Remapping *Samizdat*:

Underground Publishing and the Hungarian Avant-Garde, 1966 to 1975

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Abstract

This project examines a series of early *samizdat* publications by Hungary's avant-garde artists and intellectuals in the 1960s and the 1970s. While it is a group better known for its radical artistic endeavors, Hungary's avant-garde circles generated some of the country's first post-1956 underground publications and projects, marking the beginning of what would evolve into a *samizdat* movement in the late 1970s and 1980s. This study coincides with a recent upsurge in interest in subcultural and counter cultural movements in socialist societies: hence, it is the purpose here to examine these underground writing projects as they unfolded within the context of 1960s-era avant-garde and youth subcultural movements in Hungary and abroad. The principle aim is to highlight the role radical artists and intellectuals played in the broader *samizdat* tradition, as well as to examine closer the relationship between dissidents and the state under late socialism.

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Introduction: Mapping the field

In the 1960s, a tangible shift appeared in Budapest's cultural life. Proof the Iron Curtain was at that time rather porous, the radical youth upsurge reverberating through Europe and America had taken root in Hungary and across socialist states. The post-Stalin "thaw" had given way to a burst of cultural creativity and an emerging avant-garde movement across the region.[1] In Hungary, artists began meeting in flats to read poetry, to discuss art and politics, and to circulate forbidden texts and translations of Kandinsky's writings.[2] They organized exhibits and "happenings" in basements and private flats, in university and cultural clubs, in factories and businesses, and even inside the lion cage at the Budapest zoo.[3]

Miklós Haraszti called Hungary's radical artists of the 1960s and 1970s the "first *samizdat* generation."[4] The corpus of materials generated by avant-garde circles—posters, fliers, pamphlets, invitations, photos, artists books, exhibition catalogs, manuscripts, word art, mail art, films, journals—number in the thousands, at least some portion of which were illegally produced and distributed. Quantifying even a rough count of this era's "illicit" materials, an exercise *samizdat* scholars are prone to undertake, is a difficult task: each document comes with its own history, purpose and life-cycle; many are held up in Hungary's ambiguous "gray zone" of "semi-legal" materials.[5] Which items even

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[1] This era is often classified as the "neo-avant-garde" by some art historians to distinguish between this era and the avant-garde movement in the earlier part of the 20th century. It is a somewhat controversial term—especially among artists—and to avoid such complications, I opt to for the term "avant-garde."

[2]   In 1962, a manuscript by Béla Hamvas was reproduced and circulated among avant-garde artists. Hamvas (1897-1968) was was writer, philosopher and social critic whose writings were banned by authorities in the late 1940s. He wrote about art, metaphysics and mysticism, and became a guru of sorts for young artists in the 1960s.

[3] Katalin Néray,"From Neo-Avantgarde to Transavantgarde," in *Catalog Hommage a El Greco* (Budapest: Museum of Fine Art, 1991).

[4] From Chapel Exhibitions at Balatonboglár (1998) documentary prepared by Edit Sasvári.

[5] In 1966, Kádár's cultural minister, György Aczél, introduced a cultural policy which organized artistic expression by the so-called three Ts—*támogatás, tűrés, tiltás* (supported, tolerated, banned). It was a loosely defined system which essentially meant everything not expressly against the system was "tolerated." For a review of the effects of Aczél's on cultural life see: Éva Forgács, "Does Democracy Grow under Pressure? Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde Throughout the late

qualify as *samizdat* is a matter of debate: some argue "classic" *samizdat* is a sphere reserved for political writings and items such as artists books or exhibition catalogs, no matter if self-made and never put passed a state censor, belong to a separate, "tolerated" category of "cultural" *samizdat*. A good number of materials appear not to be *samizdat:* they carry stamps from official printing houses certifying their right to circulate in the public domain—and yet even some of these materials began as legal publications and were later banned by party officials. Others were born illegally and remained there–shuffled from hand to hand, stored away in desk drawers, circulated within small circles, in the classic, clandestine *samizdat* chain of delivery.[6]

This illustrates the complexity of Hungary's cultural system, where censorship under late socialism was often governed more by political climate and aesthetic tastes than hard-fast mandates. After 1966, heavy-handed socialist realist mandates were eased to win concessions with Hungary's cultural elite; consumer communism was introduced in effort to win over the masses. Kádár's liberalization policies had created fissures in the system, cracks in which young artists and intellectuals carved out space for "semi-autonomous" cultural life. Yet despite a more liberal approach to the arts, the state continued to control artists through a myriad of state and local bureaucratic agencies which managed access to exhibition halls, studio space and stipends. Publishing remained strictly patrolled: every typewriter was "sampled" to allow authorities to track rogue materials, access to photocopy machines was prohibited and any printed materials—posters, fliers, exhibition catalogs—required approval of censors and a stamp from official printing houses. While progressive arts were by varying

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1960s and the 1970s," *Centropa* VIII (2008): 36-48; and Gábor Pataki, "The History of Hungarian Art, 1949-1968," In *Aspects/Positions: 50 Years of Art in Central Europe 1949-1999* (Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2000): 251-260.

[6] The term "samizdat" originated in 1952 with Russian poet Nikolai Glazkov, who typed the word "*samsebyaizdat*" on an unpublished manuscript of his poetry in the place where the name of state publisher, *Gosizdat,* would normally appear. The term, which translates roughly to "I self-publish," was later shortened to "*samizdat*," and would eventually come to encompass a huge array of uncensored materials by a number of different sources: *tamizdat* (western and émigré writings published in the west, or "over there"), *radizdat* (broadcast materials usually from foreign news sources copied onto tape and distributed), *magnizdat* (recordings of music, speeches or live recordings). For a review of this, see H. Gordon Skilling, *Samizdat and Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989).

degrees "tolerated," uncensored or self-published materials were a clear breach of Kádár's cultural contract: for authorities, the appearance of illicit materials was always an immediate cause for alarm. Secret police files detail how intensely authorities tracked illegal written or printed materials—from hand-written scraps of paper to type-written or photo-copied underground journals—and reveal how serious was the state's effort to stop the flow of uncensored communication.[7]

The past decade has seen a surge of interest in avant-garde movements within the socialist bloc. Art historians in Hungary and abroad have begun to assess the era's artistic contributions and legacies, examining various artist circles and trends, and situating the movement within both a regional and international perspective.[8] A number of international exhibits on *samizdat* art reflect a growing appreciation for the lesser known dimensions of "cultural" *samizdat* and artistic contributions made by artists during late socialism.[9] But far less attention has been paid to the unofficial publishing efforts forged by Hungary's avant-garde artists, limited as it was, or to incorporating this era into the larger oeuvre of Hungary's *samizdat* and dissident movement. Most assessments of Hungary's *samizdat* movement focus on the 1980s, when a number of underground political journals like *Beszélő* (Talker) became vehicles for dissidents involved in the democratic opposition movement.[10] Scholars often mark the "birth" of Hungarian *samizdat* at the year 1977, when a group of Hungarian intellectuals signed a letter in support of Charter 77.[11] Yet pegging the advent of *samizdat* to a fixed temporal moment, giving it birth date, obscures the path that came before, truncates the broader view.

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[7] See Tamás Szőnyei's extensive work on the secret police files, including: "Kept on File: The Secret Service and the Hungarian Rock Scene 1960-1990," in *Hungarian Quarterly*, 179 (2005): 80-90.

[8] Katalin Néray, "From Neo-Avantgarde to transavantgarde," in *Catalog Hommage a El Greco*, Museum of Fine Art, 1991; Éva Forgács, "Does Democracy Grow under Pressure? Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde Throughout the late 1960s and the 1970s," *Centropa* VIII (2008): 36-48.

[9] "Samizdat: Alternative Culture in Central and Eastern Europe," Research Center for East European Studies at the University of Bremen (2002); "Secession and Magnetism: the Effect of 1968 on Contemporary Hungarian Art," Open Society Institute, Budapest (2008).

[10] *Beszélő* (Talker) was launched in 1981 by democratic opposition leaders János Kis, Miklós Haraszti, Ferenc Kőszeg, Bálint Nagy and György Petri. It carried information on a wide variety of political subjects, including Polish Solidarity movement and political reform efforts in Hungary.

[11] H. Gordon Skilling, *Samizdat and Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989).

This project examines the "first *samizdat* generation," when the ground for unofficial publishing under late socialism was first broken. The purpose, by focusing on this era, is to analyze the broader cultural, political and historical conditions within which Hungary's *samizdat* movement first developed and to highlight the role radical artists played in emerging unofficial publishing tradition. My aim is to examine the various unofficial publishing efforts by progressive artists in the context of the emerging avant-garde subcultural scene, both domestic and abroad.

Critical review of literature

This study diverges from "classic" *samizdat* studies in key ways. It challenges the "twin pillars" of cultural and political *samizdat,* the cleavage between art and politics, which governs the field of analysis on *samizdat* and oppositional movements in socialist societies.[12] This has come along with an attending demarcation between the so-called "artistic underground" and the "political underground" used by *samizdat* scholars and political scientists to organize dissident scenes across the socialist bloc. Splits in the field between art and politics creates a division with little bearing in reality: not only was art a deeply political affair in socialist societies—used to mobilize and *de*mobilize, to radicalize and pacify, to indoctrinate and to subvert—but the cultural elite themselves moved fluidly between the two genres.[13] Dicing up materials by medium, by ideas, separates the end-product from the producers—splits up intellectual and artistic circles in unnatural ways—and obscures how unofficial materials were produced, consumed and distributed within a network of "informal" participants and supporters.

Other questionable binaries dog the *samizdat* field: the most enduring among them is the "dissident vs. the state" motif. This derives mostly from early examinations of *samizdat* by western scholars and journalists, who tended to configure *samizdat* and dissident activities through the "prism

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[12] *Samizdat* scholar Ann Komaromi refers to the "twin pillars" of "cultural" and "political" *samizdat* in a paper, "Samizdat as Material Text – Methodological Implications," University of Toronto, March 2006, 4.

[13] This point explored, in the Soviet context, by Ann Komaromi in "The Unofficial Field of Late Soviet Culture." *Slavic Review* 66/4 (Winter 2007): 605-629.

of the Cold War."[14] Western attention in 1960s and 1970s was devoted almost exclusively to the Soviet sphere, which produced reams of "voices from below" scholarship based on a "one-actor model" of totalitarian regimes. The image of Russian intellectuals toiling behind the Iron Curtain for justice and human rights made for a "dramatic Cold War script,"[15] and many scholars and western journalists in particular were quick to enlist Soviet dissenters as "surrogate soldiers of western liberalism in the ideological battles of the Cold War."[16] In the context of *samizdat,* this produced elite-centered scholarship focused on a number of prominent intellectuals cast as dissident-warriors, martyrs of Soviet repression struggling against an all-powerful totalitarian state.

