, but must also be experienced and felt “with the entire body walking in and out of a building structure.”⁵⁰ Exactly what *kind* of experience one was meant to feel in Wagner’s structures of course differed from the Cubists’ intentions, but the concept of a force unseen, and only felt through the sum of all human senses, remained constant in both factions of architecture. While these points can be considered failures in their attempts to entirely break free from the older generation’s principles, the Cubists’ new considerations of the metaphysical qualities of form led their work far from the Wagnerian ideal of utilitarian practicality.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 13.

Part II: Furniture

Furniture design may seem an unlikely direction in which to take the Cubist ideas that Janák, Gočár and Hofman explored in their buildings; however, the very sculptural nature of furniture lent itself well to the architects' concepts. Furthermore, filling Cubist constructions with Cubist furniture and utilitarian objects, served to further the ideal of a Gesamtkunstwerk. As one can see upon further analysis, however, the concept of furniture groupings and placement, and the very nature of the interior spaces themselves, did not radically break with past traditions and remained entirely loyal to convention instead. Worringer points to the difficulties of transforming space, which the Cubists encountered in every design:

It is precisely space which, filled with atmospheric air, linking things together and destroying their individual closedness, gives things their temporal value and draws them into the cosmic interplay of phenomena; most important of all in this connection is the fact that space as such is not susceptible of individualization. Space is therefore the major enemy of all striving after abstraction, and hence is the first thing to be suppressed in the representation.⁵¹

While Worringer here refers to the issues of space in the realm of sculpture, it is easy to imagine the Cubist architects regarding such a notion as a summary of one of their own concerns—that is, to manipulate the interior spaces of their Cubist structures. The problem of space was unavoidable in the realm of architecture and the applied arts. The Cubists were not interested in negating space but rather altering our experience of it—they wanted to objectify space itself so as to render it part of the experiential subject. Therefore, in their designs of interior spaces and exhibition rooms, Janák and Gočár in particular echoed the exterior beveled angles, crystalline forms, and use of the diagonal to again convey the movement of matter and the spirit of the artist—this time through the

⁵¹ Worringer, 38.

experience of space. The artists attempted to further this modification of space by filling it with the Cubist utilitarian creations that approached sculptures in themselves.

Just as the Czech Cubist architects refuted the Secessionist architectural styles of their teachers, they also sought to fill their buildings with furnishings which upheld the same theories and concepts as their architecture—furniture and utilitarian objects that moved beyond rationalist functionalism toward new ideals. Milena Lamarová writes, “This break with the past was manifested by a rejection not only of its organic ornamentation and decorativeness, but also of its ideology. For the Cubist architects, art became an autonomous category, and not just decoration. It no longer served life, it was above all a vehicle for the artist’s expression.”⁵² The latter statement is far too narrow, as the Cubists did in fact build furniture which served its classic purpose, and thus, life. Using furniture design as an outlet for a modern, metaphysical and abstract artistic volition was an *additional* function of Cubist applied arts, as the work of Pavel Janák, Josef Gočár and Vlastislav Hofman will again demonstrate in this study.

The term “function” becomes perhaps even more complicated in this analysis of Cubist furniture design. One must define what exactly is meant by functionality before claiming that the Czech Cubists disregarded the concept in their work. A chair can *function* as an object upon which to sit, just as a rock could serve the same purpose. This is the most fundamental meaning of functional, while adding the element of *practicality* to the concept of function indicates that the chair is also comfortable to the human body and perhaps easily moved from one room to another. These understandings of functionality are quite basic and rudimentary when in fact, a chair can serve many other

⁵² Lamarová, “Cubism in Applied Arts,” in Von Vegesack, *Czech Cubism: Architecture, Furniture, Decorative Arts*, 55-56.

functions, as the Cubists dared to attempt in their designs. Like Cubist architecture, a Cubist chair could serve as a vehicle for the artist's inner spirit, as a stimulus of a metaphysical experience for the viewer or sitter, or as an expression of nationalism.

