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From Margin to Margin? The Stockholm Paris Axis 1944–1953

Marta Edling

The history of European art has been largely the history of a number of centers, from each of which a style has spread out.

(Kenneth Clark, *Provincialism*)¹

The study of art in relation to geographical space has for a long time been biased by the “canonical logic” of the centre–periphery narrative.² The history of modern and avant-garde art is no exception; it is in fact, as the French art historian Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel has pointed out, “essential to the myth of Modernism” as well as “to scholarship on Modernism”. A good example in Swedish art history of this shared “binary framework” of art histories of scholars and the self-fashioned narratives of artists and curators is the story of the early career in the 1950s of the Swedish museum director Pontus Hultén (1924–2006).³

The 1950s are often referred to as a short, but important, phase in Swedish art history where vital contacts with the international art scene were established. Hultén is in such texts described as something akin to a “visionary”, seeking new contacts in Paris, creating experimental exhibitions that heralded the radical programme of the Modern Museum

in Stockholm in the early 1960s. Even if both networks and alliances with Swedish colleagues and the Parisian art scene are mentioned, the narratives remain within the framework of the centre–periphery story of a slumbering Nordic province slowly being awoken by Hultén’s heroic and foresighted efforts.⁴

This is also the narrative we find in interviews with Pontus Hultén, and in Paris we find the complementary story as seen from the centre; a telling example is the 1991 interview with Hultén’s friend and associate, the gallery owner Denise René (1913–2012), when she described her efforts in 1952 to introduce modern abstract art to the ignorant Nordic audience.⁵

When the art historical narrative in this way confirms the heroic stories of the involved parties as well as the geographical “binary framework”, it is a methodological problem for the discipline, Joyeux-Prunel argues; it discourages research into historical data on interaction between spatial positions other than reports on presumed diffusions of aesthetic innovation. If used, this model will not reveal whether there are other kinds of transfers, circulations or interchange between peripheries like Stockholm and centres like Paris.

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This article aims to study in greater depth this methodological bias of the centre–periphery framework and highlight two problems the reproduction of such narratives raises. Firstly, in line with Joyeux-Prunel’s critical and geopolitical argument that research on international artistic relationships tends to turn a blind eye to the fact that such trajectories are often transnational and necessarily dependent on national contexts.⁶ Secondly, taking up arguments made by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, the problem of the researcher becoming the “instrument” of the field by reproducing heroic stories that in fact theatricalise the individual’s hard-won position and hide the social struggle that preceded it.⁷

Drawing on new archival data as well as French research previously unused in Swedish art history, I will in the first part of my text present empirical data on trajectories of individuals, including Pontus Hultén and Denise René, in two local contexts between 1944 and 1953: a presumed periphery, Stockholm, Sweden, and a presumed centre, Paris, France. Using a “historical materialist perspective”, I will focus on data indicating “material conditions of encounters and exchange” and highlight a collaborative project, namely a 1953 exhibition in Paris of Swedish abstract art between 1913 and 1953.⁸ The article’s aim is to elucidate both a new and wider scope of the historical circumstances of the interaction along the Stockholm–Paris axis during the period and individuals who have hitherto not received attention.⁹ In the last part of my text, I will use these results to explain my methodological concerns and discuss the two problems stated above.

Paris

After the liberation of Paris in 1944, several new galleries opened, among them the Denise René

Gallery at no. 124, Rue de la Boétie (1944). Two new salons for “avant-garde” art were opened: Salon de Mai (1945) and Réalités Nouvelles (1946). The new art journals and different booklets and pamphlets issued by the galleries also became important instruments for the art critics taking a special interest in contemporary art.¹⁰ This vitality of the Parisian art scene attracted young artists from other countries; it is estimated that the number of artists in 1950s Paris totalled between 4,500 and 6,000.¹¹ Also, foreign art collectors and art dealers gravitated towards Paris, and the city became a focal point of a transnational network of collaborations on exhibitions and sales. The increasing number of galleries and the inflow of young artists created fierce competition; French critics used metaphors of combat and war when describing the contemporary situation.¹²

The influx of foreign artists, art dealers and money was essential to the Parisian galleries. The French public had a conservative taste, and there was little official support for modern art in France.¹³ The post-war French audience also had little money, the market was weak until 1953, and many galleries became completely dependent on foreign capital; a telling example is the Denise René Gallery, where more than 80% of its clients came from other countries. Americans dominated the market, but contacts in other European countries were also of importance. Paris was indeed a centre of international art, but the situation was “fragile”.¹⁴

The Denise René Gallery developed in the late 1940s a profile championing geometric, non-objective abstraction, and Pierre Bourdieu refers to statements by Denise René in 1963, looking back at this period as an example of a gallery that early on strategically formulated a high profile orientated towards the “new”. René was very clear about her intent: “I wanted the *new*, to get off the

beaten track ... For me, the *period of combat* was beginning".¹⁵

As a result of the competitive climate, the galleries in Paris developed offensive strategies to assert their positions. The gallery owners encouraged networks linking critics, the jurors of the salons and prestigious awards, as well as editors of the new art magazines. The ambition was not only to launch new artists but also to present tomorrow's artistic tendencies, and the galleries strategically added other strings to their bow in the form of theoretical and rhetorical pamphlets, lectures, debates or oral presentations, thus creating an intellectual profile and framework for their exhibitions.¹⁶

Local competition and transnational strategies

To deal with local competition and a tough market, Denise René developed a well-planned marketing strategy of transnational collaborations and exchanges with foreign galleries in order not only to increase sales but also to establish international credentials for her artists. Her earliest contacts were established with Nordic galleries and patrons of art. The travelling exhibition *Klar Form: Vingt artistes de l'École de Paris* in spring 1952 was realised through her contacts with the Danish artists Richard Mortensen (1910–1993) and Robert Jacobsen (1912–1993). They gave the exhibition its Danish name *Klar Form* (Pure Form) and had links with *Galerie Birch* in Copenhagen. This contact also led René to the Finnish patron Maire Gullichsen (1907–1990), director of *Gallery Artek* in Helsinki. Gullichsen put René in contact with important art venues for the exhibition in the Nordic capitals, among them *Liljevalchs Art Gallery* in Stockholm.¹⁷

Making claims to the title "École de Paris" and the idea of an abstract tradition, the exhibition displayed twenty artists, where contemporary names, such as Robert Jacobsen, Richard Mortensen and Victor Vasarely (1906–1997), were presented side by side with old masters, such as Fernand Legér (1881–1955), Auguste Herbin (1882–1960) and Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 1887–1965). This followed the dual strategy of giving the contemporary artists legitimate ancestry and the customers promises of secure investments for the future.¹⁸

She later referred to *Klar Form* as an exhibition that had strived to accomplish a new vision and a statement on abstract art. This polemic stance was also reflected in *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, an art magazine loyal to the gallery, which in December 1951 devoted a special issue to the exhibition.¹⁹ The issue was intended as a catalogue for the exhibition travelling the Nordic capitals in spring 1952. The magazine also did follow-ups in the subsequent two issues in the spring; it reported on the exhibition, and in the first issue, it was stressed with an overt rhetoric how the importance of abstract art was demonstrated by the international attention given to the exhibition.

The *Klar Form* exhibition ... arouses considerable public curiosity in all the northern European cities where it is presented. For its part, the press makes broad comments and emphasises the exceptional importance of the works presented. The ever-growing success bears witness, once again, to the vitality of abstract art.²⁰

In the later issue, it was also underlined that the exhibition had been organised by Denise René to meet a demand; she had put on the exhibition to

respond to the desire expressed by the Scandinavian countries and Finland, who wished

to present to their compatriots the representative works of the non-figurative painters and sculptures of the *École de Paris*.²¹

The rhetorical aim was thus crystal clear: to present to the French readers that the abstract art on show at the exhibition was much-desired outside Paris.