In the 1980s, a new wave of *samizdat* scholarship appeared, reinvigorated by the swell of dissident movements and unofficial publications in socialist societies across Central Europe. In this realm, *samizdat* was viewed as an "free and independent" communication channel of the democratic opposition, presented by scholars as evidence of an emerging "civil society," of an independent or "parallel polis." The "parallel polis" motif had become a key theme of *samizdat* writings in the 1980s, articulated in various forms by a number of Central European intellectuals.[17] At the same time, the notion of "civil society" had very much come back en vogue in western academic circles, reinvigorated by the emergence of dissident groups in socialist societies.[18] The late 1980s brought rounds of new

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[14]   Benjamin Nathans, "The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Volpin and the Idea of Rights under Developed Socialism" *Slavic Review* 66/4 (Winter 2007): 630-663.

[15]   Ann Komaromi "The Material Existence of Soviet *Samizdat,*" *Slavic Review,* 63/3 (Fall 2004), 597-618.

[16]   Benjamin Nathans, "The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Volpin and the Idea of Rights under Developed Socialism" *Slavic Review* 66/4 (Winter 2007): 633.

[17]   In the late 1970s, Václav Benda developed the idea of a "parallel polis," which became a grounding philosophy and strategy for Chartists and dissident groups across Central Europe in the 1980s, articulated in various forms. Havel, for instance, spoke of an "informal, independent, non-bureaucratic, dynamic, open communities that comprise the parallel polis." Konrád's "anti-politics," in which he urges a retreat from the state, is a version of this idea. Hungarian scholar Elemér Hankiss developed the idea of a "dual society," juxtaposed against the "first society," which made up the "formal, institutional sphere" as opposed to the "second society," the "latent, informal" sphere. For a review of the various ideas above, see H. Gordon Skilling, *Samizdat and Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe,* 158-187.

[18]   Habermas's notion of public sphere grounds ideas of "civil society," a phrase which today floods academic, journalistic and international policy discourses. The concept, considered arcane in political theory in the 1970s, was revived by scholars in the 1980s in response to the Polish opposition movement and the so-called "third wave" of democratization around the world. See: Michael Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). And also: Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*: An Inquiry into a

scholarship devoted to examining the comparative elements of civil society in Central Europe, in which *samizdat* figured prominently in the equation.[19] H. Gordon Skilling's *Samizdat and Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (1989), the first comprehensive treatment of Central European *samizdat*, best articulates this perspective.[20] *Samizdat*, by Skilling's account, is equated with the revolutionary development of "free press" in western bourgeois society, which sets *samizdat* on a linear axis from the rudimentary "pre-Gutenburg" era to the birth of the modern press and democratic society.[21] Scholarship from this perspective is grounded in Habermasian notions of the public sphere, in which *samizdat* is correlated with development of a "second" or "alternative public sphere." Studies from this realm came with an inherent teleological mission that had political theorists and scholars working backwards from a desired end-point—the end of communism—in which *samizdat* was idealized as "free channel for communicating the truth" that would bring down the socialist empire.[22]

Cultural turn

For its overt geopolitical slant, much of the Cold War-era *samizdat* scholarship is now considered outdated.[23] The so-called "cultural turn," has prompted new readings of *samizdat*, with a number of scholars looking at "unofficial" culture it its fuller complexities. Revisiting Soviet *samizdat*, Ann Komaromi offers a "post-structuralist" approach, borrowing concepts from Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard, emphasizing the material and symbolic aspects of *samizdat*

Category of Bourgeois Society (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989).

[19] A sampling of literature on civil society includes: Jacques Rupnik, "Dissent in Poland, 1968–78: The end of Revisionism and the Rebirth of the Civil Society," in Rudolf L. Tőkés ed., *Opposition in Eastern Europe* (London: Basingstoke, 1979): 60–112; Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); John Keane ed. *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives and Civil. Society: Old Images, New Visions* (Oxford and Stanford, 1998); Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubrik, *Rebellious Civil Society: Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989-1993* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

[20] Barbara Falk's, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe***: ***Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings,* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002) is the best, most recent examination of Central European *samizdat* and dissident philosophy.

[21] H. Gordon Skilling, "*Samizdat*: A Return to the Pre-Gutenberg Era?" *Cross Currents*, 1(1982): 64-80.

[22] Komaromi, "The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat," 597.

[23] A number of scholars, including Komaromi, have taken this position.

writing and texts.[24] Komaromi focuses on the medium itself—the subversive essence of messages encoded within the typewritten documents—as a lens into the "historico-cultural" conditions of Soviet dissident culture. Examining its rudimentary typescript, words crammed to the edges of the pages, scribbled with edits and deliberately uncorrected errors, she argues: "the *samizdat* text provides a visual symbol of the material and cultural poverty out of which Soviet dissidents struggled and grew."[25] The "semiotics" approach is a lucrative one, in that it opens the way to examination of samizdat as form of "symbolic communication."[26] Yet the focus, so narrowly configured around fixed set of surface textual/ material signs, is often pursued with some distance from its creators, and fails to offer a "way in" to the groups the signs are said to signify.[27] Likewise, semiotics/structuralist approaches have been justly criticized for being *a*historical, essentialist, for trumping deterministic structural forces over free will and collective action that can produce social change.

Subcultural turn

The past decade, likewise, has seen a resurgence of interest in subcultural and countercultural movements in socialist societies: hippies, rockers, punks, radical artists now crowd the scene enlivening the portrait of "really existing socialism" that had long eluded western gaze.[28] The dominant trend in this realm has been devoted to examining the influences of western rock music on the socialist youth cultures, and local manifestations of rock, punk, new wave that appeared across the region between 1960s and 1980s. Numerous studies track how various groups battled censorship, or

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[24] Komaromi, "The Material Existence of Soviet Samizdat," 598.
[25] Ibid, 618.
[26] This relates to McLuhan's "media is the message" thesis. See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (2d ed.) (New York: New American Library, 1964): 5.
[27] Ken Gelder, *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Gelder (London: Routledge, 2005): 83.
[28] These studies include, but are not limited to: Sabrina Ramet, *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Gábor Klaniczay, *Ellenkultúra a hetvenes-nyolcvanas években.* (Budapest, Noran: 2003); Gregor Tomc, "The Politics of Punk," In *Independent Slovenia*, (ed.) Benderly, J. and Kraft, E. (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1994): 113-134; Gregor Tomc, "We Will Rock You: Popular Music in Second Yugoslavia." In *Impossible Histories*, eds. Djuriÿ D. and Šuvakoviÿ, M. (London: MIT Press, 2003): 442-465; Thomas Cushman, *Notes from Underground: Rock Music Counterculture in Russia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Neil Edmunds, *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin: The Baton and Sickle* (London: Curzon Routledge, 2004).

maneuvered around it by using allegorical lyrics, how groups creatively adapted ways around overt state intrusions. The picture is joyful and energetic—a welcome diversion from the staid image of repressed circles of dissidents posed by western political theorists—and one that exposes the culturally and psychologically liberating aspects of the "underground." Collectively, this wave of scholarship is crucial for its illustration of the multidimensionality of cultural life under late socialism, and for bringing socialist cultures into alignment with broader youth movements around Europe and America.

The generational component adds an important dimension of analysis for Hungary's avant-garde in particular. The group was comprised of a new generation of cultural elites, which emerged in the 1960s with radical, anti-establishment philosophies and missions, part of a wave of youth countercultural movements, both domestic and abroad. Karl Mannheim, examining the rise of German Youth movement in the 1920s, developed the idea of "generational actualities," which, as he defined it, arise in response to a shared common destiny and active participation in the social and intellectual traditions which were shaping the historical situation.[29] From this, Mannheim offered the idea of "generational units," which emerge from a widely shared pattern of responses to a specific historical situation, formulating fresh, sometimes oppositional approaches to older generations.[30] "Generational units," according to Mannheim, emerge during moments of social and political change, when social groups come to believe old values are no longer possible, new patterns of experience are consolidated, and they form a new generational style or entelechy.[31] While that "style" was nourished by the revolutionary spirit and missions of the avant-garde counter-cultural movement of the early 20th century, this new generation would develop its own form of radicalism and modes of resistance in response to the specificities of the politics and culture of the day.

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[29] Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979): 79. Mannheim's original essay "The Problem of Generations" was originally published in German in 1928; the essay was later published in English in Mannheim' *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: RKP, 1952); it is also reviewed in *Essays on the Sociology of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1992). Wohl discusses Mannheim at length in his chapter, "Germany: The Mission of the Young Generation," *The Generation of 1914,* 42-84.

[30] Wohl, *The Generation of 1914,* 78.

[31] Wohl, *The Generation of 1914,* 78.

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Mannheim's idea of "generational units" offers a lucrative frame for analyzing Hungary's avant-garde, as it widens to scope of vision to include the broader generational contexts within which the movement developed. Hungary's avant-garde was comprised of more than isolated bands of radical artist: it included its ranks a wider spectrum of young intellectuals—sociologists, philosophers, architects, doctors, professors—many, who, through their contests with the state, often catalyzed around publishing, would come to form a new generation of dissident intellectuals. Among them were sociologist/poet Miklós Haraszti, writer György Konrád, philosophers Ágnes Heller, György Bence, János Kenedi, and architect László Rajk, all of whom would become iconic participants of the *samizdat* movement, and who—as poets, writers and artists themselves—were very much immersed in the early avant-garde scene. Hence, there was a rebellious synergy between intellectual and artistic circles, which would, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, coalesce into an oppositional "generational unit," bound by shared *Weltanschauung*, or "world view."

Likewise, Hungary's avant-garde was part of an *international* wave of radical art and social movements—Fluxus, Situationist, happenings—charged by *Zeitgeist* of youth rebellion sweeping through Europe, America and the Socialist bloc. That era contained all the same taboo-breaking, discipline collapsing, power-challenging revolutionary missions of the classic avant-garde. *Samizdat,* in this way, has its spiritual roots in the radical literary-art press, to the so-called "little magazines" that became organs of the avant-garde movement in the early 20th century.[32] That avant-garde era was defined by a strong publishing tradition—Lajos Kassák's *A Tett* and *Ma*, Franz Pfemdorf's Berlin publication, *Die Aktion*, and other journals served as platforms for aesthetic and political debates, manifestos, essays and proclamations that helped shape the contours of the avant-garde movement.[33] The "little magazines," according to

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[32] For a review of "little magazines" see Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968): 20-25.