Prewar Cubist Furniture Design 1911-1914

Many photographs survive from the prewar period when Czech Cubists designed furnishings for the doctors, actors, sculptors and other rich artists and intellectuals who commissioned them; however, the photographs and designs of the Skupina group exhibitions give a better sense of the type of interiors that the artists themselves had in mind, but rarely implemented in their realized constructions [Figures 28-30]. Petr Krajčí and Rostislav Švácha write that here “we can discern a tendency towards a new kind of Gesamtkunstwerk: the crystalline architectural frame was to accommodate suitably shaped furniture with sloping surfaces, small crafts objects, sculptures by Gutfreund, and Cubist paintings by Filla and Picasso.”⁵³ These exhibition interiors are extraordinary in their conception of interior space, and are exceptions to the rule in Cubist architecture; however, while most interiors failed to deviate from the conventional simple right-angles of square and rectangular rooms, the furniture placed within often successfully conveyed many of the theories of the Cubist applied artists.

Between 1912 and 1914, the Prague Art Workshops (Pražské umělecké dílny) accounted for the majority of output of Czech Cubist furniture by Janák, Gočár and Hofman. It is clear from the advertisements published in *Umělecký měsíčník* that functionality remained, as always in the applied arts, a deep concern of the designers at the Workshops. Vojtěch Lahoda quotes one such advertisement, “[...] apart

⁵³ Krajčí and Švácha, 119.

from luxury furniture there will mainly be produced furniture for the citizen (always according to personal requirements and conditions) [...].”⁵⁴ He goes on to say that the “radical ‘new art,’ which emphasized the spiritual side of the expansion of matter, sharp edges, diagonals and crystalline shapes, required the constitution of a shape that would suit the average citizen according to individual conditions.”⁵⁵ It is true of furniture design, like architecture, that the Cubists’ sketches were often more radical than their finished works. There was much more room for experimentation, spontaneity and disregard of material and production methods in drawings; however, the issues of functionality and practicality required many edits between the points of sketching and submitting the designs for workshop production. Milena Lamarová sums up the designs on paper when she writes:

Hofman’s pen studies for seating furniture seem intended to be made in poured concrete. Gocar’s sketches for cabinets and sideboards seem amorphous as far as materials are concerned, but also speak of superb architectural discipline. Janák’s drawings, especially those from his journals, reveal a feverish study of the most extreme limits of an object’s stability, its spatial dispersion, or even its “absorption.” The counterpoint to these drawings is found in some of the designs for actual orders, which seem to be imbued with the drawing skill of the Biedermeier. Thus fantasies and concern for conventions of living are juxtaposed.⁵⁶

The latter statement is important in regard to the interplay between function and form in Cubist furniture. While the designers paid more attention to form than to practicality in their fantastical ideas on paper, they still carried out in their works many of the conceptual functions of Cubist theory—injecting designs with the essence of matter’s constant internal movement under the forces of the metaphysical fourth dimension—and

⁵⁴ Lahoda, 27.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Lamarová, in Von Vegesack, 59-60.

in the end, also rendered the pieces practically functional for the needs of the average citizen.

One of the earliest iconic examples of Czech Cubist furniture design is the furniture suite that Pavel Janák designed for a Dr. Josef Borovička in 1911-1912 [Figures 31-35]. The contrast of white and black, as well as the repetition of forms made up of both straight and diagonal lines, creates a rhythm in each piece which unifies the whole group. Lamarová points to the “function of light and shadow in early cubist painting” which is transferred to Cubist applied arts in this collection.⁵⁷ This is achieved through both the contrasting shades of white and black and the contrasting materials of wood and glass. Cubist designers often played with the reflective effects of glass in order to give a stronger sense of movement and spirituality. Janák’s bookcase design for Dr. Borovička [Figure 33] is like the repetitive pattern of glass, metal and cement that created such a strong sense of motion across Gočár’s Bohdaneč Spa [Figure 14]. Janák did not yet dare in this early collection to incorporate the diagonal to its fullest potential in his furniture designs, as he had in his architectural creations. There is little beveling or surface treatment to create the distinctive Cubist sense of rhythm and movement in matter.