Stockholm

The art market in Stockholm had seen good times, both during the Second World War and after. This was due not only to the fact that Sweden had escaped the ravages of war and could thus gain from having an intact economy and infrastructure but also to the import restrictions on third-rate foreign art, which were in force from 1939 to 1953. The number of exhibitions and artists increased, as did the number of galleries; in Stockholm, fifty new art dealers set up their businesses between 1935 and 1955.²²

Due to the accumulation of economic capital in Stockholm, galleries like the Swedish–French Art Gallery or *Galerie Blanche*, could buy art produced by old masters, such as Henri Matisse (1869–1954), Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), Fernand Legér (1881–1955) and Jacques Villon (1875–1963), at low prices in Paris directly after the war and make a profit on them in Stockholm.²³ The well-tempered and colourful mix of fauvist and cubist idioms by the younger generation of *École de Paris* painters like Jean Bazaine (1904–2001), Charles Lapique (1898–1988) and Maurice Estève (1904–2001), was also well received as inheritors of a grand old French tradition.²⁴ This interest in French art stemmed from a long tradition of Francophile attitudes in Swedish art and art criticism.²⁵

Experimental abstraction was, however, as in Paris, met with suspicion by the general

audience, and during the early 1950s, the vanguard of abstract art on the Stockholm art scene developed along similar lines as the Parisian; young and up-and-coming galleries presented either geometrical/post-cubist abstraction or an expressive abstraction inclined towards the informal, gestural and lyrical.²⁶

Local competition

In this new and tenser climate, a quintet of young Swedish art historians entered the art scene.²⁷ Pontus Hultén, or Karl G. Hultén as he called himself by this time, was in the mid-1940s a student at the Department of Art History at Stockholm University College. He and his friends and fellow students Oscar Reutersvärd (1915–2002), Rolf Söderberg (1918–2013), Carlo Derkert (1915–1994) and Hans Eklund (1921–) were greatly interested in the history of abstract art and the historic avant-garde, but they could not pursue such topics in an art history department “obsessed with the Middle Ages”.²⁸ Instead, they developed their interest in modern art in their extramural activities.

Their interests in the historic avant-garde differed somewhat, but this did not hinder their collaborations. Hultén focused more on experimental film, the legacy of Dada and the art of Marcel Duchamp.²⁹ Derkert’s field of work was wider; he frequently held popular lectures on modern art, although it is clear that his special interest was in the early Swedish avant-garde and the art produced by his mother, Siri Derkert. Rolf Söderberg wrote art criticism and in 1955 published the first art history handbook on twentieth-century Swedish art.³⁰ Oscar Reutersvärd and Hans Eklund specialised at this time in the post-cubist and non-objective Swedish artists

who had collaborated with Fernand Legér in Paris in the 1920s and early 1930s and in the kind of contemporary geometrical abstraction promoted by Denise René. I will present Reutersvärd's and Eklund's activities in this genre a little further below.

An overview of their extramural activities reveals that the five young art historians by the turn of the 1940s had developed a wide range of contacts. They had created and/or presented exhibitions at private galleries, had held popular evening lectures on modern art at public venues and the art history department, had participated in radio shows and had written monographs, articles and short texts for exhibition catalogues. The newspaper overview also reveals that there was considerable collaboration between them and that they were well connected to Nationalmuseum, where Hultén, Derkert, Eklund and Reutersvärd often helped out. Moreover, Derkert, Söderberg and Hultén held temporary positions there. In the reports in the Stockholm press on these activities, it is clear too that their academic titles and careers gave them legitimacy; the texts seldom fail to mention their academic rank.³¹

Taking their interest in modern art into consideration, one could say that their affiliation to the conservative art history department facilitated as well as necessitated dual careers. Their academic careers provided some financial support (by way of occasional travel and/or doctoral bursaries); however, they also forced the art historians (due to the art history department's conservative nature) to produce commissioned work on modern art. And in creating exhibitions of modern art and writing on this art in a public context, their academic qualifications were important credentials.³² In this way, the lack of modern art studies at the Stockholm University

College's Department of Art History created a group of academically very qualified young critics.³³ Earlier research on this period has not examined this, and it gives an interesting perspective on the role of theory and intellectuals in the promotion of modern art as part of the 1950s art scene.³⁴

Transnational strategies

As mentioned earlier, Oscar Reutersvärd took on the role of a spokesperson for geometrical abstraction and concrete art, e.g. in 1950 in connection with the commemorative exhibition of the non-objective painter Otto G. Carlsund at Gallery Artek in Helsinki, and in 1951 when he designed the show Neoplasticism at Gallery Samlaren in Stockholm. In 1952, together with Eklund, he presented an exhibition of Fernand Legér and Nordic post-cubism at the Swedish–French Art Gallery in Stockholm.³⁵

The exhibitions mirror the strategies of the Parisian context; Reutersvärd turned the gallery into a theoretical platform and wrote polemical entries in the catalogues.³⁶ Another similarity to the strategies of the Parisian galleries in the late 1940s was the combination of artists of the historic avant-garde and the contemporary artists in exhibitions, creating a historic legacy and producing a promise of secure investments in collecting the contemporary.³⁷ These similarities have, however, gone unnoticed in Swedish research. Instead, they have been ascribed to the innovative mind of Hultén and the exhibitions he created at Gallery Samlaren in 1954 (together with Reutersvärd) and 1958.³⁸ By taking the Paris context into consideration instead, it is clear that his shows, as well as Reutersvärd's earlier efforts in 1950–52, must be interpreted as the result of their Paris sojourns.

Pontus Hultén first went to Paris in 1947, and thanks to academic scholarships, he returned there and stayed for several periods of time during the late 1940s and early 1950s. He got to know the Danish artists Richard Mortensen and Robert Jacobsen, who by that time, as we saw above, were collaborating with the Denise René Gallery. In Paris, he also met the non-objective Swedish painter Olle Baertling (1911–1981), who visited the city in 1948 to study at the Académie Legér. They became, together with the Danish artists, both friends and colleagues. Baertling was also some years later, helped by the grand old man of the gallery network, the French painter August Herbin.³⁹

Oscar Reutersvärd came to Paris in 1950, financed too by a scholarship. That year Reutersvärd was introduced to the Denise René Gallery network by Hultén, and by this time they had also collaborated with Olle Baertling in Stockholm. In February 1952, Baertling exhibited, together with August Herbin, at Galleri Brinken in Stockholm; this was a collaboration with the Denise René Gallery.⁴⁰ Thus, by March 1952, when the French exhibition *Klar Form* toured the Nordic countries, the Stockholm–Paris network was already firmly established and part of the larger Nordic web of alliances Denise René had been building since 1948.⁴¹

L'art Suédois, 1913–1953: exposition d'art Suédois, cubiste, futuriste, constructiviste

On 14 February and 19 March 1953, the two main Swedish morning newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*, reported on a new exhibition of Swedish cubism and concrete art from 1913 to 1953 that was planned to travel around Europe, possibly even the

United States, and would open in Paris at the Denise René Gallery on 27 March. The texts made clear that it was a rare and proud moment for Swedish art; it was underlined that the exhibition was under the auspices of the French ambassador, and the brave intentions of the creators of the exhibition (and academic scholars), Karl G. Hultén and Oscar Reutersvärd, were praised. The support of institutions such as Nationalmuseum and the Swedish Institute underscored the reputability of the project.⁴²