[33] For a review of avant-garde journals see: Pók, Attila. "Modern Sociology and Modern Art in Early Twentieth Century Hungary," *Hungarian Studies* 9/1-2 (1994) 65-71; Oliver A. I. Botar, "From the Avant-Garde to 'Proletarian Art': The Emigré Hungarian Journals *Egység* and *Akasztott Ember*, 1922-23," *Art Journal*, 52/1 (Spring, 1993): 34- 45; S.A. Mansbach, "Confrontation and Accommodation in the Hungarian Avant-Garde," *Art Journal*, 49/1 (Spring 1990): 9-20.

Poggioli, had an organizing effect *within* the avant-garde, merging the radical "political" and "artistic" avant-garde circles into a bona fide cultural "movement." Small in circulation, non-commercial, avant-garde periodicals are the *modus operandi* of avant-garde movements, as indicated by the resurgence of such publications by radical artists in Europe and America beginning the 1960s. While the comparative constraints on "free" publishing between East and West were demonstrable, this at least helps to re-position 1960s-era *samizdat* within an international context, recognizing "underground" publishing as a broader transnational avant-garde phenomenon.

While a *"Zeitgeist"* can explain the overarching rebellious impulses—the "spirit of the times"—the emerging generational rift in Hungary can no more be reduced to a popular expression of anti-establishment behavior any more than the western youth movement can be simplified as a form of "popular" cultural resistance. But rather, as Mannheim argues, a *Zeitgeist* is a reflection of a deeper socio-political rift brought about during times of rapid social change, reflecting tensions between different currents or tendencies that come to express themselves in colliding, oppositional ideologies.[34] DeStalinization and Kádárism, therefore, figures prominently into this equation, as those changes altered the political, social and economic dynamics within Hungary as a new 1960s-era generation was coming of age.

Research aims and scope of study

This project examines how underground publishing evolved within Hungary's "first *samizdat* generation," focusing specifically on how underground publishing developed within the emerging avant-garde movement. While the aim is to position *samizdat* within the emerging progressive artistic and intellectual scene—and to illuminate its uniquely avant-garde features—this study also takes into account the political, social and cultural constellations in which the movement developed. The purpose of this project, then, is to examine the social history of early unofficial publishing efforts by avant-garde

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[34]   Wohl, 79.

circles, looking at how those projects were formulated within the political and social contexts of Kádárism and within emerging 1960s-era radical social movements in Hungary and abroad. I aim to show how s*amizdat,* at this stage, was very much wired into aesthetic experimentalism of the emerging radical art movements in Hungary, and how those efforts were shaped by, and in response to, specific political pressures and cultural climates.

As this study shows, as pressure from the state increased, so too did underground publishing activity. Despite Hungary's image as the "happiest barrack of the communist camp," the opening of the secret police files has revealed how relentlessly the state campaigned to break up, discredit, denounce and otherwise disband alternative artists, musicians and intellectuals throughout late socialism.[35] The post-1956 cultural "thaw" certainly allowed for more creative freedoms—a wide, shifting zone of "tolerated" activities worked to diffuse pressures and demands from Hungary's youth subculture and to bolster Hungary's image in the West as liberal communist regime. But alternative artists and intellectuals were targets of constant denunciations in the press, along with, it is now increasingly known, intense police survellience, intervention and harassment. Hence, this projects tracks how those "external" pressures contributed to shaping, indeed radicalizing, a collective avant-garde community, or what Poggioli called a "community of rebels."[36]

In some ways, this approach plays on the dissident mystique, resting on the "dissent" v. "state" "unofficial" v. "official" demarcations that obscure the multidimensionality of cultural life under late socialism. Ann Komaromi, looking at the distinction between "unofficial" and "official" in late Soviet society, recognizes that such binaries do "little as exclusionary mechanisms" but argues it is useful to "cordon off autonomous space for unofficial culture with fluid boundaries and dynamic distinctions."[37] She focuses on the "border crossings," where spheres interact, which can highlight the "interstices where

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[35] See Hungarian journalist and researcher Tamás Szőnyei's extensive work on the secret police files, including: "Kept on File: The Secret Service and the Hungarian Rock Scene 1960-1990," in *Hungarian Quarterly*, 179 (2005): 80-90.

[36] Poggioli, 30-31.

[37] Ann Komaromi, "The Unofficial Field of Late Soviet Culture." *Slavic Review,* 66/4 (Winter, 2007): 606.

social significance may be created."[38] This project, therefore, provides an opportunity to test and explore the set of binaries—official/unofficial, dissident/state—on which a good deal of scholarship on socialist societies is based. While the inherently oppositional nature of the avant-garde certainly amplifies those distinctions, the purpose will be to illuminate the so-called "border crossings," to explore the points of tension between the avant-garde and officialdom as it gave rise to a number of *samizdat* projects.

It is important to recognize, as Robert Darnton and others have shown, the history of underground publishing—and states' efforts to control the written word—goes back centuries.[39] Hence, an enduring question is whether *samizdat* should be aligned with classic underground publishing movements, viewed as an early manifestation of the "pre-Gutenberg" bourgeois press. I would suggest *samizdat*, at this era under examination, bore little resemblance to nascent independent press or classic media. As Poggioli argues, the literary-art press served a very different function from the romantic 19th century periodical's role as a venue of public opinion: the avant-garde periodical, he claims, operated as an "independent and isolated military unit," and labored closer to the creative process, embodying the discipline-collapsing, taboo-breaking rebelliousness of the avant-garde.[40] By Poggioli's account, the avant-garde journal is more of a "spiritual" endeavor, meant not so much "affirm in *words* the uniqueness of its own theoretical doctrines and practical achievements," but rather it aims to prove itself in "*deeds* the supreme value of the teachings it exercises or represents."[41] Hence, one of the principle aims of this project is to examine *samizdat* as it unfolded within the broader artistic and intellectual dissident movement, as an act, a "deed," highlighting how those projects were tied into the taboo-breaking missions of the avant-garde.

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[38] Ibid, 606.
[39] Works on censorship by Robert Darnton include: *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1982); "Censorship, A Comparative View: France 1789-East Germany, 1989," *Representations* 49, Special Issue: Identifying Histories: Eastern Europe Before and After 1989 (Winter, 1995): 40-60; *Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W. W. & Company, 1996).
[40] Poggioli, 23-25.
[41] Ibid, 24.

Theoretical approaches, methods, organization

As a theoretical framework for this discussion, I will draw on relevant ideas from social and counter-cultural movements, in effort to examine the avant-garde wave as part of a broader social and historical phenomenon. A number of thinkers figure prominently in this analysis: Herbert Marcuse, New Left theorist who became a key articulator of the 1960s-era counter-cultural movements;[42] Theodore Roszak, who examined the theoretical and social groundwork for and implications of counter-cultural movements;[43] and finally Poggioli's theories the avante garde, and particularly, his concept of the "dialectic of movements," which helps frame the evolution of Hungary's avant-garde as it related to underground publishing.

In this project, the phrases "civil society," "second public sphere," "parallel polis"—theories which abound in most discussions of *samizdat*—will not make appearances. This is not so much to refute the notion of *samizdat* as being a form of "independent communication" en route "civil society," but rather to look at the subject with a fresh perspective. So bound are studies of *samizdat* to the idea of civil society, it has become a broad-based test of *samizdat's* success or failure which obscures the specific features and accomplishments achieved by even limited publishing efforts. I argue that *samizdat* cannot be universalized: there is no monolithic formula for the phenomenon—it manifested differently across socialist states, in ferocity, volume, content and social meaning. Hence, this project endeavors to "de-universalize" and "relativize" the dissident experience and *samizdat*, while highlighting the role of Hungary's avant-garde in dissident movements of the 1960s and 1970s.[44] The aim is not only to mend the fence erected between "artistic" and "political" *samizdat,* and to fill in the historical record overlooked by western scholars, but it is to challenge the monolithic assessments of dissident movements in socialist

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[42] Marcuse's work on the 1960s-era countercultural movement and New Left includes: *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Society* (Boston: Beacon, 1964) and *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1969).

[43] Theodore Roszak , *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970).

[44] Nathans, cited earlier, makes a similar call for this in his study of Soviet dissent, see: "The Dictatorship of Reason," *Slavic Review* 66/4 (Winter 2007): 630-663.

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Central Europe. To that end, western Polanists and Sovietologists have dominated the discourses on dissident movements under socialism. The Polish "exceptionalism" argument, however profoundly exceptional the Polish dissident movement was, has skewed the field, created a hierachy of oppositional behavior and *samizdat* within the socialist bloc. Some of this has to do visibility of Solidarity and its spectacular, sustained mass actions which offer quantifiable evidence of collective dissident behavior to political scientists.[45] Some of this, within the realm of Soviet scholarship, is geopolitical: the Cold War produced reams of scholars committed to studying Soviet life, many of whom were former dissidents or exiles who found homes in western universities. Meanwhile, the field of western scholarship on Hungary has been stalled by the lack of scholars able to research in Hungarian, mostly by virtue of its linguistic impenetrability. Although a number of studies on Hungarian avant-garde movement have been published, most are in Hungarian: hence, whatever new is revealed often remains a discussion among Hungarian speakers. This study is an effort to balance the field, to bring groups of actors to the front of the stage, many who are popular, if not iconic figures in Hungary but are virtually unknown in the West. To compensate for my own linguistic limitations, I rely on a number of oral interviews, in effort to reconstruct events.

While much of the art itself falls under the realm of *samizdat*, in that it was self-produced and uncensored by the state, I focus primarily on written materials, on a number of journals and publishing projects, most of which were produced in no more than six issues and never more than a few dozen copies. Few have ever been written about in any detail in English.[46] I rely on a number of primary sources: an array materials from Artpool and and private archives, a set of translated secret police files, various articles

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[45] For example, Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubrik, analyzed the strength of Polish civil society by quantifying the number of strikes and demonstrations in Poland during late socialism. See: Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubrik, *Rebellious Civil Society: Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989-1993* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

[46] An exhibit on *samizdat* by Hungary's avant-garde was held in New York City in 1990, organized by local artists and gallery owner Tibor Várnagy. The exhibition catalog contains an article covering some of the journals under consideration, see: Tibor Várnagy, "Hidden Story: Samizdat from Hungary and Elsewhere," exhibition curated by Tibor Várnagy and John P. Jacob, Franklin Furnace, September 27 - November 10, 1990.

from the state and foreign press, and interviews with artists and others involved in the field. Where

applicable and possible, I will analyze content and texts, but my primary focus is to examine the political

and social climates around which these projects developed. Secret police reports provide remarkable detail

and background on artists and the avant-garde movement, and reveal the state's incessant efforts to track

unofficial publications and certain artists. Articles in the state and international press add a third

dimension, as it illuminates how radical artists were being discussed in the public domain. Finally, a

number of oral accounts by artists provide details of personal experiences and perceptions of the era.