The side chair in the Borovička suite is among the most famous pieces of Cubist furniture [Figure 35]. Unlike the office furniture designed for the same doctor, the dining room furniture was much more daring and more theoretically Cubist. One finds the Cubist angles in the bent legs, the front edge of the seat, and the back of the chair which forms a slightly broken isosceles triangle. The visual effect of the rear legs, which reach up to support the back, creates the sense of movement for which Janák strove. Upon close inspection, the grain of the wood and the diagonally applied shiny veneer covering

⁵⁷ Ibid, 60.

the surface heighten the sense of contrasting angles and bring the whole construction closer to crystalline form. This is an effect which appears in almost every wooden Cubist construction, achieving particular clarity and success in Vlastislav Hofman's collections. In addition to his success in applying his own Cubist theories to the chair, Janák also remained very concerned with the functionality and practicality of the piece. It is practical for its light weight and compact size, allowing for easy portability from point-to-point within a room or home. The back and seat of the chair are also anatomically compatible, despite their angular appearance. The triangle of the back slightly folds inward to support the human back comfortably, and Janák beveled the points where the legs meet the back to form a smooth transition for the sitter to lean against. The seat features a concave section to add to the ergonomic comfort for the sitter. Here utilitarianism melds with the Cubist sense of metaphysical functionality to create a practical chair that also acts as a sculpture in its own right.

The issue of upholstery and other textile design becomes an important consideration in Cubist applied arts. It was very difficult for the Cubist designers to reconcile their radical theories with the traditionally decorative nature of fabric. In many cases, the architects avoided the use of upholstery in their chair designs, but for consumers it was usually a requirement of the comfort they expected in home furnishings. The neutrality of solid colors for the upholstery might seem an obvious solution for the Cubists; however, what usually appeared were very traditional floral designs, even those made by artists of the avant-garde, such as František Kysela. In the early stages of Cubist applied arts, as exemplified in Janák's armchair for Dr. Borovička [Figure 32], designers often utilized stripes in order to maintain an overall sense of

geometry, at least. By 1913, however, Josef Gočár began to employ Kysela's floral patterns in his collection for the actor Otto Boleška [Figures 36-40]. The jagged points of the back of the Boleška sofa [Figure 39] and the diagonal angles at which the arms, back and legs of the armchair [Figure 37] bend would seem very much at odds with the flowered upholstery; however, Lamarová points out that, "if we compare Picasso's 1907 paintings of women and viaducts and Braque's 1908 paintings of houses in Estaque with their organic, shattering rhythmization of the landscape, then Kysela's textile designs are not out of context. On the contrary, [...] the sophisticated, stylized leaves and flowers [...] amplify the visual spatial activity [and] penetrate its surroundings."⁵⁸ She goes on to write that in terms of the Boleška sofa, the floral ornamentation of the fabric "becomes the transition between stable and rotational percept" due to the use of wood to clearly define and outline the edges of the work.

Gočár's bookcase designed for his own apartment demonstrates what V.V. Štech referred to as the Cuboexpressionist phase of Cubist applied arts [Figure 41].⁵⁹ The corners radiate to such exaggerated angles that the piece portrays agitated movement and resembles "deformed crystalline structures from a Paleolithic landscape."⁶⁰ Returning to the importance placed on the diagonal in Cubist architectural theory, Gočár used this element in his mature Cubist furniture design to full effect. Rostislav Švácha writes:

In their eyes the diagonal was the perfect example of the projection of the spirit into a passive prism. This involved a dramatic movement of matter, action and story, stripping furniture of its mere usefulness, transposing it into the realm of pure art. Even though the diagonal appeared to be a fairly unstable element, diagonal-dominated designs of Cubist furniture drew firm support from the shape of the crystal [...] Cubist furniture designs often hinged on an interplay of two

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Monika Wenzl-Bachmayer, *CubiCZmus! Die Dekonstruktion der Moderne in Prag* (Vienna: Museum Postsparkasse, 2009), 24.

⁶⁰ Lamarová, 64.

conflicting phenomena—action and tranquility, both states being depicted by the diagonal.⁶¹

It is true of Gočár's personal bookcase that the diagonal has both a stabilizing and activating purpose. The diagonal lines used in the beveled surfaces and protruding corners serve to incite the viewer to understand the forces of the artist's spirit on the creation of matter. At the same time, the diagonally radiating corners center the rhythmic movement of matter into the core of the piece, bringing it all back to a sense of calm within the chaos.

