Periodicals beyond Hierarchies: Challenging Geopolitical and Social 'Centres' and 'Peripheries'

Gábor Dobó, Aled Gruffydd Jones, Merse Pál Szeredi, and Zsuzsa Török

Journal of European Periodical Studies, 9.1 (Summer 2024)

ISSN 2506-6587

The *Journal of European Periodical Studies* is hosted by Ghent University

Website: ojs.ugent.be/jeps

To cite this article: Gábor Dobó, Aled Gruffydd Jones, Merse Pál Szeredi, and Zsuzsa Török, 'Periodicals beyond Hierarchies: Challenging Geopolitical and Social 'Centres' and 'Peripheries'', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 9.1 (Summer 2024), 1–7

Periodicals beyond Hierarchies: Challenging Geopolitical and Social 'Centres' and 'Peripheries'

Gábor Dobó
Petőfi Literary Museum – Kassák Museum
dobo.gabor@pim.hu
Aled Gruffydd Jones
Tanygrisiau, Gwynedd, Cymru/Wales
aledgjones20@hotmail.com
Merse Pál Szeredi
Petőfi Literary Museum – Kassák Museum
szeredi.merse.pal@pim.hu
Zsuzsa Török
HUN–REN Research Centre for the Humanities
torok.zsuzsa@abtk.hu

ABSTRACT

This special issue of the *Journal of European Periodical Studies* emerges from the 10th International European Society for Periodical Research (ESPRit) conference and postgraduate workshop, held in September 2022 at the Museum of Fine Arts – Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI) in Budapest, Hungary, in collaboration with the Petőfi Literary Museum – Kassák Museum. Focused on the theme of 'Periodicals beyond Hierarchies: Challenging Geopolitical and Social "Centres" and "Peripheries" through the Press', the conference attracted scholars from diverse backgrounds who explored core–periphery tensions in various contexts. The essays included in this issue, stemming from selected presentations at the Budapest conference, offer an introduction to the spatial breadth and historical dimensions of the centre–periphery lens within periodical studies. Building upon theoretical foundations dating back to Raúl Prebisch's recognition of core–periphery disparities in the 1920s, and subsequent critiques such as Immanuel Wallerstein's identification of semi-peripheral regions, these essays critically engage with the evolving discourse surrounding core–periphery dynamics. Ultimately, this collection encourages a nuanced understanding of periodicals as cultural maps that survey the complexities of collaboration, competition, and conflict across diverse geographic landscapes. By doing so, it prompts critical interrogation of the centre–periphery model, questions its utility in enriching our understanding of periodical dynamics, and challenges preconceived notions of centrality and peripherality within periodical studies specifically, and cultural studies more generally.

KEYWORDS

centre–periphery, world-systems analysis, Latin language periodicals, Middle East, East Central Europe, anti-Nazi press, little magazines

Periodicals beyond Hierarchies: Challenging Geopolitical and Social 'Centres' and 'Peripheries'

This special issue of the *Journal of European Periodical Studies* draws most directly from the range of papers presented, and the discussions they stimulated, at the 10th International European Society for Periodical Research (ESPRit) conference and postgraduate workshop, held on 7–9 September 2022 at the Museum of Fine Arts – Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI) in Budapest, Hungary, co-organized with the Petőfi Literary Museum – Kassák Museum. The conference theme, 'Periodicals beyond Hierarchies: Challenging Geopolitical and Social "Centres" and "Peripheries" through the Press', attracted a range of papers from across Europe and beyond which, collectively, illuminated the core–periphery tension in a variety of different ways.[1]

The essays that follow are adapted from a selection of those delivered at the Budapest conference. They provide an introduction, within periodical studies, to the rich spatial breadth and the historical and linguistic complexities of the 'centre–periphery' lens through which imperial reach, unequal distribution of resources, urban cultural concentrations, and diverse forms of periodical production may be scrutinized and understood. Budapest, the physical location of the conference and a centre within the once powerful Austro–Hungarian Empire, was itself imbricated, politically, militarily, and culturally, with territories and populations that extended across Europe, from London and Paris into the Ottoman world and even into areas of the pre-1918 Middle East. The city's history thus provided a particularly germane vantage point from which to review the inequalities of place and power that characterized nineteenth-century Europe, and which also spoke of the many, and continuing, legacies of the international peace treaty agreed at Versailles on 28 June 1919.