Some of the journals under consideration exist only in fragments, or not at all—and for this, I rely entirely

on oral interviews to reconstruct the events.

In order to illuminate the evolution of the avant-garde scene, the chapters are arranged

chronologically. The first chapter lays out broader history and relevant trends of avant-garde movements,

focusing on the fusion of art and politics, as well as the generational aspects of both avant-garde waves.

The purpose to outline the key characteristics and motifs of avant-gardism as it evolved as a counter-

cultural movement. The first section of this chapter is dedicated the first avant-garde wave in early 20th

century, looking at the idea of *Weltanschauung*, and examining Hungary's participation in this movement

and in particular, the role of Lajos Kassák; the second section examines the post-war avant-garde within

the context of the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s, bringing in ideas from Marcuse and Roszak,

and then outlines the relevant features of and figures within Hungary's avant-garde.

The second chapter focuses on the shifting cultural and political climate in the early to mid-1960s,

and how authorities and the mass media to help popularize the image of the "deviant youth" which would

both give shape to and energize the avant-garde. This section examines the early circulation of a series of

manuscripts, the formation of a number of artist circles, and the first "happening," which which gave way

to two *samizdat* projects including Gábor Altorjay's journal *Laura?*

Chapter 3 explores the series of *samizdat* projects that appeared between in 1971 and 1973, as

pressure from authorities and the media intensified. It will explore two projects in detail: Imagination/Idea, a project launched in 1972 by László Beke, and the first attempt at publishing a collective *samizdat* journal *Szétfolyóirat,* which was a collaborative that involved members of various avant-garde circles. This journal became the focal point of a secret police investigation, coinciding with a crackdown on *samizdat* and young artists and intellectuals.

The final chapter reviews the 1960s and 1970s-era *samizdat* movement, the specific contributions of the "first *samizdat* generation," and how the era relates to broader *samizdat* movement. In this section, I will discuss briefly the demarcation between "artistic" and "political" *samizdat,* drawing back on "twin pillars" that splits field of *samizdat*. This chapter concludes with a review of the reception and canonization of a number of avant-garde artists since 1990.

Chapter 1: Life, art, avant-gardes

> "Art is a *Weltanschauung*. Art transforms us and we become capable of transforming the world. In the present day world-catalysm...art has become nearest to the point for which a new world will be formed." — Lajos Kassák (1919).[47]

Art and politics merged in spectacular fashion around two waves of avant-garde movements in the 20th century—around the turn of the century and, again, following the second world war. While exhaustive hermeneutic debates over periodization and aesthetics persist, the both "avant-gardes," here, are explored as socio-cultural movements, which crystallized around progressive artistic and intellectual "communities" that collectively mounted radical challenges to standing formal traditions—cultural, social, political.[48]

The term itself, lifted from the France's battlefields, is imbibed with militancy, which only adds to its revolutionary, battlesome mystique. Poggioli tracks the historical roots of the word, outside the battlefield, to radical left political movements in France in the 1840s. Its political usage continued until the 1870s when it was used to describe progressive, anarchist bohemian artists during the Paris Commune. Baudelaire first used it to describe "*les litterateurs d' avant-garde*," referring to the militant bands of writers coalescing in Paris's coffeehouses.[49] The two parallel avant-gardes, literary and political, were merged into a "movement" with the birth of the first "little magazine," *La Revue indépendente* (1880), which brought together the "rebels of politics and the rebels of art" who advanced a unified program of social and artistic revolution.[50]

The first avant-garde movement orbited around the tumult of the *fin-de-siecle*, which had ushered a dramatic shift in intellectual, cultural, economic, political and social arenas in Europe's urban

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[47] Kassák, "Picture-Architecture," *MA*, Vol. 7, No. 3, March 25, 1922. In *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes (1910-1930)*. Eds Timothy O. Benson and Eva Forgács (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002): 427-432.

[48] Poggioli, see chapter on "The Concept of a Movement," in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 17-40.

[49] Poggioli, 10. A review of Poggioli also appears in Mary Gluck, "Toward a Historical Definition of Modernism: Georg Lukacs and the Avant-Garde," *The Journal of Modern History*, 58/4 (Dec., 1986): 845-882.

[50] Ibid, 11.

centers. The terms "modernism" and "avant-garde" are intricately bound concepts, used interchangeably and, more often, set in opposition to one another.[51] Modernism, as Schorske defined it, marked a break with Enlightenment thought, it was the "anti-thesis of the ancient," that brought cascading implications in philosophy, music, art, literature and politics.[52] Schorske draws a line in the mid-19th century, when European high culture became a "whirlwind of infinite innovation," when a "ruthless subterfuge of change" gave way to fragmentation of intellectual and cultural categories.[53] Post-Nietzschean thought had given way to "irrationalism, subjectivism, abstractionism," or what Shoenberg called a "death-dance of principles."[54] For both Nietzsche and Marx, modernism was a pejorative term, synonymous with bourgeois decadence, a thesis future generations came to actively embrace. Modernism, by this view, was as a perilous condition brought about by the chaotic confluence of rapid urbanization and industrialization and the social and political inequities it produced. This "crisis of modernity" inspired a wave of critical or subversive reformulations of social, intellectual and cultural traditions.[55]

Avant-garde art was one such reformulation: it was a reaction to, and rejection of, the chaos of modern life, which simultaneously rejected the classic artistic traditions and theory—*l'art pour l'art,* "art for art's sake"—while charging art, and artists, with potent social and political mission. The leading role of artists as forerunners to social revolution was articulated by composer Richard Wagner in his 1849 essay *Art and Revolution,* written in exile after the fervor of social revolutions which shook urban centers from Paris to Vienna, Berlin to Budapest.[56] Wagner called for "the mightiest force" of artistic revolution, promoting the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk,* or a *"*total art work," which would deliver a social

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[51] For a discussion of "modernism" and "avant-garde" see Mary Gluck, "Toward a Historical Definition of Modernism: Georg Lukacs and the Avant-Garde," *The Journal of Modern History,* 58/4 (Dec., 1986): 845-882.
[52] Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1979): xviii.
[53] Ibid. xix.
[54] Ibid, xix.
[55] Ibid, xix.
[56] Wagner participated in the May uprisings in Dresden was considered a politically dangerous character by German authorities, who issued a warrant for his arrest.

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utopia.[57] His self-professed aim was to commit "artistic terrorism," to destroy the institutions that bound up artists as "slaves" and as "day-laborers of commerce."[58] Wagner's idea of *Weltanschauung,* or "world view" would likewise have a profound effect on contemporary intellectuals and artists, as it became the grounding philosophy of avant-gardists throughout the 20th century.[59]

By the turn of the century, progressive artists became intimately aligned with, if not indistinguishable from, radical left political circles congregating in urban centers across Europe. Avant-garde artists were as much engaged in radical aesthetics as they were radical politics, immersed in what Bauman describes as the "socialist counter-culture."[60] The socialist counter-cultural movement was, according to Bauman, a rejection of the ideal form of "political equality" of bourgeois liberalism, a refusal of the notion that without equality in other spheres—economic, cultural—no true social equality could exist.[61] This came along with the notion of a "socialist utopia," an idea derived from by Marx's idea of "scientific socialism," but reconfigured into a kind of "romantic socialism" by avant-gardists from the German Romantic tradition.[62] A "socialist utopia" was envisioned as a futuristic world devoid of war, inequity and human suffering, inspiring waves of prophetic writings by the era's young, left-leaning literati. This is best characterized by Edward Bellamy's 1888 novel, *Looking Backward 2000-1887,* written in reaction to socialist movements in Europe, in which his central character, a time-traveling Bostonian, wakes up in the year 2000 to find himself in a socialist utopia:

> With a tear for the dark past, turn we then to the dazzling future, and, veiling our eyes, press
> forward. The long and weary winter of the race is ended. Its summer has begun. Humanity has
> burst the chrysalis. The heavens are before it.[63]

According to Robert Wohl, the avant-garde circles that arose between 1910-1933 constituted

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57 Wagner, *Art and Revolution*, 1849.
58 See Wagner's letters to Franz Liszt, in which he writes: "[M]oney I have none...but an immense desire to create an artistic terrorismus...Come hither and lead the great hunt; let us shoot till the rabbits lie right and left."
59 It is well known that Wagner's *Weltanschauung* would later be adapted by Hitler.
60 Zygmunt Bauman, *Socialism: The Active Utopia.* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1976): 140
61 Bauman, 142
62 For a discussion of this, see Theodore Roszak , *The Making of a Counter-Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970): 85-123, but especially p. 91.
63 Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (Courier Dover Publications, 1996): 142

what he called the "generation of 1914," collectively bound by a common unity of experience that transcended national boundaries, but themselves differently according to specific national foundations, traditions and political cultures.[64] Where in Western Europe, avant-garde would develop as a kind of aesthetic radicalism which had deeply political connotations, those movements in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia and later the Soviet Union would take on intensified political dimensions, developing into a kind of "political messianism," as artists sought political redemption in the cultural sphere.[65] Culture and art became the sole avenue to national regeneration, as kind of "cultural nationalism" swept over Central Europe at the turn of the century.[66] The pressing issues of national sovereignty and tangled national identities, unsolved in the political sphere, traversed into the realm of culture, which became the chosen path to a culturally grounded nationhood.

Hungarian avant-garde

The appearance of Hungarian avant-garde movement in the second decade of the 20th century was prefaced by considerable groundwork carved out by a network of left-leaning intellectuals who had begun to explore the collaborative role of arts and social sciences in driving social change.[67] Key among them was a group of sociologists, led by Oszkár Jászi and Ervin Szabó, who established the journal *Huszadik Század (Twentieth Century)* in 1900. The journal codified the official "birth" of sociology in Budapest, and its early followers believed that modern sociology could overcome national, social, political bias and prejudices, in hopes of resolving the illness "gnawing at the body of Hungarian society."[68] Likewise, the monthly *Nyugat (West)* became a forum for the fused interests of radical sociologists, intellectuals and new generation of art critics and artists—its reviewers included

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64 Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 2-3.
65 Eva Forgács, "Between Cultures, Concepts of Hungarian Constructivism," *Between Worlds: Central European Avant-Gardes,* 147.
66 Eva Forgács, "National Traditions: Hungary," in *Between Worlds,* 47.
67 Forgács, "Between Cultures," 147.
68 Attila Pók, "Modern Sociology and Modern Art in Early Twentieth Century Hungary," *Hungarian Studies* 9/1-2 (1994): 66.

art critic Lajos Fülep, and artists Károly Kernstok and Géza Lengyel, who would form the avant-garde circle of artists, The Eight.