The suite designed for Boleška represents the peak of Cubist furniture design before the First World War. If one compares the Boleška bookcase to Gočár's personal bookcase [Figures 40 & 41], the overall effect of the latter and more mature phase gives a sense of calm and balance.⁶² It is quieter, more elegant and regal than the Cuboexpressionist phase, but it does not depart from the original theories of Cubism. In terms of the less extreme angular outlines, the Boleška suite's simplicity renders it more practical than the earlier works in Gočár's repertoire; however, the continued use of thick and heavy wood surely made the pieces difficult to move when needed. The fact that Gočár designed the more radical and exaggerated furniture suite for himself and the Boleška suite for a client certainly accounts for the differing degrees of practicality. Lamarová writes, "The unrestrained experimentation he exercised in designing his own living space apparently yielded to the requirements of the client; thus he interpreted the dynamics of matter more in the contour plan than in matter as such."⁶³ This statement refers to the Boleška suite's rhythmic diagonal outlines of the flat surfaces of wood, in

⁶¹ Švácha, 200.

⁶² Wenzl-Bachmayer, 24.

⁶³ Lamarová, 64.

contrast to Gočár's personal suite, whose beveled masses produce a stronger sense of depth and dynamic movement in the undulating surfaces. Thus, concerns for functionality and practicality in his clients' furniture forced Gočár to find a balance between his most extreme experiments in Cubist theory and the utilitarian requirements of furniture. The interplay between the oblique outlines and the diagonal grain of the wood, as well as that between light and dark tones of wood or between wood and vibrant upholstery, creates the sense of movement desired in Cubistically rendered matter, while the pieces still serve the comfort and functions of everyday domestic needs.

Vlastislav Hofman's Cubist furniture designs, like his sketches for Cubist buildings, were often far too radical to implement in actual constructions. His realized works tend to be the heaviest and bulkiest of all the Cubist designers' furniture, and yet his sketches indicate even less practical ideas. Again highlighting the importance of conveying an inner spirit of the artist, with which Hofman always concerned himself deeply, Worringer writes that "the tectonic idea, utilitarian purpose, and material are only factors with which a higher idea is expressed, and that within the logical evolution of a tectonic idea a corresponding gamut of psychic conditions is also being played out."⁶⁴ The point is true in Hofman's work that the element of practicality was not of utmost concern in his work; however, like Janák and Gočár, he strove to achieve more meaningful functions in his furniture design than mere practicality. His furniture designs are distinguishable for their monumentality and their simplicity of form, as well as the use of dark, heavy thick masses of wood. A prime example is the suite that Hofman designed for the sculptor Josef Mařatka in 1911-1912 [Figures 42-44]. In these pieces the sheer weightiness burdens the viewer, as well as the owner who would struggle to

⁶⁴ Worringer, 81.

move the pieces from one space to another. Mahulena Nešlehová writes, “Only the delicacy of the veneer, evoking the illusion of a crystalline plasticity using the contrasts in the natural grain of the wood, and the expressive use of beveling, enliven the static nature of these pieces. The almost primitively raw, mythical appearance is underlined by the dark stained oak and dark brown leather upholstery with closely spaced brass tacks.”⁶⁵ Hofman strove for a much stronger visual unity among his furniture suites than Janák and, to a certain extent, Gočár. Referring to a slightly different dining room suite designed in 1911 and 1912, Hofman wrote in his publication “Remarks on Furniture” (1913) of the desire for total unity of the individual piece with the whole collection:

The foundation is the inclination of the planes used in the table, finishing its horizontal surface as its main utilitarian component. The task is to make the form based on that precondition appropriate, to apply it consistently, and to use it to form other pieces of furniture. If the right system is chosen, it can be applied to all objects, even though they might serve different purposes.⁶⁶

It is apparent that the foundational system Hofman chose for some of his furniture groups, including the Mařatka suite, rendered many of the pieces too bulky and large for practicality or even for production. The beveled legs often had to be carved out on the inside so that the furniture was light enough to be lifted, and so that it was not too top-heavy for the pyramidal legs; however, this editing remained hidden from the visible surface, and the suite maintained its impression of foundational unity.

A large collection of Hofman’s sketches survive from the years 1911-1913. It is advantageous here to compare those sketches to the final designs that were delivered to the customers. A chair design from 1912 [Figure 45] shows a fascination with crystalline, beveled angles covering every facet of the piece, which would surely prove

⁶⁵ Nešlehová, 79.