Not only that, but the conference venue itself encapsulates the entangled history and difficult heritage of the region. Positioned between the historically working-class Angyalföld district — an area with significance to the life and work of the proletarian avant-garde writer Lajos Kassák — and Heroes' Square — the iconic Millennium Monument erected in 1896, to commemorate the thousandth anniversary of the foundation of the Hungarian state — today's Museum of Fine Arts – KEMKI headquarters was initially constructed as the Israelite hospital of Pest in 1899. Bearing witness to the indelible trauma of the Holocaust, the complex continued to operate as a hospital until 2007. Since 2020, KEMKI and the National Museum Conservation and Storage Centre, each institution forming a part of the Museum of Fine Arts, have utilized the historic hospital campus. The main conference hall is the meticulously restored former house of worship, which showcases the scars and functions of the hospital over the past 120 years. As a venue for the ESPRit conference, it was an appropriate space within which to delve into a more profound comprehension of the spatial dynamics inherent in various transnational political, linguistic, and cultural formations. The discussions revolved around the concepts of core and periphery, exploring the dynamic and constantly evolving relationships that exist between these elements. Even the 'hybrid' format, which combined elements of a traditional conference with real-time online participation, had consequences in relation to the question of centres and peripheries. Initially implemented as a preventive measure due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic,

1 The paper was prepared in the framework of the Hungarian Scientific Research Fund (OTKA, FK 139325) project entitled the *Digital Critical Edition of Lajos Kassák's and Jolán Simon's Correspondence between 1909 and 1928, and New Perspectives for Modernism Studies*. The host institution of the project is the Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum. The scientific and organizing committee of the conference was composed of Gábor Dobó and Merse Pál Szeredi (Petőfi Literary Museum – Kassák Museum), Dávid Fehér, Emese Kürti, Eszter Őze (Museum of Fine Arts – Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI)) with the assistance of Vanda Pál and Zsófia Kókai from the same institution, and Evanghelia Stead (UVSQ Paris-Saclay).

it proved to be an opportunity to include participants from overseas who otherwise might not have been able to engage in discussions on this topic.

While the core–periphery dichotomy has been acknowledged in what may broadly be termed social studies since at least 1929, when the Argentinian economist Raúl Prebisch began to formulate his critique of classical liberal economic theory in response to the global economic crisis of that year, it began to acquire a broader political resonance in the years immediately following the second world war.[2] Further studies by Prebisch himself on the underdevelopment of Latin American economies, which became known as the Prebisch–Singer thesis in 1950, formed an empirical rationale for a wide spectrum of political activism in the 'Third World', particularly within the United Nations.[3] A decade later, other studies pointed to the unequal, even antagonistic, character of economic relations between diverse but connected economic areas that were simultaneously binary and asymmetric. The work of John Friedmann in the mid-1960s was particularly influential in this regard, but the idea of core–periphery tensions as an explanatory model was also swiftly transferred to other disciplines, including international relations, sociology, human geography, and anthropology, particularly in the United States.[4] The concept sought to explain structural inequality in spatial terms, where the 'core' was a developed region, innovative and productive, and the 'peripheries' were those physical spaces that lagged behind developmentally, or even showed signs of decline. From this grew the 'dependency theory' embraced by anti-colonial post-war nationalists and mid-twentieth-century Marxists, which further crystallized the deterministic nature of the dislocation between supposed metropoles and their satellites. In human geography, it was applied, again problematically, to the notion of geographies of knowledge, the uneven distribution of information and skills that had wrought such calamitous declines in living standards, economic potential, and cultural weight in areas that lay outside the privileged, mainly urban, centres of political and financial power. However, as Immanuel Wallerstein argued in his study of *The Modern World System* in 1974, key areas of the globe did not comfortably sit within this crude binary model, as significant regions were neither core nor peripheral, but ambiguously semi-peripheral.[5] Furthermore, on closer analysis, it became clear to others, particularly historians of such imperial world systems as the British empire, firstly that there was a clear and deliberate relationship between the impoverishment of some regions and the enrichment of others, and secondly that some of the key components of white, north-European modernity, in the sciences as well as the arts, could be seen to have originated in, or were adapted from, their Global South colonial territories.