Between 1910 and 1914, aesthetic debates dominated discussions among Hungarian intellectuals, many who were heavily influenced by German thinkers Kant and Hegel, but were drawn especially to Nietzsche's ideas on the connection between art and life.[69] Lajos Fülep, who had translated Nietzsche's *Die Gerburt der Tragödie,* transformed Nietzsche's aesthetic concept into an ethical category: art, by his vision, was a result, an end product, a human creation of ethical inspiration.[70] Meanwhile, at coffee houses and in meetings among the Galilei circle, composer Zoltán Kodály, Béla Balázs and György Lukács debated ideas around creating national art that reflected universal values. Later, Balázs would reveal in his journal a conversation he had with Kodály: "I have a dream about a great new Hungarian culture we have to create. . . a spiritual rebirth. . . a rehabilitation of art, a religion of art, which would for the basis of the future culture. Its temple would be the concert hall, the art gallery, the theater. I spoke to [Kodály] of the redeeming power of art, that people will improve and society will once again become healthy."[71]

Kassák: The Activists

The transformational capacity of art and the central role of the artist as "prophet-warrior" would reach a crescendo under Lajos Kassák, poet, writer and artist who stewarded the most radical branch of Hungary's avant-garde, the Activists. A locksmith's apprentice with genuine proletarian roots, Kassák would become a revolutionary figure in Budapest progressive cultural scene at the start of the war, parting company with Lukács and those established "bourgeois" radicals that had congregated around *Nyugat.* Kassák was a self-trained poet and ardent socialist, who had wandered Europe's

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[69] Julia Szabó, "Ideas and Programs: The Philosophical Background of the Hungarian Avant-Garde." *The Hungarian Avant-Garde: The Eight and The Activists* (Hayward Gallery: London, 1980): 13-14.
[70] Ibid, 9
[71] Forgács, "Between Cultures: Concepts of Hungarian Constructivism," in *Central European Avant-Gardes*, 149. Quoting Mary Gluck, from Balazs's diary, in *Georg Lukács and His Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985): 138.

capitals on foot, and those he indoctrinated into the Activists were of similar working-class pedigree.

Kassák's journal, *A Tett*, and later, *MA,* modeled after Franz Pfemdorf's Berlin publication, *Die Aktion*,

seethed with antiwar and anti-nationalist declarations and prophetic pronouncements about

revolutionary artists in ushering the new socialist utopia.

The first world war had radicalized avant-garde groups across Europe and had made an

especially deep imprint on the young Activists, who were tormented by the violence and brutality that

had "inflicted deep, throbbing wounds in the decrepit body of old Europe."[72] In a world tossed by

chaos, death and war, for Kassák, art was the only road to salvation: "art, especially literature, because

it possesses the most direct, active means of expression, faces the greatest task in molding the coming

generation into human form."[73] Kassák's youthful, fiery polemics often put him at odds with more

established intellectuals ("Our will is as red as our blood and fresh as our youth," he proclaimed).[74] The

Activists were not scholars, they were energetic artist-warriors, anarcho-syndicalists and engaged

directly in revolutionary politics in hopes of creating new human society, a "new morality."[75] According

to Kassák, "poets and artists should stand in the tempest," of the social battlefield,[76] and it was his

group which were thus the true vanguards of both Hungarian art and the coming socialist revolution:

"The killing fields of war are fertilizing new, more willful energies—preparations for some great

communion in socialism."[77] By the time of his exile in Vienna in the early 1920s, Kassák and *MA* had

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[72] Forgács, "Between Cultures," 160. Kassák, especially during the war years, was transfixed by apocalyptic visions, his writings reflecting a mix of anarchism, surrealism, Dadism and Futurism. In his essay, "To Accompany Carlo Carra's Painting *Anarchist Funeral*," he wrote: "The whole city was in the throes of an awesome, hellish dance...Over their heads the coffin was placed hand to hand, still speaking to them of the promised land, and it seemed as if its red streaming ribbons shone like live, flaming torches illuminating the longed-for-world." See "To Accompany Carlo D. Carra's Painting Anarchist Funeral," *A Tett* (1916), in *Between Worlds*, 158-159.

[73] Kassák, "Program," In *Between Worlds*, 160.

[74] Kassák's growing radicalism prompted a response from Mihály Babits, poet, art critic and central figure in the *Nyugat* circle, who wrote: "They refuse to create according to existing forms, but they also refuse to create new ones: what they want is to break asunder all laws, to shake off and deny anything that is formal and prescribed. This is what the program of *A Tett* means: virtual anarchy." Mihály Babits, "Today, tomorrow, and literature," *Nyugat* 9, No. 17, September 1916, 330-331, citied in Mary Gluck, "Toward a Historical Definition of Modernism: Georg Lukács and the Avant-Garde," *The Journal of Modern History*, 58/4 (Dec, 1986): 861.

[75] Kassák, "Onward On Our Way," *MA*, Vol. 3, No. 12 (Dec. 20, 1918). In *Between Worlds*, 171.

[76] S.A Mansbach, "Confrontation and Accommodation in the Hungarian Avant-Garde," *Art Journal*, 49/1 (Spring 1990): 9.

[77] Kassák, "Program," In *Between Worlds*, 160.

emerged on the forefront of the international avant-garde scene, as a prophetic spokesperson of International Constructivism and the international utopian society he adamantly believed it would deliver.

The "second" avant-garde

The onset of World War II brought an end to the first avant-garde countercultural movement. If the first avant-garde was fused around the radical political and social changes brought about by war and modernism, the second generation is often pegged to changes of post-war, "post-modern" consumer society. Aesthetic analyses of the latter-day movement often rotates around a modern/avant-garde v. post-modern/neo-avant-garde praxis, where "post-modern" (or "neo-avant-garde) art is seen as a rejection of modern art and mass commercialism that manifested as a "cynical surrender to the bourgeois market place."[78] The "neo-avant-garde" had, by some estimates, lost its revolutionary fire, its artists embracing the fragmented, media-driven superficiality of the new post-war economic boom. No where is this perspective more dominant than with Warhol's "pop art" and "op art"—which Warhol himself often insisted had no social meaning.[79] Through pop art, op-art, minimalist art, a new generation of artist sought to merge high culture with mass culture—recycling motifs and materials from advertisements, billboards, magazines, newspapers, comics, photographs, television and popular cinema.[80]

The youth 1960s countercultural movements in America have, likewise, seen as an outgrowth of post-war society, a crisis of the homogenizing forces of post-modern life and the 1950s McCarthyesque, *Leave it Beaver,* conservative culture. Theodore Roszak, in his *Making of a Counter-Culture* (1970) framed the rise of the youth counterculture as a reaction to "technocratic

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[78] Jay Marin, "Forward" in *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicized Art Under Late Socialism,* ed. *Aleš Erjavec.* (London: University of California Press, 2003): vxi.
[79] Berghaus, Günter. "Happenings in Europe in the '60s: Trends, Events, and Leading Figures." *TDR*. 37/4 (Winter, 1993): 158.
[80] Ibid*,* 158.

totalitarianism" of post-war America.[81] Within "Western" countercultural movements, distinctions are made between American youth movements and their European counterparts, which were entrenched in the neo-Marxist New Left movements that coalesced in reaction to the inequities of late capitalism. While both in America and in Europe, the mass student actions would be catalyzed around the Vietnam War, in Europe the movement was deeply aligned with far-left socialist philosophies, flowing as much from the streets as it was from academic departments. The revolutionary utopianism of the earlier avant-garde movement with renewed vigor. Philosophy professor and New Left guru Herbert Marcuse's *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) envisioned total social revolution: "the threatening homogeneity has been loosening up and an alternative is beginning to break into the repressive continuum."[82] Marcuse called for total "psychic revolution," emphasizing the role of the liberating the conscience in social change, calling for "the radical transformation of values...[which] must guide the direction of such a change.[83] It was he called the "dialectic of liberation," which begins with recreating a "psychic reality" that in turn creates a new "social reality."[84]

Happenings

The 1960s-era social movements generated a new political youth identity: hippies, flower power, mystics, wizards, Zen tricksters, Dharma bums, beatniks—it was a carnival of new anti-establishment cultural figures that shocked and upturned social convention. This morphed into a collective display of artistic and cultural anti-establishment behavior around the advent of the "happening." The "happening" had its roots in Dadaism, its traces can be found in the 1920s performances by German artist Kurt Schwitters and the Bauhaus theater of Moholy-Nagy. Throughout the 1950s it had developed into a kind of experimental live art that merged artistic genres—often

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[81] Roszak, see chapter on "Technocracy's Children," in *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 1-41.
[82] Douglas Kellner, "Radical Politics, Marcuse and the New Left," in *The New Left and the 1960s (*London: Routledge, 2005): 21. Herbert Marcuse*, An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press*,*1969)*.
[83] Ibid, 21.
[84] For an examination of Marcuse's idea of the "dialectics of liberation," see Roszak, "The Dialectics of Liberation: Herbert Marcuse and Norman Brown," In Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 84-123.

associated, in America, with groundbreaking musical experimentalism of John Cage. The term was coined by American artist Allan Kaprow in the late 1950s, and later, would become the hallmark of the international Fluxus movement, spearheaded by Lithuanian born avant-garde artist George Maciunas and Dick Higgins, both students of John Cage. The "happening" mantra, "Art = Life," came with revolutionary mission: "to fuse the cadres of cultural, social and political revolutionaries into united front in action."[85] The "happening" became a potent anti-establishment symbol—as much an artistic endeavor as it was cultural, social, political. In western settings, the "happening" eventually became associated with hippie counter-cultural scene—following Timothy Leary's motto: "Turn on, tune in, drop out." In socialist Europe, "happenings" came wrapped with added level of anti-establishment radicalism—and political danger—as authorities associated the activities with western bourgois enemy. Polish artists, theater director and painter Tadeusz Kantor held the first happening in 1965; a year later, Hungary held its first "happening," which enlivened the avant-garde scene and came to serve as a critical point of irritation and contention between authorities and artists. In 1968, the "happening" became fused with New Left movement in Paris, and radical avant-garde group, the Situationists, which exploded with revolutionary force during the May revolutions.[86] According French happening artist Jean Jacques Lebel, who considered his participation in burning down the Paris stock exchange his finest happening performance: "the May Revolution dynamited the limits of 'art' and 'culture' as it did all other social or political limits. The old avant-gardist dream of turning 'life' into 'art,' into a collective creative experience, finally came true. The May uprising was theatrical in that it was a gigantic fiesta, a revelatory and sensuous explosion outside the 'normal' pattern of politics.[87]

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[85] George Maciunas, *Fluxus Manifesto* (1963).
[86] For a description of the Situationists and the May Revolutions, see Berghaus, 163-165.
[87] Berghaus, 165, quoting Lebel, Jean-Jacques, "Notes on Political Street Theatre, Paris; 1968, 1969." *TDR*, 13/4 (1969): 1-18.