⁶⁶ Hofman, “Remarks on Furniture,” in Mahulena Nešlehová, *Vlastislav Hofman* (Prague: Vlastislav Hofman Society, 2005), 370, originally published in *Umělecký měsíčník* I (1911-12), 58.

far too complex to serve as a sturdy construction upon which to sit. When compared to the side chair designed for the sculptor Josef Mařatka [Figure 44], one can immediately see the heavy editing that Hofman employed between design and production in order to achieve a certain level of simplicity for the sake of practicality. Some of the designs from this period were modified to create a suite for a lady's drawing room [Figures 46 & 47]. The shapes and foundational systems are similar to the designs from 1911-1913 [Figures 48-50]; however, it is clear that Hofman reduced the amount of beveling in his final works. Keeping in mind that these groups were usually produced by the PUD or Artěl, as the artists were not cabinet-makers in their own right, the producers could only adhere to the designs as far as concerns for marketability and constructability would allow. For the first time after the design for Mařatka, both the suite for a lady's drawing room and the sketched designs from 1912 demonstrate "an attempt to lighten form by means of cut-outs and to work with the inner space of objects, as well as rhythm."⁶⁷ The final products still served Hofman's intended conceptual functions, despite the concessions he made for practicality.

After this short survey of three Czech Cubists' furniture design, one might ponder the artists' choice of oak in the majority of their works. This is an issue which deserves attention, as it raises pertinent questions about the Cubists' regard (or disregard) for nationalism in their prewar design work. Oak traditionally carries connotations of nationalism in Germany, and considering the continuing conflicts concerning German minorities in the Czech lands at the end of the nineteenth century, it is striking that Czech artists would choose a material so laden with Germanic associations. Walnut, cherry and fruit wood were the materials of choice during the Biedermeier or Empire

⁶⁷ Nešlehová, 89.

period in the nineteenth-century Czech lands.⁶⁸ The rejection of associations with Austria, rather than Germany, was probably more important to early twentieth century Czechs, as tensions steadily rose between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its minority national groups. On the other hand, the choice of oak may simply have been one of availability and cost on the part of the Cubist applied artists. Whether deliberate or purely convenient, the Cubists' zeal for oak is a problematic choice that ought to be investigated further.

Cubist furniture allowed for an even more private and intimate experience than its architectural counterparts. The pieces represented utilitarian sculptures of what the Cubists saw as their own metaphysical psyche projected into and onto three-dimensional creations which interacted with space in new ways. Wilhelm Worringer's theory of empathy once again seems to guide the Cubists' work:

We are delivered from our individual being as long as we are absorbed into an external object, an external form, with our inner urge to experience. [...] In this self-objectification lies a self-alienation. This affirmation of our individual need for activity represents, simultaneously, a curtailment of its illimitable potentialities, a negation of its ununifiable differentiations.⁶⁹

The Cubist applied artists acted upon this urge to experience the invisible fourth dimensional interactions of matter and space in their attempts to revolutionize the objects of daily use and need so that all of society could frequently share in the enlightening experience. Once again, as it happened with architecture, the designers' prewar goals would shift after 1914 from a focus on the individual and personal experiences to the collective and a national experience.

⁶⁸ Jiří Rak, Claudia Terenzi, et al., *Biedermeier Art and Culture in Central Europe 1815-1848* (Prague and Milan: Museum of Decorative Arts, Prague and Skira Editore, 2001).

⁶⁹ Worringer, 24.

Furniture for the New Republic

After the First World War, as the newly formed Czechoslovak nation required new architecture to unite the people, these buildings naturally also called for new furnishings to fill the interiors. Remaining fixated on the ideal of a Gesamtkunstwerk, Janák, Gočár and Hofman all created interior furnishings which would match their architectural designs in style and in purpose. Gočár applied his Rondocubist style to furniture suites designed in the early 1920s. Janák melded elements of Rondocubism with folk-derived patterns and motifs. Hofman created collections for Artěl's commissions that retained many of the prewar Cubist angles but were also heavily imbued with folk elements.