The theme of the 2022 ESPRit conference in Budapest also recalled a tradition of political writing and cultural criticism that has challenged the salience of some of the more deep-rooted cultural hierarchies, and thus the ways in which they were embedded in periodical forms and texts in modern Europe. Some of the more powerful of these critiques stem from the work of Cambridge literary scholar and novelist Raymond Williams, in particular his 1973 book *The Country and the City*, in which he argues for the existence of 'structures of feeling' in rural communities that are distinct, though not wholly disconnected, from the cultural concerns of urban centres of power, and which

2 See Raúl Prebisch, 'El momento presente en la crisis internacional', *Revista Económica*, 5.7 (1932), 115–17.

3 For the 'Prebisch Manifesto' on core–periphery dynamics, see Raúl Prebisch, *The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems* (Santiago: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1950).

4 See John Friedmann, *Regional Development Policy: A Case Study of Venezuela* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1966).

5 Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

not only have a powerful validity in their own right but which also feed into national narratives of people and place. In this sense, for Williams, the rural 'periphery' is also a 'centre', or a collection of diverse centres, that in combination help construct, and even to challenge, the 'national' or other hegemonic imaginary.[6]

A similar approach has been adopted by dissident authors behind the Iron Curtain since at least the 1970s. The discussion gained renewed momentum during the 2000s, when art and literary historians, influenced by postcolonial theories, began challenging the narrative that disproportionately highlighted the role of certain culturally visible currents with a predominantly Western focus. Piotr Piotrowski, for instance, advocates for a horizontal art history, with the aim of counterbalancing the perception that East Central European artistic practices remain a kind of 'close-Other' in Western historiography.[7] This concept of 'close-otherness' is explored further by Larry Wolff and by Balázs Trencsényi, Maciej Janowski, Monika Baár, Maria Falina, and Michal Kopecek.[8] Consequently, the avant-garde works produced in the geopolitical area between Germany and Russia have been situated on the periphery of 'universal' (i.e. Western) narratives, reflecting global inequalities in the construction of knowledge about twentieth-century literature and art. In recent years, various studies and exhibitions, directly or indirectly influenced by Piotrowski's insights, have delved into non-Western European artistic movements on both local and global scales.

The first, and the most methodologically-focused, of the articles published in this collection, is by Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel and Nicola Carboni. In their preliminary account of an on-going 'distant reading' research project exploring visual contagion, which has adopted a quantitative approach to the mapping of periodicals' centres of production and circulation areas, the authors argue that, despite the 'methodological efficiency' that has led many prior studies of periodicals to conform to an hierarchical paradigm that foregrounds 'core narrators', their own work suggests a different way of conceiving of that historical process. In particular, they highlight the instability of the notion of the 'core', which they regard as a 'shifting panorama' of locations; they identify the spatial reach of periodicals less as static geographies and more as a complex interplay over time of polycentric areas of circulation. However, by employing computational techniques to organize the big data generated by the mapping project, including the setting up of structured metadata, they also identify, during the period following the Second World War, a greater homogenization of images printed in periodicals across the continent, and a subsequent loss of the hybridity and regional specificities that characterized pre-war periodicals. For all the evident advantages of distant reading, however, and the far-reaching ways in which its methods have contributed to, even transformed, approaches to periodical studies, explanations for such changes, in text as well as images, continue to require the attention to local detail that the more conventional forms of close reading demand.

The bracing interrogation of how periodical studies may be conducted in the future, posed by the opening article, and the potential it promises for the emergence of novel forms of interpretation, is continued in the articles that follow, each of which, in broadly chronological order, explores the core–periphery question within its historical

6 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus,1973).

7 Piotr Piotrowski, 'Toward a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde', in *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, ed. by Sascha Bru, Jan Baetens, Benedikt Hjartarson, Peter Nicholls, Tania Ørum, and Hubert van den Berg (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 49–56.