Hungarian avant-garde (1966-1975)

In socialist Europe, the avant-garde movements that arose in the 1960s came loaded with additional layers of political complexities and barricades. The initial stirrings appeared as a reaction against the cultural confines of "socialist realism," the rigid ideological model mandated by socialist countries under Stalinism that had re-aligned cultural and intellectual expression—art, literature, music and all academic disciplines—with heavy-handed, bland Party dogma.

In the 1960s, young artists and intellectuals emerged from the universities, many who earnestly believed they would become legitimate vanguards of a new, progressive cultural and intellectual scene.[88] Many endeavored to resurrect the utopian spirit of the old avant-garde—following Kassák, who was still alive and remained an iconic figure among progressive artists. Young artists initially sought to resurrect past movements—to repair the incessant ruptures of Hungary's artistic life, broken by political upturns throughout the 20th century—while simultaneously attempting to re-connect with international modern art trends.[89] Their difficulties were accentuated by the fact that "modern Hungarian art" was characterized by series of "breaks," in what was a long line of "catastrophes and failures."[90] During the interwar period, there had been an effort to reconstitute progressive artistic circles—the European School of abstract artists, for instance, operated from 1945 to 1948 and made efforts to reconnect with French surrealists and Hungarian émigrés in Paris. While the older generation would offer an ideological platform and aesthetic inspiration for young artists and intellectuals, the new avant-garde would eventually pioneer its own path, anchored to both national traditions and contemporary countercultural and radical artistic trends.

Most art historians mark off the years between 1966 and 1975 as the true avant-garde era—a stretch of time between which the avant-garde flourished into a *de facto* artistic and subcultural

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88 Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 36.
89 Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 40.
90 Eva Körner, "No 'ism's' in Hungary," 25.

movement within Hungary. The movement itself was configured around the specifics of cultural

minister György Aczél's policy, which organized artistic expression by the notorious three Ts—*tűrés,*

támogatás, tiltás (supported, tolerated, banned). The policy was loosely defined, often regulated by

personal aesthetic tastes of party officials and political climate, but essentially, it meant anything not

expressly against the system was "tolerated." However, in the realm of painting for instance,

abstraction of any sort remained taboo, deemed "formalist" and bourgeois by party elites and censors.

In 1960s, a network of new social spaces, cultural clubs and exhibition halls had emerged which

became "tolerated" sites of alternative cultural activities and behavior. This produced a kind of

subcultural geography, with state-supported events or productions by more conventional "state artists"

appearing at official venues—it was rare in the 1960s especially that anything deemed progressive ever

made it passed the juries that controlled access to official exhibition halls or stages—and alternative

artists and activities held at various "semi-official" spots around the city. Many progressive artists

abandoned seeking legitimacy in the "official" realm and began to explore alternative spaces—cultural

clubs, businesses, offices, churches, factories—where activities were tolerated so long as they were not

too overtly political.

Despite constraints on cultural expression, the era was marked by significant innovations in

film, theater and the visual arts. A new generation of ambitious documentary and experimental

filmmakers with the Béla Balázs Studio (*BBS*) spearheaded trends in Hungarian "new cinema." Miklós

Jancsó's films tackled a host of controversial issues, including Hungarian independence and

revisionism in his *Szegénylegények* (*Round-Up*, 1966), the brutality of war in *Csillagosok, katonák,* (or

The Red and the White, 1967), skepticism toward communism (*Fényes szellők,* or *The Confrontation*,

1968), the cult of the personality *Égi Bárány* (1970), and the allegorical film of a failed uprising (*Még

kér a nép*, or *Red Psalm*, 1971).[91]

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[91]   Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 37. See also: Lóránt Czigány, "Jancsó Country: Miklós Jancsó

Within the matrix of tolerated, "semi-official" club spaces and exhibition halls, there emerged a new space for cultural affairs: the private domain. All across the socialist bloc, young artists and intellectuals exploited the state's retraction from the "private" domain since Stalinism: new literary and artist circles emerged in Moscow and Leningrad, where students and intellectuals spent evenings at *kompanii,* gathered in private flats listening to jazz, drinking vodka, reciting poetry, debating politics, discussing foreign literature and films.[92] In Budapest, progressive young artists formed the Zugló Circle, meeting at a private flat in Budapest's Zugló District. Likewise, the "No.1 group," operated from the flat of Petri Galla Pál, as kind of alternative cultural center, where those present could discuss and circulate literature and music. Private gatherings became sanctuaries for young dissident intellectuals and alternative artists, functioning in the same manner as the cafe and salon in the early 20th century. Part exhibition hall, lounge, private "flying" university, private gatherings became laboratories of creative thought and non-traditional behavior.[93]

In the 1960s, new artistic leaders emerged: the most notable among them was Miklós Erdély, a key figure among the older generation who "jumped" to the new generation to become a spiritual and aesthetic leader for young artists.[94] A Kassák-like figure who stepped into this role following Kassák death in 1967, Erdély had a profound impact on young artists, especially on Tamás Szentjóby and Gábor Altorjay, who emerged early on as radical figures within the avant-garde scene.[95] Tamás Szentjóby and Gábor Altorjay were among those young Hungarian artists drawn to contemporary western art trends, especially Fluxus, "happenings," and the discipline-collapsing aesthetics that ultimately blurred the lines between artistic mediums. This played out on a practical level: painters became poets, poets became filmmakers, filmmakers were actors, actors were painters and writers and

and the Hungarian New Cinema," *Film Quarterly*, 26/1 (Autumn, 1972): 44-50.

[92] Ludmilla Alexeyeva, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Climate.* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990) 82-84.

[93] Lóránd Hegyi, "Central Europe as a Hypothesis and a Way of Life," in *Aspects/Positions: 50 Years of Art in Central Europe (1949-1999),* (Wein: Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2000) 32.

[94] Eva Körner, "No 'ism's' in Hungary," 25; and Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 47-48.

[95] Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 47.

poets. The incoherence of mediums was what gathered individual avant-garde members under the broader banner of "artist," making it nearly impossible to organize membership by discipline: the incoherence of mediums was what gave unity and coherence to the movement itself. The collision of artistic disciplines was reflected most forcefully in the avant-garde's turn toward conceptualism, which became especially pronounced in the early 1970s in Hungary as it would among artists abroad. While on an aesthetic level, conceptualism freed artists from the confines of artistic forms and categories, in Hungary and across the socialist bloc, this enabled artists to circumvent censorship since concepts and ideas were temporal, spontaneous and could not be subjected to juries that pre-approved events.[96]

In the 1970s, among the most progressive and politically provocative hub of the avant-garde scene was the apartment theater of Péter Halász and István Bálint—the Kassák Stúdió. Both Halász and Bálint had been members of the University Theater in the late 1960s, and later quit to form Kassák Stúdió. Prior to being banned in 1972, the group had performed at Lajos Kassák Culture House in Budapest, where they staged a number of controversial performances, until officials finally pulled the group's license to perform in public in 1972.[97] After this, the group began holding performances at Péter Halász's flat in District VII, performances which included experimental plays, from an avant-garde version of *King Kong* to puppet theater. Meanwhile, other experimental theater groups, like Tamás Fodor's *Orfeo* (later Studio 'K') and László Najmányi's István Kovács Stúdió,[98] managed, with varying degrees of success, to find public venues for their performances.[99]

The avant-garde scene in Hungary reached an apex in 1970 to 1973, catalyzed around the summertime Chapel Exhibitions in Balatonboglár. Over the three season span, more than 35 events would be held at the lakeside compound, in a run-down chapel leased from the local district by

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[96] Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 40.
[97] Before being banned, the group had continued to perform shows that had been been banned by censors as "rehearsals," and not as official performances. Interview, Tibor Várnagy, April 2009.
[98] This group was named in honor of László Rajk Jr., the son of the showtrial victim László Rajk, who was given the name István Kovács when he was put into an orphanage following his father's execution.
[99] Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 42.

Budapest artist György Galántai. Initially the Chapel operated legally and would serve as an alternative artist colony of sorts, hosting theater, concerts, documentary film, poetry readings, exhibitions, happenings, and other alternative activities increasingly unwelcome by officialdom in Budapest. The Chapel exhibitions often drew together a wide circle of the avant-garde, which had coalesced at this point into a broader dissident subculture. In 1972, the Chapel Exhibitions included a number of exhibits and performances by controversial artists, many who had been banned by authorities in Budapest. These included a kinetic sculpture, *Like a Bird* (1971) by István Haraszty—a politically provocative allegory on the state's control over artistic life, in which a live bird was offered a choice between conformity and rebellion—performances by banned Kassák Stúdió, and Szentjóby's now famous "*Be Forbidden,*" action, where observers were made to cross a rope in order to read the text of his exhibit: "*Art is everything that is forbidden. Be Forbidden.*"[100]

That summer art historian László Beke organized an avant-garde festival at the Chapel that included a group of Czech and Slovak artists, which was deemed by authorities as a worrisome sign of solidarity with neighboring Central European artists.[101] The activities at the Chapel soon became the focal point of intense media and police attention and the Chapel was banned in 1973, after which it operated one final season illegally.[102] While Balatonboglár would become a hub of "anti-establishment" artists and intellectuals—a mini-Woodstock-like gathering of sometimes several-hundred-at-a-time long-haired hippies—the Chapel exhibitions produced some landmark artistic endeavors: poetry art, action art, word art, "anti-art," that would give shape to what became a uniquely Hungarian avant-garde oeuvre.

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[100] For a review of this, see Eva Körner, "No 'ism's' in Hungary," 25.
[101] Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 43-44.
[102] For a review of Chapel Exhibitions, see István Hajdu, "The Illegal Avant-garde," *The Balatonboglár Chapel Studio of György Galántai 1970-1973*, eds. Júlia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári (Budapest: Artpool-Balassi, 2003): 114-118.