Printed sources do not reveal exactly how this exhibition was financed; however, what is clear is that the heroic rhetoric in the above-mentioned articles stands in stark contrast to the realities. The patronage of the French and Swedish authorities, also stressed in the catalogue, was not, as we shall see below, matched by any substantial financial support.⁴³ Reutersvärd and Hultén never received remuneration or reimbursement, and Reutersvärd wrote in a “melancholic letter” (as described by Söderberg) that the exhibition and their stay in Paris had cost them “thousands of kronor and three months of work”.⁴⁴ Hultén, who, in 1953, held a temporary position as an assistant at Nationalmuseum, had to apply for an unpaid leave of absence in order to work on the Paris exhibition.⁴⁵ The interest expressed by the director of Nationalmuseum, Otte Sköld (1894–1958), in the exhibition should also be seen in the light of his own participation as an artist, and, as is indicated by the “melancholic letter” above, the museum appears to have taken no active part in arranging the exhibition other than facilitating the transport of the paintings. Most likely, the freight was financed by Nationalmuseum since it was hoped that Denise René would establish contact with the French painter Fernand

Legér, who had promised to donate a painting by the Swedish painter Otto G. Carlsund (1897–1948) to the museum; however, the sources of most of the financial support seem to have been surprisingly unclear.⁴⁶

The presentation of the exhibition in the Swedish press was strategically planned and also reflects a certain amount of self-interest on the part of the young art historians. This is revealed not only by the rhetoric in the above-mentioned short articles prior to the opening but also in the first report on the exhibition in *Dagens Nyheter*, only a few days after the opening. In this report, Rolf Söderberg, Hultén's and Reutersvärd's friend and student colleague, directly conveyed the intentions. Neither the neutral headline "Swedish art in Paris" nor the text revealed his own involvement in the exhibition; he had namely written the main entry in the catalogue. The text praised the Denise René Gallery as the only one in Paris with "a desire to show initiative and a spirit to cultivate", mentioning also that the gallery's "ideal" was well known to the Swedish audience as a result of the exhibition Klar Form the year before. Denise René had "with an unshakeable belief embraced the latest abstract art", and the gallery now showed Swedish abstraction was "flattering", Söderberg asserted. It was, he stated, high time to present true avant-garde Swedish art to an international audience; the "stepchildren" and "experimenters" who, according to Söderberg, had been disregarded in Swedish art. The report on the exhibited artworks also closely mirrored his text in the catalogue and its constructed timeline of Swedish abstract art.⁴⁷

The young art historians were also allowed to write a follow-up on the exhibition in the November 1953 special issue of *Art d'Aujourd'hui* on Nordic avant-garde art. In these

texts, as in earlier ones and exhibitions in Stockholm, Hultén, Reutersvärd and Söderberg asserted the aesthetic affinity between all kinds of cubist, post-cubist and moderately abstract art in Sweden between 1910 and 1953, and its continuous contact with international avant-garde art: French cubism, Dada, Art Concret, etc.⁴⁸

The polemical intent can also be seen in this special issue, and the texts by Söderberg contain the same kind of rhetorical figures as the French reports on Klar Form the year before. The post-war emergence of a new generation of concrete artists in Sweden was described as the result of a want, an impulse given by a "hunger for intellectualism" after a long period of domination by decorative and gestural colourist art. The post-war reappearance of abstraction stemmed, according to the text, from a pent-up need for nourishment; concrete art remedied a frustration and a want for an essential aesthetic ingredient.⁴⁹

Söderberg had also by this time received a commission from the publishing house Albert Bonniers förlag to write a book on twentieth-century Swedish art, a project he carried out in parallel to writing texts for the exhibition and the magazine. The book was released in 1955 and mirrors in important ways the narrative of Söderberg's Paris texts.⁵⁰

The art critical response in the Swedish press was mainly positive, both to the exhibition and the articles in *Art d'Aujourd'hui*. Critics welcomed its new avant-garde approach and emphasised, in a similar manner as we saw examples of in the French reports on Klar Form, the international interest.⁵¹ The polemical intent was also understood as part of *Art d'Aujourd'hui*'s profile. It was explicitly referred to as a magazine that had made "the biased standpoint into a

virtue that gives it its polemical effectiveness ...It exclusively upholds the cause of the non-figurative painters".⁵²

The polemical agenda also provoked a comment from the critic Nils Palmgren (1890–1955), who pointed to the, in his view, aggressive and tactical strategies of the group of young concrete painters participating in the exhibition. They were already established in the Stockholm art market, and Palmgren argued that they had forged their careers by making allies of art critics in the press and on national radio and that in this exhibition in Paris they had utilised their theoretical allies in academia. They had been smart enough to “acquire the right influential friends”, and their “attack” was this time aimed at an “international platform”.⁵³

Palmgren’s comment reflects, not surprisingly, his hostility towards abstract art.⁵⁴ However, it reveals also that this artistic venture, although launched by Hultén, Reutersvärd and Söderberg as a bold international outreach, had the more immediate and pragmatic concern of furthering careers in Stockholm. The young art historians had, as we have seen, been actively involved since the early 1950s in launching historic avant-garde and contemporary abstract artists onto the Stockholm art scene, and these artists, also represented at the Paris exhibition as both an older and a younger generation, were far from unknown and were of growing interest due to discussions on a new museum of modern art in Stockholm. Siri Derkert (1888–1973), Otte Sköld, Viking Eggeling (1880–1925), Otto G. Carlsund, Erik Olson (1901–1986), Christian Berg (1893–1976), Lennart Rodhe (1916–2005), Olle Bonniér (1925–2016), Arne Jones (1914–1976), Karl-Axel Pehrson (1921–2005) and Olle Baertling had already been exhibited as part of broad

overviews of modern art at major national institutions, such as Nationalmuseum, Liljevalchs Art Gallery and the National Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts (Riksförbundet för bildande konst), and private galleries, such as the Swedish–French Art Gallery and Färg och form (Colour and Form), and the small shows at Gallery Samlaren.⁵⁵ The Paris exhibition was in this sense an endeavour very much in tune with Stockholm.⁵⁶

The argument for the international relevance of the art presented in the exhibition appears biased also when taking into account the article “Complément à la Scandinavie” by the French critic Michel Seuphor (1901–1999) in a later issue of *Art d’Aujourd’hui*. In the text, Seuphor commented upon the omission of several Scandinavian artists, not least the lack of information on Norwegian abstract painting. He also mentioned that he found a number of Swedish names missing. Seuphor wrote:

Some gaps in the Scandinavian countries which appeared in *Art d’Aujourd’hui* (October–November 1953) have to be amended ... abstract painters of some importance have also been omitted. These are primarily Gösta Verner, Ture Lindström, Inger Ekdahl, E. Gustavsson, Lindquist, Valentin Andersson, Gösta Eriksson, Zan, Gyllenberg, John Berg and Nils Nixon.⁵⁷

Seuphor also mentioned the painters Bengt Lindström (1925–2008), Wiking Svensson (1915–1979) and Eric H. Olson (1907–1995). The comment points out that the report on Swedish art in the magazine had omitted the young Swedish abstract artists already living in Paris, and one of them, a friend of Seuphor, Eric H. Olson, had penned a letter to Seuphor, who then wrote the text intended as an addendum.⁵⁸ This further underlines

that the Swedish artists exhibited at the gallery in April and presented in the magazine in November were those names which were first and foremost relevant to the Swedish audience and by 1953 “hot” favourites for the Stockholm art market.⁵⁹ One could say that they constituted (together with the art historians’ special selection of Swedish historic avant-garde artists) almost a kind of brand the young art historians had claimed for their extramural activities. The Swedish abstract artists who lived and worked in Paris, had received little or no attention in the Swedish press and, with the exception of Nils Nixon (1912–1997), were little known in Sweden and were from this point of view of little interest.⁶⁰

The Paris exhibition can thus be interpreted as a strategic measure taken to safeguard the local positions of the art historians in Stockholm, where they had dual careers. The exhibition told a story of abstract art in Sweden that in fact gave legitimacy to them as its main spokesmen. Whilst they fought for recognition by academia as well as on the Stockholm art scene, Paris could, although still offering meagre financial rewards, give them ample symbolic recognition to help further advance their careers as independent critics and in the long run as experts on modern art and as art historians.