8 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); Balázs Trencsényi, Maciej Janowski, Monika Baar, Maria Falina, and Michal Kopecek, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 1–15.

particularity. Piroska Balogh brings to light an unduly neglected aspect of European journalism: the appearance of new periodicals published in Latin in the Kingdom of Hungary during the early nineteenth century, long after the language had declined as a medium of public discourse in the 'core' centres of Europe. As Balogh explains, the multilingual composition of the Hungarian territories within the Habsburg empire required, if only transiently, the adoption of a single print language that was accessible to readers who belonged to a number of different non-Hungarian speaking communities. An examination of the news and knowledge content of such *ephemerides*, moreover, uncovers elements of both their editorial intentions and their broader sources of information, along with their reach into the assumed cultural 'cores' of Europe.

The notion of peripherality in periodical studies, however, extends beyond the spatial or the linguistic, an observation powerfully demonstrated by Barbara Winckler in a study of early twentieth-century Arabic women's journalism in Damascus, Beirut, and elsewhere in the Middle East. Writing on the peripheries of hegemonic print culture, authors and their subaltern texts suffered social forms of marginalization, including those expressed by the relative brevity of the latter's lifespans, and the unevenness and irregularity of their preservation, which, nonetheless, signals their value to contemporary cultural institutions, sociologies of editorship, and social activism. Moreover, in contrast to the implied readership of 'ordinary' women and intellectuals, Winckler finds that the actual readers of these periodicals also included men, thus presenting a more nuanced picture of the extent of their reach, and a more complex relationship with their societies.

Magdolna Gucsa's examination of the monthly Paris-based anti-Nazi journal *Die Zone* (1933–34) also interrogates its subject's dual functions, as a promoter of values and a centre of exiled German resistance to the newly-installed Hitler regime. Intended to preserve the essence of liberal German culture in the face of the new authoritarianism, the journal aimed through a combination of cultural criticism and political activism — not always an easy dual role to navigate editorially — to construct a point of reference, organization and resistance for a widely dispersed community of anti-Nazi German refugees in France and beyond. It thus sought, during its brief lifetime, to become a centre outside its centre, an anti-fascist German Paris set against the repressive National Socialist government in Berlin.

Finally, as in the case of the opening article, the fruit of a transnational European collaboration that so effectively underpins the purpose of ESPRit, Marie Boivent and Giorgio Di Domenico shift the focus of our attention to the European art periodicals of the late 1970s and 1980s. By bringing together four artists' titles from this period, *Neon de Suro*, *Schmuck Magazine*, *Commonpress*, and *La Città di Riga*, the authors argue that their geographical and thematic marginality, along with their precarious existence on the fringes of European publishing, render deeply problematic a core–periphery approach to their categorization. In any case, they argue, the notions of core and periphery are themselves necessarily 'relative, evolving and diffuse'.

Read in combination, these articles may prompt those of us who work on periodicals from within a range of disciplines to reappraise both our research questions and the methodologies we employ to address them. In addition to the rescuing of yet more titles from the great deluge of Michael Wolff's 'golden stream', these studies also invite us to consider in a theoretically informed and consistent fashion the relationships that were developed between those titles, and between the titles and their places of production and distribution.[9] By thinking about periodicals in this spatial manner, as forms of cultural mapping across geographies of human collaboration, competition,

9 Michael Wolff, 'Charting the Golden Stream: Thoughts on a Directory of Victorian Periodicals', *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, no. 13 (1971), 23–38.

and conflict, we may wish to ask whether the core–periphery model enriches our understanding of our subject, or whether the most welcome development of such detailed empirical research as may be found in these studies further destabilizes the very idea of a centre, and thus, by implication, also of peripheries.