Josef Gočár's postwar furniture design, like his architecture in the early 1920s, demonstrates the most complete realization of the phenomenon of Rondocubism. Two major groups survive today which both incorporate the classicizing monumentality of form, as well as the geometric ornamentation characteristic of Rondocubist design [Figures 51-55]. The rounded forms alternate with angular ones, creating a rhythmic sensation, an impression of movement that was familiar from prewar Cubist works. However, the angular forms are understated in Rondocubism, and Gočár rid his work completely of the previous dependence on the diagonal line and beveling to create crystalline forms. The decorative nature of Rondocubist pieces accounts for the major departure from early Cubism in the applied arts. Instead of relying on only the modeled core forms themselves, the designers turned to the applied ornamentation they had once so vehemently rejected. Gočár's bookcase designed in 1922 [Figure 51] is practically a small-scale replica of the façade of the Legiobanka [Figure 21]. The raised circles and

half-circles of the bookcase dance repetitively across the otherwise flat surface. The shiny and smooth quality of the wood surfaces contrasts with the frosted glass, adding an interesting dichotomy of textures to the typically contrasting materials of wood and glass of early Cubist works. Despite the fact that Gočár abandoned the Cubist modeling of core forms during his Rondocubist phase, his works of this period retained the Cubist functions of Czech Cubist applied arts. The furniture encouraged its beholder to understand matter and form as rhythmic and constantly in motion, and interacting with the space it fills. Furthermore, the elements of folk decorative motifs were meant to resonate with the Czech citizen's national spirit.

During the war, Janák's furniture style changed drastically, abandoning the buildup of diagonal angles and beveled surfaces to the point that his designs approached what would become known as Neoplasticism. Olga Herbenová distinguishes this phase by the following changes: "bent forms are straightened out, the square replaces the triangle and the rhomboid, the concave breaks give way to squared lines. Horizontals and verticals and large fields of contrasting colors, asymmetrically grouped, become the main compositional element."⁷⁰ These changes in style are well exemplified in the designs for a bedroom suite (1915) [Figures 56 & 57]. The black rectangles contrast with the natural wood, retaining the Cubist element of repetitive patterns of geometric forms; however, the sense of movement in the form itself is entirely absent in these pieces. The wood is flat and unmodeled. The outlines of the pieces form right angles and never employ diagonal lines. Thus, already in 1915, Janák experimented with a style that would relegate Cubist architectural theory to the naïve and youthful days of the prewar attitude.

⁷⁰ Herbenová, "Janák's Journal 1911-1914," in Von Vegesack, *Czech Cubism: Architecture, Furniture, Decorative Arts*, 94.

While Janák began gravitating toward a more functionalist style during and after the First World War, he also took part in the nationalistic decorativism that prevailed among several Czech artists in the early 1920s. His Rondocubist buildings represented a distinctive mix of geometry and nationalistic and folk motifs; however, while working for Artěl in the early twenties, Janák designed several interiors that were almost entirely devoid of all Cubist elements. Ladislava Horňáková writes, “In the atmosphere of the post-war nationalism, Czech Cubism had reached a decorative distinction, in which the impulses from folk art and the building trade were applied. The concept was based on the rehabilitation of folklore ornamentation, with the general understanding and didactics, as well as the celebration of the character of the country society.”⁷¹ Janák’s design for the Hořovský Villa in Prague (1921-22), reaches such levels of folk decorativism that he seems to have completely renounced his Cubist past [Figure 58]. A hint of his Rondocubist architectural decoration, such as that seen in the Palác Adria and Crematorium in Pardubice, appears in the raised wooden circles protruding from the painted walls of organic Czech and Slovak folk patterns. This application of circles and semi-circles gives the impression of Janák’s arbitrary, half-hearted and superficial attempt to relate this work to the Rondocubist tendencies in Gočár’s and his own architecture.

A photograph of the interior of a gentleman’s room in the chateau at Nové Město nad Metují demonstrates the third and fully Rondocubist direction of Janák’s postwar designs [Figure 59]. As Milena Lamarová writes, “Janák seemed to be floundering at the time. He did not avoid either historicizing or folk inspirations,” and this collection of

⁷¹ Horňáková, in Potůčková, 99.

furniture represents a “bizarre reminder of his efforts to create a national style.”⁷² The applied ornamentation seen in his Palác Adria [Figure 25] and Crematorium at Pardubice (1921-23) appears in this office suite; however, the play of the alternating light and dark shades of wood is also reminiscent of the early prewar Cubist office collection for Dr. Borovička. In accordance with Rondocubist architecture, Janák forsakes the emphasis on the modeling of core forms to focus instead on the decorative geometric patterns and colors that create the Rondocubist sense of movement—a movement restricted to the surface and not emanating from within the matter itself.