A methodological problem: I. What is a centre? And where is the periphery?

During the last thirty years, critical art geography has provided a more complex and nuanced idea of the geographical distribution of artistic positions and how we are to understand their interrelations. The findings demonstrate the necessity of critically

examining the way we understand art in relation to geographical space and avoiding presuppositions about what a centre is and what effect it has on the margins.

By way of summary, the importance of the transnational, or perhaps better put, translocal, collaborations and mutual dependencies of the Stockholm–Paris axis seems a vital fact to observe. Instead of a one-way diffusion, we can see that strategic measures were taken in each local context in order to increase the competitiveness and resources in the regional habitat. The transnational contact was spurred by competition and the attempt to advance from a marginal local position. The exhibition of Swedish art in Paris as well as the Klar Form exhibition in Stockholm were in this sense “detours”, as a means to an end.

Earlier art geographical research has interestingly demonstrated that such a “physical as well as symbolic detour” has been a recurrent pattern in the strategies of launching modern art. Building artistic credentials and reputations by exhibiting in foreign cities was a strategy to create a notion of an external demand, a “desire” outside the national context. The international reception was thus used by galleries and artists as a kind of mediator to create domestic attention. We find it in European modernism and the career-building efforts from the late 1800s as well as endeavours to introduce American abstraction in Paris in the late 1950s.⁶¹

Although having identified similar “detours” launched from Paris in 1952 and Stockholm in 1953, it is undeniable that Paris was, in important ways, a centre in the course of events referred to above. The collaborations were indeed dependent on the French capital’s international reputation as a mythological space and an economic hub, offering an infrastructure of institutions important to

artists as well as to art dealers and patrons, galleries, salons and magazines.⁶² The status of the city as a metropolis of art thus gave the exchange between Denise René and her Nordic collaborators its driving force; the Francophile Swedish art market had had the city as a focal point since the 1920s, and it also served, as we have seen, as a magnet internationally.⁶³

As the historian Carlo Ginzburg and the art historian Enrico Castelnuovo have pointed out, this is in fact how centres work. The relationships between centres and peripheries are founded on “political, economic, religious” dependencies. The “symbolic domination” and the aesthetic impact of the centre must be seen as an effect of this accumulation of resources; it takes “surplus wealth” to produce, distribute and purchase art.⁶⁴ As we have seen in the case of Paris, this “surplus wealth” very much consisted of foreign money. In the 1950s, Paris grew into a transnational stock exchange, a geographical space where social, artistic and economic assets were combined and augmented, creating intense competition and a diverse art scene.⁶⁵ It took great efforts to launch a gallery and to advance from a marginal position in this terrain.

So, even if the city was a mythological and economic focal point, this obviously did not suffice in the day-to-day business of the fledgling gallery during its early days at no. 124, Rue de la Boétie. Starting out in July 1944, it was one of many galleries competing for attention and foreign money. The art market was still weak until the early 1950s, and the transnational network of galleries and patrons and the travelling exhibitions of the Denise René Gallery were vital.⁶⁶ The historical data thus testifies to a rather frail situation where “the local embedded the international” and “the

international embedded the local” and the topography of the Paris art scene must accordingly be understood as a transnational space of complex and intertwined relations.⁶⁷

It is also obvious that the Nordic countries did not constitute a random periphery; they were “margins”. This concept, suggested by the art historian Piotr Piotrowski instead of the vaguer notion of “periphery”, indicates positions defined by, and literally constituted by, their relationship to a centre. And the Nordic “margins” were indeed focused on Paris and very important to Denise René and other art dealers and galleries.⁶⁸ Denise René’s first overseas exhibition took place in Denmark in 1948, and the contacts with patrons of art, such as Maire Gullichsen, were vital; there was enough money and influence and a taste for abstract art to support a large travelling exhibition in the Nordic capitals in 1952. Thus, as Piotr Piotrowski reminds us, margins have an impact on centres and, we should add, as we have seen in this case, on each other.⁶⁹

To conclude, art historians must be cautious when identifying centres; their terrain may be heterogeneous and their coherence cannot be taken for granted. From this also follows that it is always important to be careful about how research locates and defines a centre; the geographical space (and the city limits) do not necessarily demarcate the social space and the relations that underpin its attractive force.

A methodological problem: II. Theatricalisation

If in the case of art history, according to Joyeux-Prunel, we “always study the same centres and the same people”, we should ask ourselves why art historians endorse aesthetic

preferences of certain artists, curators and critics and why we reproduce self-fashioned narratives.⁷⁰

When the scholar thus becomes a mere “instrument” of the field, what is missing is one of the fundamental methodological demands, namely the “epistemological break” with taken-for-granted assumptions produced by the field.⁷¹ And by being in tune with such beliefs, such as the existence of a natural order of the field where art is made (and furthered) by striving, self-sacrificing, creative individuals fighting for the true (or new) values of art, it promotes a “personalist” view of avant-garde strategies.⁷² The result is then a theatricalisation of new, experimental and daring achievements as solely aesthetic efforts and results of heroic agency. In that way, it obscures not only their homology with social positions, i.e. the resources and dispositions necessary to accomplish such endeavours, but it also makes those who “did not win the battle of history” more or less invisible and may detract from other artistic productions that in the same “peripheries” were “sidesteps” or even outcomes of resistance or competition.⁷³

This article has argued that it is important to consider that the (first, local, then national, transnational and later international) careers of Denise René and Pontus Hultén were based on trying to establish and defend local positions. By taking this into consideration, it becomes clear that the narratives of their endeavours to promote modern art obscure the social reality that necessitated them, namely harsh competition and meagre resources. It may seem an obvious and uninteresting fact to point to modest beginnings; however, the methodological point is that heroic career trajectories are reliant on access to resources and networks and presuppose dependencies as well as competition.

In the self-constructed narratives of Hultén and René, no attention is given to the fact that it was fierce local competition and insufficient career opportunities that pushed them, so to speak, from margin to margin in order to establish and secure careers. Using social analysis, we may thus interpret the local competition in each context as a centrifugal force that created mutual transnational dependencies.

Thus, rather than to presume that the exhibition *L'art Suédois 1913–1953* was the result of an aesthetic affinity and a gravitation towards an artistic centre, not unlike the physical pull of a magnetic field, social analysis helps to also identify the push effect that necessitated incentives to create new alliances outside the local context. It points to the relevance of considering the competition in the contemporary art scenes in Stockholm and Paris, where new critics and artists made claims to being the vanguard, and where the stakes were high in the post-war change of artistic generations.

To conclude, if visions and farsightedness are characteristic of innovators, one should remember that they are the product of both virtue and necessity. The heroic narrative simplifies and hides the often fragile and shaky beginnings, the push effect of competition, and dismisses as traditional, provincial or parochial those positions that threatened professional advancement locally.