Gábor Dobó has been a research fellow at the Petőfi Literary Museum – Kassák Museum since 2015. He focuses on Modernist periodicals of the interwar period, with a special emphasis on the East and Central European region. Currently, he is the principal investigator of the research project 'Digital Critical Edition of Lajos Kassák's and Jolán Simon's Correspondence between 1909 and 1928, and New Perspectives for Modernism Studies' (OTKA FK-139325). He is a committee member of the European Society for Periodical Research (ESPRit) and was the co-organizer of the 10th ESPRit conference in Budapest. He co-edited a volume entitled *Cannibalizing the Canon: Dada Techniques in East-Central Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2024) with Oliver A. I. Botar, Irina M. Denischenko, and Merse Pál Szeredi. In 2022, he was a Fulbright visiting scholar at the Harriman Institute of Columbia University in New York City. Previously, he studied at universities in Budapest (MA, 2011; PhD, 2018), Florence (MA, 2011), and Angers (visiting PhD student, spring semester 2014).

Aled Gruffydd Jones is a cultural historian, editor, and author. His main research fields are the history of nineteenth and early twentieth-century journalism, and the cultural and religious relationships between constituent parts of the British Empire and their continuing postcolonial resonances. He has held the posts of Sir John Williams Professor of Welsh History and Senior Pro Vice-Chancellor at Aberystwyth University, Literary Director of the Royal Historical Society, Vice-President and later Chief Executive of the National Library of Wales and National Librarian of Wales. He has also held visiting professorships in International History at Northwest University, Xi'an, China, and in Cultural History at Panteion University, Athens, Greece, where he remains Co-director of the ETMIET research project on Greek periodical culture in the Research Centre for Modern Greece (KENI). He served as editor of the social history journal *Llafur* (1985–92), *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (2000–04), and the *Welsh History Review* (2003–2011). His books include *Press, Politics and Society: A History of Journalism in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1993); *Powers of the Press: Newspapers, Power and the Public in Nineteenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Scolar Press/Ashgate, 1996, republished by Routledge 2016); and, with Bill Jones, *Welsh Reflections: Y Drych and America, 1851–2001* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2001).

Merse Pál Szeredi is an art historian and director of the Petőfi Literary Museum – Kassák Museum. His research focuses on modernist and avant-garde periodicals in Central Europe during the 1910s and 1920s. He is currently working on his PhD dissertation, which analyses the international networks of Lajos Kassák's periodical *Ma* [Today], published in Vienna between 1920 and 1925. He has curated exhibitions and edited several volumes at the Petőfi Literary Museum – Kassák Museum since 2015. Recently, he co-edited a volume entitled *Cannibalizing the Canon: Dada Techniques in East-Central Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2024) with Oliver A. I. Botar, Irina M. Denischenko, and Gábor Dobó.

Zsuzsa Török is a senior research fellow at the HUN–REN Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute for Literary Studies, Budapest. Her research interests include women's writing, periodical studies, and Hungarian-British contacts in the nineteenth

century. She has been active in the promotion of periodical studies in Hungary, and has authored a comprehensive study on the Anglophone paradigm of periodical research titled 'Periodical Studies: The Anglophone Paradigm', *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* (2022). Her work has been published in, among others, the *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, *Slavonica*, *Teksty Drugie*, and *Women's Writing*.

Bibliography

Crespo, María Victoria, 'Crisis in the Periphery: The Concept of "Crisis" in Latin American Developmentalism and Raúl Prebisch, 1929–1980', *Sociologia & Antropologia*, 12.3 (2022), 1–27

Friedmann, John, *Regional Development Policy: A Case Study of Venezuela* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1966)

Jakubowska, Agata, and Magdalena Radomska, eds, *Horizontal Art History and Beyond Revising Peripheral Practices* (New York: Routledge, 2022)

Piotrowski, Piotr, 'Toward a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde', in *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, ed. by Sascha Bru, Jan Baetens, Benedikt Hjartarson, Peter Nicholls, Tania Ørum, and Hubert van den Berg (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 49–56

Prebisch, Raúl, 'El momento presente en la crisis internacional', *Revista Económica*, 5.7 (1932), 115–17

—, *The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems* (Santiago: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1950)

Trencsényi, Balázs, Maciej Janowski, Monika Baár, Maria Falina, and Michal Kopecek, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)

Wallerstein, Immanuel, *The Modern World-System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974)

Williams, Raymond, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus,1973)

Wolff, Larry, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994)

Wolff, Michael, 'Charting the Golden Stream: Thoughts on a Directory of Victorian Periodicals', *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, no. 13 (1971), 23–38