Chapter 2: Hippies, Hooligans, Happenings

In 1963, sections of unpublished manuscripts and writings by Béla Hamvas had begun circulating around Budapest. A prolific writer on metaphysics, surrealist art and eastern traditionalist philosophy, Hamvas was widely influential on the younger generation of artists and intellectuals in the early 1960s.[103] In the 1930s, Hamvas and classical philologist Károly Kerényi formed the intellectual circle and journal *Sziget* (Island), a short-lived publication on philosophy and cultural affairs. Between the wars, Hamvas was active in the European School and joined a group of philosophers of the so-called "other Budapest School," who met for "Thursday conversations."[104] Together with his wife, writer Katalin Kemény, Hamvas published *Revolution in Art: Abstraction and Surrealism in Hungary (1947),* and for it, Hamvas would become an icon of sorts among Hungary's surrealist artists throughout the SocReal era and beyond. Although socialist realism had not yet been mandated, surrealist and abstract art was increasingly viewed as "formalist" by Lukács, who had shown an growing hostility toward abstraction, despite his earlier defense of the style.[105] (By the late 1940s, for example, the only Cezanne album in the Academy of Fine Arts library would be locked away.)[106] In 1948, Lukács dismissed Hamvas from his post as librarian in the Central Library of Budapest, and after which, Hamvas was effectively blacklisted. He took factory jobs and worked construction until his death in 1968.

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[103] Writings in English on Hamvas are scarce. Hamvas and Kerényi, and the journal *Sziget* (Island), are mentioned in the *Handbook of Contemporary European Social Theory,* ed. Gerard Delanty (London: Routledge, 2006): 147.

[104] Thursday night sessions typically included, Lajos Szabó, Béla Tábor and Béla Hamvas, and his wife, Katalin Kemény, and Stefánia Mándy, the future Situationist Attila Kotányi, as well as Endre Bíró and György Kunszt. A review of Thursday night sessions can be accessed online at: Ádám Tábor, "Concourse at the centre," *Exindex.hu* (November 2007).

[105] For a look at Lukác's role in 1940s-era cultural policy, see Mihály Szegedy-Maszák,"The Rise and Fall of Bourgeois Literature in Hungary (1945-1949)" *Hungarian Studies* 13/2 (1998/99): 199-214.

[106] Gábor Pataki, "Two chapters in Franco-Hungarian art connections: the European School, (1945-1948) and the Zugló circle (1958-1968)," *French Cultural Studies* 11 (2000): 406.

Around 1963, painter Sándor Molnár, who had befriended Hamvas and his wife, had begun to re-type and circulate Hamvas's writings among the Zugló Circle, a group of abstract artists who had begun to meet regularly at Molnár's flat in Budapest's Zugló district since 1962.[107] Around the same time, László András, a Buddhist theology student who had become Hamvas's protégé, began to circulate Hamvas's writings among small groups of artist and intellectual circles. Hamvas's oeuvre was immense: part one of his *Scientia Sacra Mankind's Spiritual Heritage,* ran six volumes; the second part, which he wrote privately between 1960 and 1964, was another 1,000 pages. Hence, the projects involved re-typing and distributing what amounted to several thousand pages of Hamvas's manuscripts, along with a number of Hamvas's essays and novels. Artist Tamás Szentjóby, who was among those involved in re-typing and distributing the texts, recalled the work as being "completely chaotic."[108] Not only was access to typewriters scarce, but there were a number of different intellectual circles involved in the production. Some people secretly typed sections on typewriters at their workplaces, or they worked with a single unsampled machine they borrowed from a friend.[109] Often they used carbon paper, making five copies of excerpts at a time. Most copies were riddled with typos and edits—which Hamvas himself expressed some irritation with—rarely, if ever, did anyone have a complete copy of any one text at one time.[110] By another account, someone had mis-numbered the pages of Hamvas's novel *Carnival*, which runs seven books and more than 1,000 pages alone, and so no one any idea what actually happened in the novel and the story line became something of an urban myth.[111] For how much illicit Hamvas paperwork was circulating around Budapest it is surprising the secret police never caught on. By the time of Hamvas' death, practically everyone involved in the progressive scene in Budapest had read at least some portion of his work, which remained in circulation through the

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[107] The Zugló Circle was made of Sándor Molnár, Imre Bak, István Nádler and Pál Deim.
[108] Interview, Szentjóby, Budapest, May 2009.
[109] The typewriter they used was an unsampled machine from fellow artist Gábor Altorjay.
[110] Interview, Szentjóby, May 2009.
[111] Interview, Gábor Altorjay, Berlin, May 2009. *Karnevál* (1948–51, *Carnival*, published in 1985).

1980s.[112]

The"Youth Problem"

The Hamvas manuscripts were probably the first "collective" *samizdat* project in post-1956

Hungary. While it certainly involved members of the older generations of intellectuals and artists—and

Hamvas himself, who provided young artists with the manuscripts—the work was fueled by young

blood, by a new generation of progressive artists and intellectuals thirsty for direction, artistic and

philosophical, and for a taste of new ideas. Along with the fact that Hamvas was *banned*, and for that,

most young artists and intellectuals wanted to read him, he was attractive to younger generations on a

number of other levels. He wrote of spiritual liberation, astrology, and Eastern mysticism, of spiritual

liberation, astrology, Eastern mysticism, and introduced ideas by French traditionalist René Guénon

and German psychiatrist and existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers.[113] In his novel *Carnival*, for

instance, Hamvas wrote:

> Now there is one thing I know: that it is time for us to get prepared. The moment of
> awakening is approaching. War. Maybe. Maybe revolution, or procession, or penitence.
> Maybe a ball, but more likely, famine. Maybe a feast, or rather a holocaust, as
> everybody anticipates it. . . Prepare for the wondrous awakening.[114]

In the early 1960s, there remained a distinct generational overlap, and many younger

intellectuals and artists attached themselves to icons of the older generation, some of whom had been

pushed off to the side by officialdom.[115] Kassák, by then an elder statesmen of the avant-garde, was

highly influential to young artists especially, many who sought to resurrect the utopian spirit of the old

avant-garde. In this way, the older generation acted as what Mannheim defined as "crystallizing

agents," which occur when younger groups attach themselves to older generations before forming their

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[112] Interview, Tibor Várnagy, Budapest, April 2009.

[113] Works by René Guénon include: *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines* (1921), *The Multiple States of the Being (*1932), *Oriental Metaphysics (*1939); Works by Karl Jaspers, who wrote about existentialism and theology, include *Reason and Existenz* (1935), *Philosophy of Existence* (1938).

[114] Excerpt from Hamvas, *Carnival*, provided by László Melis, *The Apocalypse of Enoch,* liner notes (Budapest Music Center Records BMC CD 035, 2000.)

[115] Forgács discusses this in general in "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde;" Eva Körner, "No 'ism's' in Hungary," 25.

own "newer life ideal."[116] There was a stretch of time when generational "entelechies" co-existed simultaneously, which gave generational continuity to existing streams of intellectual and creative thought.[117] The mingling of generations was apparent with the *Vigilia* group, an open circle of writers, intellectuals and artists who had reconstituted themselves in the early 1960s, meeting often at Café Hungaria. The group often included artists Miklós Erdély and Béla Kondor, writers János Pilinszky and Miklós Mészöly, as well as numerous budding intellectuals and artists from the younger generation, including Tamás Szentjóby.

The early-1960s cultural climate was still icy: many older intellectuals were willing to feed their ideas to younger adherents but were unwilling to test Kádár's new political system. It was a time of party purges, political show trials, coinciding with lip service denouncing the "cult of personality" of Stalinism. The post-1956 crackdown brought harsh punishments to thousands of intellectuals involved in the revolution—writers Tibor Déry, Gyula Háy had just been released from prison in 1960, and another round of amnesty was granted to political prisoners 1963. The cultural "brain drain" from 1956 was immense: more than 200,000 Hungarians had emigrated following the Revolution, among them, thousands of intellectuals and cultural elite. Of the older generation of intellectuals who did not leave for the west, many retreated into "internal emigration," or "spiritual emigration," or took to "writing for the drawer." There were some creative attempts made: In 1960, artist Béla Kondor had planned an exhibit, which was banned by authorities because the catalog contained an essay by still blacklisted writer László Nemeth. Likewise, there were moments of defiance: in 1961, then-elderly composer Zoltán Kodály was invited by the Party to address workers at a Budapest factory—with the understood purpose of his rallying the still-disgruntled workers behind the next economic plan—instead, he read passages from the New Testament about brotherly love.[118] With Revai's spirit of socialist realism still stalking the

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[116] Wohl, on Mannheim, *The Generation of 1914*, 79.
[117] Ibid, 79.
[118] M.S. Handler, "Defiance in Hungary," *New York Times*, November 4, 1961, p. 8.

landscape, there was palpable ebb in cultural life in Budapest, which, as one western reporter described it in 1961, was a "not too cheerful city."[119] Some in the old guard—many who were were committed Marxists and active accomplices in the communist party's rise—were anguished by defeat, marooned within their own country. Such was the motif of Déry 1962 essay, *Reckoning*, in which his protagonist, a tormented elderly professor, dies in a snow field steps from the Viennese border, unable to bring himself to cross it.[120]

The 1960s-era generation was not so beleaguered: many were teenagers during the Revolution, and some had witnessed first-hand the violence on the streets, but none undergone the succession of tumultuous political upheavals that many in the older generation—especially the cultural elite—had been an integral part. Among what would become the new generation of dissident intellectuals, most were born sometime in the 1940s which meant they had spent their formative years in grade school when ideological indoctrination school curricula was at its apex. The group came of age in the 1960s, when deStalinization had ushered ideological and moral crises, one ending in Kádár's deeply conflicting, constantly-on-the-mend compromises. Questioning, revising the past clashed with debates on "ideological purity," reflecting the deep rifts within the party on the direction of post-1956 political life.

Party officials as early as 1958 had begun debating the "youth problem" in Hungary. The Hungarian Party's monthly *Társadalmi Szemle* addressed the problem of politically and ideologically apathetic students in its March issue. The paper noted that among students the "petty bourgeois ego and selfish interests are stronger. . . than consideration of society and community interests," and some even embrace "hostile ideologies and morals," and remain "aloof from the life of the community, spreading truancy, lack of discipline and cynicism."[121] The monthly claimed the lack of Marxist indoctrination at

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[119] Handler, "Defiance in Hungary," 8.

[120] Tibor Déry, "Reckoning," from journal *Uj Irás*, translated text in Radio Free Europe Research Reports, 24 October 1962. Box-Folder-Report: 32-2-27.