Thus, as pointed out in the introduction, it is methodologically important to consider the relationships of “material exchange, circulation and transaction” between individuals as well as their access to resources in their local context. In that way, the relationship between centres and margins, as well as the heroic trajectories, might be critically reconsidered and reframed as materially founded and interdependent.⁷⁴

Endnotes

1. Kenneth Clark, *Provincialism*, London, 1962, p. 3. The quote is discussed in Enrico Castelnuovo, Carlo Ginzburg and Maylis Curie, "Symbolic Domination and Artistic Geography in Italian Art History", *Art in Translation*, Vol. 1, No 1, 2009 (1981).
2. On "canonical logic", see Anna Brzyski, "Introduction: Canons and Art History", in Anna Brzyski, ed., *Partisan Canons*, Durham, 2007.
3. Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Provincializing Paris", *Artlas Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No 1, 2015, pp. 41, 61.
4. See, for example, Andreas Gedin, *Pontus Hultén, Hon & Moderna*, Stockholm, 2016, pp. 10, 12, 35–40; Hans Hayden, *Modernismen som institution*, Stockholm, 2006, pp. 184, 190; Patrik Andersson, *Euro-pop*, PhD diss., Univ. of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2001, pp. 3, 18. For a critical historiographical overview of the center-periphery narrative in this period, see Annika Öhrner, *Barbro Östlihn & New York: konstens rum och möjligheter*, PhD diss., Uppsala Univ., Gothenburg, 2010, pp. 188–192.
5. Hans Ulrich Obrist, "The Hang of It", *Art Forum*, April 1997. Cf. also Jean-Paul Ameline and Nathalie Ernoult, "Pontus Hultén", in *Denise René, l'intrépide*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2001. On Denise René, see Denise René and Catherine Millet, *Conversations avec Denise René*, Paris, 1991, pp. 56–59; Mette Højsgaard, "Denise René Interviewet af Mette Højsgaard i Galerie Denise René", in Gitte Ørskov and Jakob Vengberg Sevel, eds., *Rum og Form: Robert Jacobsen 100 år*, Aalborg, 2012; Mette Højsgaard, ed., *Robert Jacobsen & Paris*, Copenhagen, 2001; Mette Højsgaard, *I Paris lærer man at tale rent*, PhD diss., Univ. of Copenhagen, 2000, pp. 83–89.
6. Research of importance for this line of argument is Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Introduction: Reintroducing Circulations: Historiography and the Project of Global Art History", in Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Catherine Dossin and Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, eds., *Circulations in the Global History of Art*, Farnham, 2015; Joyeux-Prunel, 2015; Catherine Dossin, *The Rise and Fall of American Art, 1940s–1980s*, Burlington, 2015; Castelnuovo, Ginzburg and Curie, 2009 (1981); Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Nul n'est prophète en son pays?* Paris, 2009. The introduction in DaCosta Kaufmann, Dossin, Joyeux-Prunel offers a historiographical overview of earlier research. DaCosta Kaufmann, Dossin, Joyeux-Prunel, 2015, pp. 1–22; also endnote 74 in this text lists further readings, e.g. Kaufmann, 2004.
7. Research of importance for this line of argument is Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago, 1992; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, Cambridge, 2014 (1996).
8. On this methodological approach, see DaCosta Kaufmann, Dossin, Joyeux-Prunel, 2015, pp. 1–3.
9. The article contributes to the number of critical studies of Swedish modernism, 1945–1960, aiming to shift focus from a personalised approach (great men) to "infrastructure" of vital importance for artistic success, e.g. in the Modern Museum in 1958 (Hans Hayden, *Modernismen som institution*, Eslöv, 2006; Öhrner, 2010; Öhrner, "The Moderna Museet in Stockholm: The Institution and the Avant-Garde", in Tania Ørum and Jesper Olsson, eds., *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries, 1950–1975*, Leiden, 2016); in television and radio (David Rynell Åhlén, *Samtida konst på bästa sändningstid*, PhD diss., Stockholm Univ., Lund, 2016); in public art (Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, *Skulptur i folkhemmet*, PhD diss., Uppsala Univ., Gothenburg, 2007); and in the development of old and new institutions for art education (Anna Lena Lindberg, *Konstpedagogikens dilemma*, Lund, 1991; Marta Edling, *Fri konst?* Stockholm, 2010). Linda Fagerström's critical study of young Swedish artists' career opportunities and the role of the artist during the late 1940s and 1950s clarifies the working conditions and terms for aspiring artists. See Linda Fagerström, *Randi Fisher – svensk modernist*, PhD diss., Lund Univ., Lund, 2005.
10. Julie Verlaine, *Les galeries d'art contemporain à Paris*, Paris, 2012, pp. 39–40, 45, 54–65, 167–176.
11. Verlaine, 2012, p. 292.
12. On metaphors of combat, competition and war, see Verlaine, 2012, pp. 114–121; cf. endnote 15 below. On the position of Denise René, see Véronique Wiesinger, "Mouvements et marchés de l'abstraction", in *Denise René, l'intrépide*, Paris, 2001.
13. Dossin, 2015, pp. 103–106; Verlaine, 2012, pp. 114–117; Kathryn Anne Boyer, "Political Promotion and Institutional Patronage: How New York Displaced Paris as the Center of Contemporary Art, Ca. 1955–1968", PhD diss., Univ. of Kansas, Ann Arbor, 1994; Kathryn Boyer, "Association Française d'Action Artistique and the School of Paris", *Journal of Art History*, Vol. 70, No 3, 2001.
14. Verlaine, 2012, pp. 75–131, 397–405; Dossin, 2015, pp. 85–111, citation on p. 96; the art market was also hampered by taxes and an old-fashioned infrastructure. See also René and Millet, 1991, pp. 54–56.
15. "[J]e voulais du neuf, m'écarter des chemins battus... Pour moi, le temps du combat commençait". English translation in Bourdieu, 2014 (1996), p. 156 (Bourdieu's italics). *Catalogue du 1^{er} Salon international des galeries pilotes*, Lausanne, 1963, p. 150.
16. Verlaine, 2012, pp. 133–140, 153–180.
17. On the Danish – French collaboration and Robert Jacobsen see Højsgaard 2000 pp. 255–260, Højsgaard 2001, Højsgaard 2012, as well as Jan Würtz Frandsen *Richard Mortensen* Copenhagen 1992, pp. 309–534. On Finnish contacts, see René and Millet 1991, pp. 56–57, Helena Woirhaye *Maire Gullichsen*, Helsingfors 2002 pp.120–122, ed. Erik Kruskopf & John Arnold, *Maire Gullichsen*, Pori, 2000, pp. 169–171 and pp. 107–110. Jean-Paul Ameline "Denise René. Histoire d'une galerie" in *Denise René, l'intrépide*, Paris 2001.