Hofman’s postwar furniture, like Janák’s and Gočár’s Rondocubist phase, exhibits his interest in a return to folk motifs to appeal to citizens of the new republic. Artěl received a commission in 1922 to design and furnish the mountain resort, Hviezdoslav Hotel, in Štrbské Pleso of the High Tatras in the Slovak region of the new country. Several Artěl designers took part in the project, and Hofman made drawings for the dining room furniture [Figure 60]. During the early 1920s, Hofman became much more concerned than ever before with practicality, easier production, the use of folk-art motifs and decorative effects, and the sobriety of form.⁷³ No longer does the crystal provide the ultimate ideal of beauty in form. The Hviezdoslav dining room retains few of the beveled edges and diagonals used in the prewar era to create a sense of movement through form. This sober style can hardly be considered Cubist in any sense of the theories proscribed by Janák and Hofman before the First World War. On the other hand, a bed design for a mountain hotel, sketched in 1920, demonstrates the lingering touches of Cubist elements of Hofman’s prewar work [Figure 61]. The beveled legs and

⁷² Lamarová, 74.

⁷³ Nešlehová, 93.

triangular patterns recessed into the surfaces recall Hofman's and other Cubists' earlier style; however, the *retour à l'ordre* is strikingly apparent in his use of nationalistic colors, the reliance on the simplicity of right-angles and the use of Czech and Slovak decorative patterns that could be found in the average home, often in textiles. Hofman never experimented with Rondocubism, and his few other furniture pieces of the postwar period remain entirely true to his prewar style. Beyond the Hviezdoslav Hotel project, Hofman was content to direct most of his creative attention to architectural projects during the postwar period.

In the early twenties, Czech Cubist furniture drastically diverged from the designers' prewar styles in terms of visual and structural forms. The designs remained functional as the utilitarian nature of furniture necessitated, and they were often even more practical than furniture designs from the mature Cubist phase of 1913 and 1914. Many conceptual functions of Cubist theory also remained constant in the postwar phase of applied arts. Not only could a piece of furniture serve as a dining table or chair, it could also convey national unity and pride to remind its beholder of Czech nationhood that finally materialized after centuries of suppression by foreign rulers. Unlike in the prewar phase, Cubist furniture designers conveyed a sense of order and balance in the inner relationships of matter and form, indicating the artists' approach toward the rationalism they rejected before World War I.

Conclusions

The artists of Skupina set many lofty goals in their treatment and exploration of Cubism in architecture and furniture, most of which remained either only partially realized in completed projects or entirely unrealized in sketches and designs that were never executed; however the concept of function in architecture and the applied arts was considerably reinterpreted by this avant-garde group. The functionalist concepts of Wagner and Kotěra were not sufficiently creative enough for artists like Janák, Hofman and Gočár. Czech Cubist architects redefined their forebears' ideals of function, in which practicality and livability prevailed. They believed that architecture and furniture design could serve many functions—the mediators of the spatio-temporal fourth dimension, the three-dimensional product of an artist's inner creative movement, or the canvas for national celebration. Given the short time-frame during which Cubists were able to apply these theories before the First World War, their accomplishments were numerous, as well as consequential for the succeeding movements in twentieth-century architecture and applied arts. After the war, their theories led to revivals of national and local traditions in the realm of surface ornamentation, rather than in modeling of forms. While the essentially Cubist elements faded during the early 1920s, the Czech Cubists continued to exalt the same prewar functions of their experimental and radical designs. The interplay between form and function in Czech Cubist architecture and applied arts is a fascinating tug-of-war game that oscillated between balance and imbalance from 1911 to 1925, after which function triumphed and the shift occurred toward an intense focus on rationalist functionalism, championed in Czechoslovakia most notably by artist, teacher and architecture critic Karel Teige (1900-1951).

Appendix

Figure 20



Josef Gočár, Interior Staircase, House of the Black Madonna, Prague, Author's Photo

Figure 25



Pavel Janák and Josef Zásche, Palác Adria, 1923-25, Prague, Author's Photo

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