18. Verlaine, 2012, pp. 124–126.
19. *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, serie 3, No 1, décembre 1951; René and Millet, 1991, pp. 53–61; Verlaine, 2012, pp. 173–174.
20. “L'Exposition Klar-Form ... soulève une vive curiosité, de la part du public, dans toutes les villes des pays du nord de l'Europe où elle est présentée. De son côté, la presse accorde de larges commentaires et souligne l'importance exceptionnelle des oeuvres présentées. Le succès sans cesse grandissant témoigne, une fois de plus, de la vitalité de l'Art abstrait. “L'Exposition itinérante Klar Form. “Vingt Artistes de l'Ecole de Paris””, *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, serie 3, No 3–4, février-mars 1952, p. 59 (my translation).
21. “[R]épondre au désir exprimé par les Pays Scandinaves et la Finlande, qui souhaitaient présenter à leurs compatriotes des oeuvres représentatives des peintres et sculptures non figuratifs de Ecole de Paris”. “L'Exposition ‘Klar Form’”, *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, serie 3, No 5, juin 1952, p. 59 (my translation).
22. Martin Gustavsson, *Makt och konstsmak*, PhD diss., Stockholm Univ., Stockholm, 2002, pp. 127–151; Tulla Grünberger, *Svenskt måleri under andra världskriget*, PhD diss., Stockholm Univ., Stockholm, 1984, pp. 47–71.
23. Gustavsson, 2002, p. 134.
24. An early example is issue no. 4/5 1945 of the leading Swedish art magazine *Konstrevy*, in which six articles on modern and contemporary French art are presented. Cf. also Yngve Berg, “Konstkrönika”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 1947-04-03. This reception was also in line with the international promotion by French authorities of French art as a tradition of the grand masters. See Boyer, 2001.
25. Eva-Lena Bergström, *Nationalmuseum i offentlighetens ljus*, PhD diss., Umeå Univ., Umeå, 2018, pp. 167–170, 209, 216–222, 259, 274–276, 306; Andrea Kollnitz, *Konstens nationella identitet*, PhD diss., Stockholm Univ., 2008, pp. 201–249.
26. Gustavsson, 2002, pp. 127–151. These two lines of development were general characteristics of Nordic art by this time. Ørum and Olsson, eds., 2016, pp. 25–32.
27. On the art scene during the period, see Bo Lindvall, “1947–1956: En kavalkad över de sista tio åren i svensk konst”, *Konstrevy*, häfte 1, 1957; Sten Dunér, “Modernismen i Sverige mellan den 1 mars 1945 och den 19 januari 1950”, in Torsten Bergmark, ed., *Den åldrade modernismen*, Stockholm, 1977, pp. 168–181. On the young art historians, see Eugen Wretholm, *Moderna svenska konstnärer*, Stockholm, 1969, pp. 6–9; Teddy Brunius, *Baertling*, Stockholm, 1990.
28. “[M]edeltidsfixerade högskolan”, Rolf Söderberg, *Mina konstnärsänkor och andra konstminnen*, Stockholm, 1999, pp. 47, 73 (my translation). On Swedish art history in this period, see Oscar Reutersvärd, “Om fyrtialets svenska konsthistoria”, *Ord och Bild*, 1945.
29. Jimmy Pettersson, “Apropå film”; Patrik Andersson, “Den inre och den yttre rymden”, in Patrik Andersson, Anna Tellgren and Anna Lundström, eds., *Pontus Hultén och Moderna museet*, Stockholm, 2017; Lief (sic.) Eriksson, “Duchamp in Sweden, 1933–1970”, <http://toutfait.com/duchamp-in-sweden-1933-1970-a-critical-review/>, published: 2000/12/01, updated: 2016/07/12, accessed: 2018-02-20; Ulf Linde, *Från kart till fallfrukt*, Stockholm, 2008, pp. 26, 167.
30. Carlo Derkert became known for his popular lectures on the radio, at exhibitions, at Nationalmuseum, etc. His name appeared frequently in the press (see also note 31 below); Kristoffer Arvidsson, “Carlo Derkert i efterkrigstidens konstpedagogiska landskap” and Annika Öhrner, “Carlo Derkert – biografiska data och bibliografi”, *Biblis*, No 57, spring 2012. On Söderberg, see Söderberg, 1999; bibliographical information on his writings can be found in *Svenskt författarlexikon*, Vol. 2–6, 1953–75.
31. Full-text searches can be done in the search engine Svenska dagstidningar (Swedish newspapers), a database of digitalised major Swedish newspapers. I have tracked the five art historians from 1936 to 1960 and charted all the minor and major entries where their names appear. This gives an overview of their exams, marriages, public appearances, bursaries and scholarships, exhibitions, publications, etc.
32. On their early academic careers, see, for example, reports on bursaries in *Dagens Nyheter*, “Högskolans doktorandstipendiater”, 1947-12-16; “Doktorandstipendier vid Stockholms högskola”, 1950-05-28; “Högskolestipendierna i Stockholm utdelade”, 1950-05-20; “Doktorand- och licenciatstipendier”, 1953-05-16. Also letters in Rolf Söderberg’s archive from Oscar Reutersvärd repeatedly refer to their efforts to apply for bursaries, and study loans were an option when applications were rejected; see the letters 1953-03-15, 1953-04-18, 1953-05-06, and undated letter [May 1953] from Oscar Reutersvärd to Rolf Söderberg in Rolf Söderberg’s archive, Royal Library MS, acc. 2008/108:3, and the letter in reply from Rolf Söderberg to Oscar Reutersvärd, 1953-05-17, Lund University Library MS, Oscar Reutersvärd’s archive. The letters also reflect the necessity of keeping in with the professors at the art history department. For a report on the sacrifices that living on such meagre means entailed, see also Cri [pseud.], “Studentfamilj är hemkär”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1948-10-14; Gerdes [pseud.], “Akademiska knep med smörkniv och tallrik”, *Norrskensflamman*, 1944-07-15.
33. Hultén obtained a bachelor’s degree in 1948 and a licentiate degree in 1951; Rolf Söderberg, a bachelor’s degree in 1944 and a licentiate degree in 1946; Oscar Reutersvärd, a licentiate degree in 1944 and a doctorate degree in 1952; Hans Eklund, a bachelor’s degree in 1944 and a licentiate degree in 1950; and Carlo Derkert, a bachelor’s degree in 1945. Bibliographical and biographical information on the exams and published texts of the five art historians can be accessed from the online *Project Runeberg* (runeberg.org), providing free electronic editions of Scandinavian literature. On the relationship between the academic position and the art critical assignments, see E. H., “Konsthistorikerna

- principdebattera”, *Konstvärlden*, Vol. 3, No 8, 1943, pp. 230–231. Art historians criticised Oscar Reutersvärd for using his taste for abstract art to analyse art historical material, focusing on intra-aesthetic criteria. See Ragnar Josephson, “Ett underligt fyrtiotal”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1946-02-18; Gotthard Johansson, “Impressionisterna och naturen”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1952-12-14; Carl Nordenfalk, “Impressionisterna inför konstvetenskapen”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 1953-01-27.
34. Earlier research has overlooked this intimate relationship during this period: “It is no exaggeration to say that the fields of art history and art criticism have had remarkably few points of contact”, Hans Hayden writes and cites one exception, Teddy Brunius, who worked as a critic and curator during the same period. Hans Hayden, “Konsthistoria utanför universitetet”, in Britt-Inger Johnsson and Hans Pettersson, eds., *Åtta kapitel om konsthistoriens historia i Sverige*, Stockholm, 2000, p. 159 (my translation). The relationship between art history and art criticism is not commented upon in Dan Karlholm, Hans Dam Christensen and Matthew Rampley, “Art History in the Nordic Countries”, in Matthew Rampley, ed., *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe*, Leiden, 2012.
 35. Reutersvärd collaborated with the Finnish patron Maire Gullichsen in the preparations for the commemorative exhibition in Helsinki. Reutersvärd advertised for works by the artist in the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1950-02-24; Kruskopf and Arnold, 2000, pp. 107–110. On the exhibition at Gallery Samlaren, see Gunnar Hellman, “Variationer på ett gammalt tema”, *Konstperspektiv*, No 4, 1951; Ulf Hård af Segerstad, “Förändrade perspektiv”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1952-06-18. Eklund designed several exhibitions around the turn of the decade: *Abstrakt och surrealistiskt ur Egon Östlunds samling*, Stockholm, 1949; *Vår tids konst*, Riksförbundet för bildande konst, 1950; and *Den unga kubismen*, 1952.
 36. See the prefaces to the small catalogues *Legér och nordisk postkubism*, Stockholm, 1952, and *neoplasticism*, Stockholm, 1951. On Paris, see Verlaine, 2012, pp. 118–121.
 37. Verlaine, 2012, pp. 124–126. The strategy was praised by Swedish critics. See, for example, K.B., “Neoplastiskt sammanhang”, *Aftonbladet*, 1953-09-10.
 38. Hayden, 2006, pp. 190, 332–333, note 25. Cf. also Gedin, 2006, pp. 55–56, 77–78.
 39. Interview with Hultén’s partner, Anna Lena Wibom, 2015-09-12; Ameline and Ernout, 2001, pp. 64–66; Teddy Brunius, *Baertling*, Stockholm, 1990, pp. 42–43, 48–49, 64–66; Obrist, 1997. See also note 32 for information on bursaries.
 40. Brunius, 1990, pp. 64–81; Thomas Millroth and Per-Olle Stackman, *Svenska konstnärer i Paris*, Stockholm, 1989, pp. 175–193; Söderberg, 1999, pp. 73–79. See also note 32 for information on bursaries.
 41. The network was built not only on friendly and professional relationships; Denise René lived together with Richard Mortensen. Söderberg, 1999, p. 84. Oscar Reutersvärd and Rolf Söderberg were brothers-in-law and were married to the sisters Kerstin Lundhobom (b. 1919) and Britt Lundhobom (b. 1917). See “Maud Lundbohm”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1978-01-07; “Ansedel Maud Ernestine Maria Nordberg”, <http://www.molins.nu/Disgen/ooo/oooo/379.htm>, produced: 2013-12-23, accessed: 2018-07-12.
 42. “Svensk konst till Paris”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1953-02-14; “Svensk kubism och konkretism på Europaturne”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 1953-02-14; “Svensk nutidskonst på utlandsturné”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1953-03-19; “Kubister på vandring”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 1953-03-19.
 43. *L’art Suédois 1913–1953: exposition d’art Suédois, cubiste, futuriste, constructiviste*, Galerie Denise René, Paris, 1953.
 44. The reference to Reutersvärd’s letter appears in Swedish in Söderberg, 1999, p. 81: “I maj 1953 fick jag ett melankoliskt brev från Oscar Reutersvärd: ‘Den där utställningen hos Denise har fullständigt sugit ut Pontus och mig. Det har blivit vi som med egna portmonnäer fått punga ut med alla otaliga utgifter i samband med organiserandet. Detta plus vårt Parisbesök har kostat oss tusentals kronor och tre arbetsmånader’”. Letter from Oscar Reutersvärd to Rolf Söderberg, 06-05-1953 (my translation); see Rolf Söderberg’s archive, Royal Library, MS, acc. 2008/108:3.
 45. “Protokoll i museiärenden, 1948–1953”, Nationalmuseum archive MS, serie A2, volym 76. I am grateful to Jimmy Pettersson for pointing this out to me.
 46. Letters from Pontus Hultén to Rolf Söderberg, 1953-02-17, 1953-05-02, undated [1953], 02-28/03-02, Rolf Söderberg’s archive, KB, acc. 2008/108:1. The donation of the Carlsund painting is also mentioned in the press, and Legér received an honorary decoration at the opening of the exhibition from the Swedish ambassador. “Svensk konst gör lycka i Paris”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 1953-03-31; “Svensk nutidskonst på utlandsturné”, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1953-03-19; “Kubister på vandring”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 1953-03-19; Oscar Reutersvärd, “Legér och skandinaverna”, in Christian Derouet et al., eds., *Legér och Norden*, Stockholm, 1992. The exhibition moved on to Brussels only with the help of private sponsors. Pelle Börjesson and Gerhard Bonnier, “Abstrakt svensk konst på Brysselutställning”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 1953-12-02. There is no trace of the 1953 Paris exhibition in Nationalmuseum’s archive, according to an e-mail to the author from Eva Lena Bergström, 2018-02-23.
 47. “[I]nitiativlust och nyodlaranda” ... “ideal” ... “med trosvisshet gått in för den yngsta abstrakta konsten” ... “smickrande” ... “styvbarnen” ... “experimentatorerna” Rolf Söderberg “Svensk konst i Paris”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 1953-04-01 (my translation). The article was the result of an initiative by Söderberg, who contacted *Dagens Nyheter*’s editor, Uno Dalén, in February 1953. Dalén was not at first aware of Söderberg’s

- involvement in the project; however, he accepted the text on the condition that it should be a report and not a critical review. See the five letters from Uno Dalén to Söderberg, February to April 1953, in Rolf Söderberg's archive, Royal Library, MS, acc. 2008/108:1. Oscar Reutersvärd later thanked Söderberg for the "extremely helpful" ("stor nytta") article. See letter from Oscar Reutersvärd to Rolf Söderberg, 1953-04-17, Rolf Söderberg's archive, Royal Library, MS, acc. 2008/108:3 (my translation).
48. For a critical historiographical analysis of this narrative, see Annika Öhrner, "Cubism in Transit: Siri Derkert and the Early Parisian Avant-Garde", in Harri Veivo, ed., *Transfers, appropriations et fonctions de l'avant-garde dans l'Europe intermédiaire et du Nord*, Paris, 2012.
 49. "[D]'une faim d'intellectualisme". Rolf Söderberg, "de 1940 à 1950", p. 7 (my translation). See also Rolf Söderberg, "Introduction", Oscar Reutersvärd (sic.), "Otto G. Carlsson", and Pontus Hultén, "Viking Eggeling", *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, série 4, No 7, octobre-novembre 1953.
 50. Söderberg, 1999, pp. 102–103. In the foreword, Söderberg writes that the last chapter on contemporary art was revised in 1953. Rolf Söderberg, *Den svenska konsten under 1900-talet*, Stockholm, 1955, p. 8. The text was also revised in later editions. On its influence on Swedish art history, see Jeff Werner, "Svansviftningens estetik", in Cecilia Widenheim and Eva Rudberg, eds., *Utopi och verklighet*, Stockholm, 2000.
 51. Eugene Wretholm, "Svensk modernism i Paris", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1953-04-09; "Abstrakt stämman talar för oss", *Expressen*, 1953-04-22; "Svensk konkretism i parisisk debatt", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1953-04-21; "Parissvenskt", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1953-04-23; Sven Lövgren, "Modern svensk konst inför fransk publik", *Dagens Nyheter*, 1953-11-29; Ulf Hård af Segerstad, "Ny svensk konst i fransk tidskrift", *Svenska Dagbladet*, 1953-11-27; K. R—d, "Böcker och tidskrifter: Svenskt abstrakt inför utlandet", *Sydsvenska Dagbladet Snällposten*, 1953-12-02.
 52. "[D]et partiska ställningstagandet till en positiv egenskap, som ger den dess polemiska slagkraft" ... "Den hävdar exklusivt de nonfigurativa konstnärernas sak" K. R—d, 1953-12-02 (my translation).
 53. "[S]kaffa sig de rätta inflytelserika vännerna" ... "attack" ... "internationell plattform" Nils Palmgren, "Orienterat mot framtiden", *Aftonbladet*, 1953-04-10 (my translation).
 54. Barbro Schaffer, "Nils O E Palmgren", *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, Vol. 28, Stockholm, 1992–94.
 55. On exhibitions and the discussions on a new museum of modern art, see Bergström, 2018, pp. 273–286. The artists had been exhibited in shows, such as *God konst i hem och samlingslokaler*, Stockholm, 1945; *Abstrakt konst*, Stockholm, 1947; *Ung konst*, Katalog nr. 203, Färg och form, Stockholm, 1947; *Abstrakt och surrealistiskt ur Egon Östlunds samling*, Stockholm, 1949; *Det moderna museet*, Stockholm, 1950 and Carl Nordenfalk and Hans Richter, eds., *Viking Eggeling, 1880–1925*, Stockholm, 1950. See also the previously mentioned exhibitions at Gallery Samlaren. The two youngest, Lars Rolf and Ted Dyrssen, were still in the beginning of their careers.
 56. Rolf had exhibited at several Stockholm galleries in 1951 and 1952, making his debut at Galleri Aesthetica in February 1951. He caught the attention of Yngve Berg, "Konstkrönika", *Dagens Nyheter*, 1951-02-15, and was favourably mentioned again by Berg in his "Konstkrönika", *Dagens Nyheter*, 1952-03-13 and 1952-12-18. The only odd name out was Ted Dyrssen, a young sculptor who appears to have been the "joker in the pack". The database has no record of exhibitions at renowned galleries before the 1953 Paris exhibition.
 57. "Quelques lacunes doivent être réparées dans l'ensemble sur les pays scandinaves paru dans *Art d'Aujourd'hui* (octobre-novembre 1953)/ ... /Parmi les Suedois quelques peintres abstraits d'une certaine importance ont été également omis. Ce sont principalement Gösta Werner, Ture Lindström, Inger Ekdahl, E. Gustavsson, Lindquist, Valentin Andersson, Gösta Eriksson, Zan, Gyllenberg, John Berg et Nils Nixon". Michel Seuphor, "Complément à la Scandinavie", *Art d'Aujourd'hui*, série 5, No 1, février 1954, p. 13 (my translation). Gösta Werner's name is misspelled in the original.
 58. Seuphor, 1954, p. 13. On the friendship between Seuphor and Olson, see Millroth and Stackman, 1989, pp. 184–185.
 59. Gustavsson, 2002, pp. 135–143.
 60. Olson's frustration can be seen in the light of the fact that just a few months earlier, in February 1953, he had exhibited at Galerie Aesthetica in Stockholm, presenting a new artistic profile as "neoplasticist". Olson's ambitions were, however, discouraged by the art critic Yngve Berg, who saw nothing but decorative uses for Olson's paintings. Yngve Berg, "Konstkrönika", *Dagens Nyheter*, 1953-02-12. The other artists, referred to by their full names or otherwise identifiable in Seuphor's text, only rarely appear in the database Svenska dagstidningar, 1947–1955. Gösta Werner, i.e. Werner, made his debut in 1950 but does not appear, apart from one exception (see below), in the database until 1962. See also his obituary in *Dagens Nyheter*, 1989-11-15. Ture Lindström is mentioned for having successfully sold a graphic sheet in 1953 at an exhibition of Nordic artists in Bergen. "Svensk konst såld Bergen", *Dagens Nyheter*, 1953-04-16. Inger Ekdahl is briefly mentioned and characterised as doing "abstract compositions" by the critic Yngve Berg in a short review of the group exhibition De Unga at Galerie Aesthetica. "Konstkrönika", *Dagens Nyheter*, 1951-04-26. Her solo debut at Lilla Paviljongen (Little Pavilion) in 1954 was mentioned favourably by the critic Nils Palmgren in *Aftonbladet*, 1954-10-07. Valentin Andersson appears in an ad for Gummeson Art Gallery in *Dagens Nyheter*, 1950-01-19, and, together with Gösta Werner, is referred to as a concrete painter by Yngve Berg, "Konstkrönika", *Dagens Nyheter*, 1954-11-18. Zan, perhaps a reference to the sculptor Jack Zan, who first

made his career in the northern parts of Sweden, is fleetingly mentioned in the Stockholm press during the 1950s, e.g. in 1953 by Yngve Berg, who briefly referred to Zan's "rather ingenious non-figurative sculptures". Yngve Berg, "Konstkrönika", *Dagens Nyheter*, 1953-05-21. Nils Nixon's career was different. He had his first solo exhibition already in 1946 at Gummeson Art Gallery. See Yngve Berg, "Konstkrönika", *Dagens Nyheter*, 1946-09-26. During the late 1940s, he was associated with the new generation of concrete painters exhibited at the Paris show in 1953, but he never received the same attention. He was not an alumnus of the school of the Fine Art Academy and as early as 1951 was described as an odd man out by Martin Strömberg in the book *Den nya konsten*. His modest career is also reflected in the lack of art historical interest in his art. Cf. Thomas Millroth, "Måleriet och skulpturen", in *Signums svenska konsthistoria, vol. 12, Konsten 1915–1950*, Lund, 2002, p. 96. I have not been able to find the artists Gösta Eriksson, Gyllenberg, E. Gustavsson and Lindquist.

61. Joyeux-Prunel, 2015, pp. 44–45; Dossin, 2015, pp. 127–143; DaCosta Kauffmann, Dossin and Joyeux-Prunel, 2015, pp. 190–192; Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Jouer sur l'espace pour maîtriser le temps", *EspacesTemps.net, Works*, 28.11.2006, <https://www.espacestemp.net/en/articles/jouer-sur-lrsquoespace-pour-maitriser-le-temps-en/>. René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* Baltimore, 1965 (1961), p. 2.
62. See note 13; cf. also Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, London, 2009, p. 25.
63. On Paris and the Swedish art market in the 1910s and 1920s, see Andrea Kollnitz, "Promoting the Young", in Hubert van den Berg, ed., *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries, 1900–1925*, Amsterdam, 2012; Annika Öhrner, "A Northern Avant-Garde", in Pam Meecham, ed., *A Companion to Modern Art*, London, 2018.
64. Castelnovo, Ginzburg and Curie, 2009 (1981), pp. 7–9.
65. Verlaine, 2012, pp. 221–229, 384, gives a good overview of this heterogeneous art scene in the mid-1950s.
66. Verlaine, 2012, pp. 75–131.
67. Citation from Joyeux-Prunel, 2015, p. 47.
68. Ameline, 2001, p. 21. Ca. 10% of the Parisian art market's clientele came from the Nordic countries between 1944 and 1952 according to Verlaine, 2012, p. 96. Cf. Tania Ørum, "The Post-War Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries", in Ørum and Olsson, eds., 2016, pp. 14–16.
69. Piotrowski, 2009, pp. 29–30.
70. Joyeux-Prunel, 2015, p. 61.
71. Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, pp. 218–260.
72. Bourdieu, 1996, p. 186.
73. Joyeux, 2015, p. 51; Castelnovo, Ginzburg and Curie, 2009 (1981), pp. 16–21.

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Summary

The historical study of art in relation to geographical space has for a long time been biased by the "canonical logic" of the centre–periphery narrative. This text takes as its starting point a methodological critique of this binary framework by using an example from Swedish art history, namely the art historical narrative of 1950s Sweden as a slumbering Nordic province slowly being awoken by the heroic and foresighted efforts of the Swedish curator Pontus Hultén. The text analyses two local contexts between 1944 and 1953: a presumed periphery, Stockholm, Sweden, and a presumed centre, Paris, France, and the collaboration between individuals in these two spaces. In focus is a 1953 exhibition in Paris of Swedish abstract art from 1913 to 1953. The text concludes with a methodological discussion arguing that by considering "the material conditions of encounters and exchange", it becomes clear that the transnational contacts in these cases were spurred by local competition and that they were mutually dependent, rather than a product of diffusions of aesthetic innovation from centre to periphery.

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