[121] "Hungarian University Youth Resist Communist Indoctrination," 4 April 1958. In Radio Free Europe, Evaluation and Analysis Department, Box 30-3-144.

the universities had triggered worrisome incidents like at the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) where students "'proclaimed the leading role of the young generation and an opposition to the older generation.'"[122]

At the same time, heated debates about youth "hooliganism" began to appear in the state press, as party officials grew concerned with Hungary's "galerik," or youth gangs hanging around on the streets, adopting western style, dress and music.[123] Similar scandals had emerged in the 1950s, when authorities and press had created a "moral panic" over working-class youth "jampec," who were causing problems across the socialist block—in Moscow, Leningrad, Warsaw, East Berlin and Budapest —and in Western cities.[124] Although the effort was to use the "jampec" figure to show the dangers of western films, comics and western popular culture, the fervor helped popularize the image of youth as an "exciting new social force."[125] A new type of hooliganism was constructed in 1960s with the state's campaign against the "galerik," who were linked in the press to images of "bourgeois" counter-revolutionary forces of 1956.[126] In August 1960, Budapest authorities arrested members of the working-class Vágóhíd street gang, sparking rounds of political-ideological debates in the both state radio and press.[127] An article in *Magyar Nemzet* described the socially destructive features of "hooliganism," in which "sexual indecency, though typical, is not the worst feature," compared to its "ideological decadence, a contempt of socialist ideology. This... means that the contaminated strata of our youth turn toward alien ideals. Their ideals are modeled on the show pieces of bourgeois society, their wishes come forward as forces drawing them away from us, they turn into spiritual dissenters even while

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[122] "Hungarian University Youth Resist Communist Indoctrination," 4 April 1958. In Radio Free Europe, Evaluation and Analysis Department, Box 30-3-144.

[123] For a review of "jampec" phenomenon, see Sándor Horváth, "Myths of the Great Tree Gang: Constructing Urban Spaces and Youth Culture in 'Socialist Budapest,'" in Joanna Herbert, ed., *Testimonies of the City. Identity, Community and Change in a Contemporary Urban World* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2007): 73-93.

[124] See Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels. Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[125] Horváth, "Myths of the Great Tree Gang," 76.

[126] Ibid, 77.

[127] "The 'Hooligan' Problem in Hungary," Radio Free Europe, RFE Evaluation and Analysis Department, background report. 1961-2-24box-folder-report: 31-2-182.

living in the country."[128] The most scathing attack appeared in *Élet és Irodalom*, which decried

hooliganism as a "social symptom of youth having turned into savages," and reflected the "moral

deterioration in Western imperialism."[129] According to the report, youth hooligans represent "the

nihilism and cynicism of the dethroned ruling classes, the defeated underworld, the dispersed gangs of

rowdies and elements of the banned brothels whose rotten spirit continues to live on secretly."[130]

Sensationalized stories on Hungary's hooligan youth both worked to sell newspapers and helped

give shape and identity to an emerging youth subculture.[131] According to Kellner, mass media a most

dominant force defining conflict, social values, and distinguishing categories of the "other," by

providing "symbols, myths and resources" that help shape a common cultural identity.[132] Heavy

ideological polemics from the party and press amplified the mythology of youth as "other," in which

the "the youth" was treated as a distinct "anthropological" group.[133] The "anti-social youth," as a

problematic, deviant social group, became the focal point of numerous sociological surveys, essays and

psychological profiles.

Many young intellectuals and artists embraced the rebel image. They wore hippie clothes, grew

long hair, they came bearded and beaded, wearing American blue jeans.[134] Szentjóby's appearance, by

the 1970s, was somewhat notorious, he had evolved into a "Christ-like figure," with long blond hair,

short beard and mustache, donning a worn brown leather jacket and "carrying a sack like a

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128 "The 'Hooligan' Problem in Hungary," Radio Free Europe, RFE Evaluation and Analysis Department, background report. 1961-2-24. Box: 31-2-182.
129 "The 'Hooligan' Problem in Hungary," Radio Free Europe, RFE Evaluation and Analysis Department, background report. The Vagohid "gang leader," Béla Kovari, who was a minor, received the maximum sentence, five years in jail; the others were sentenced to prison terms ranging from five to 10 years.
130 Ibid.
131 Horváth, 76.
132 Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture. Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*. (London: Routledge, 1995): 1.
133 Horváth, "Myths of the Great Tree Gang," 77.
134 For a review of the blue jeans phenomenon, see: Ferenc Hammer, "Blue Jeans in Socialist Hungary." Paper for the Citizenship and Consumption: Agency, Norms, Mediations, and Spaces Conference, March 30th – April 1st, 2006, Cambridge.

wanderer."[135] A number of neo-Marxist scholars from the Birmingham School have used Gramsci's theory of hegemony to examine how youth subcultures in post-war Britain adapted, and co-opted, styles and dress to express their opposition to the parent, "hegemonic" culture.[136] Whether this works to explain the Hungarian model is debatable—as Gramsci's idea links style as an expression of class, that is, opposition to upper-classes. A better explanation is that alternative artists and intellectuals were expressing their general non-conformity—with the most antagonistic materials available, western hippie wear—which developed into a distinct generational style, a kind of "bohemia," which was as much a form of protest as was a visible marker of one's membership in Hungary's "community of rebels."

While hyped in the press and on popular television programs, the "youth problem" was actually quite serious insofar as the state was concerned. Hungarian authorities saw young progressive artists and intellectual circles as a particular problem: "They impact the young people with the false glint of the 'being other,'" one secret police report concluded.[137] In response, the Party in early 1960 announced it planned to shift its attention to the "cultural front," launching a effort to boost membership among university students in the Communist Youth League, to which about half of students belonged.[138]

Concessions were made to appease the rebellious youth, in hopes of "winning over" the youth, to diffuse social pressure and as a means of social control.[139] Hence, universities became sites of "controlled rebellion," with spots like the University Theater, the "R" Club at Budapest's Technical University, and a number of student clubs run by ELTE, including the Eötvös Club, operating as regular hubs for avant-garde performances and alternative music shows. Likewise, a network of cultural clubs

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[135] Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 40.
[136] The most famous among these is Dick Hebdige's *Subculture*: *Meaning of Style* (London, Methuen, 1979).
[137] "Suggestion for the further controlling of Péter Halász and his company," Ministry of Inner Affairs III/IIII-4-a- Sub-Department Folder No. O-16268/2 ("Fishermen"). 7 December 1973. Transl. Veronika Csikós.
[138] "Hungarian University Youth Resist Communist Indoctrination," 4 April 1958. In RFE/RL Background Reports, Box 30-3-144.
[139] Ibid.

—the Derkovits Youth Club in Ujpest and the Lajos Kassák Cultural Club—were common sites for progressive theater, artistic events and lectures. Some became legendary haunts: the Young Artist Club, for instance, was "member's only" club with sections for writers, journalists and artists, which became a favorite late-night-into-early-morning drinking spot and hangout Budapest's young, rebellious intellectual crowd.

The authorities made concessions, too, in the realm of popular youth media, in an attempt to quell consumption of western magazines and foreign radio. Among a number of youth magazines and journals that appeared in the 1960s, some were remarkably liberal, like *Ifjúsági Magazin (Youth Magazine)*, a pop-culture journal founded by students at the Technical University in 1965, which contained not only political stories, but also articles on the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix and the Beatles.[140] Around the same time, the Hungarian Television began hosting a wildly popular pop music contest and Hungarian Radio started a weekly music magazine called "Just for the young!" (*Csak fiataloknak!*).[141]

But early attempts to launch new avant-garde journals, legally, were denied, which illustrates the Party's less flexible stance toward publications involving non-traditional art and artists. The first effort came from within the Faculty of Humanities at ELTE, with the journal *Értesítő (Notification)*, which ran a single issue before being shut down in 1965.[142] Two years later, Tamas Szentjóby and another group of artists—Miklós Apáthy and filmmaker László Hegedűs—tried to form the journal *Kezdet (Start)* and had taken their idea to Kassák, who declined to take responsibility for the journal. After Kassák's death in 1967, the group presented the idea to the Information Office of the Ministers' Council but it was rejected. Another journal, *Eszmélet (Consciousness),* was planned and approved for

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[140] Hammer, Ferenc. "Blue Jeans in Socialist Hungary." Paper for the Citizenship and Consumption: Agency, Norms, Mediations, and Spaces Conference, March 30th – April 1st, 2006, Cambridge, 13

[141] Ibid, 13.

[142] This journal involved Árpád Ajtony, Ferenc Bodor, Gábor Bódy, Miklós Győrffy, Gyula Kodolányi.

publication, but at the last minute, Aczél refused to allow the journal's publishing.[143]

Hence, it became clear that neither legitimate avenues for publishing would be unavailable nor could the older generation be relied upon for aid. By the mid-1960s, a number of illicit writings had begun to make the rounds: artists with the Zugló Circle had translated and typed out copies of works on abstract art by Kandinsky and Jean Bazaine's *Notes sur la peinture d'aujourd'hui*.[144] Among that group, the effort was very much to reconnect with European art trends and to discuss art theory prohibited in public circuits. Certainly, the forbidden nature of the writings contributed to the allure, but the Zugló circle was a group of formally trained artists who very much were endeavoring to educate themselves in modern art theory, to reacquaint themselves with old Hungarian masters and engage in aesthetic debates. The circle was, in effect, an early version of the so-called "flying university," a private university like the Galilei and Gresham circles in the early 20th century, where those present worked out new aesthetic programs for Hungary's oncoming artistic revolution. Influenced by both Hamvas and Kassák, the group began to work out the aesthetic program for Hungary's avant-garde. According to artists Imre Bak: "'free energy of the actual fine art of today stems not only from those intentions that suit our everyday life and of which they became organic parts, but also from a desperate effort to warn: it is not enough to enlarge our material, technological and ecological demands, we have to increase our intellectual demands as well, *we have to shape ourselves not only outwardly but also inwardly*.'"[145]

Dumb Poets

It was group of untrained artists who provided a decisive "break" with the older generation—and spur a new crop of *samizdat* projects—that would revolutionize Hungary's avant-garde scene. In 1965, a small group of artists called the Circle of Dumb Poets began writing poetry and holding writing

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[143] This journal involved editors Béla Horgas and Júlia Levendel.
[144] Gábor Pataki, "Two chapters in Franco-Hungarian art connections: the European School, (1945-1948) and the Zugló circle (1958-1968)" *French Cultural Studies* 11 (2000): 406.
[145] Eva Körner, "No 'ism's' in Hungary," 26.

contests in a private flat. The group—made up of Tamás Szentjóby, Gábor Altorjay, László András and Zoltan Tárkányi—was heavily influenced by Hamvas, but also by the Fluxus movement, happenings, and the anarcho-Marxists leanings of French Situationists. The group met weekly at the Rudas baths and then went to Tárkányi's flat in the 9th district, only because Tárkányi's girlfriend possessed unsurpassed sandwich-making skills.[146] Szentjóby and Altorjay had known each other from childhood, they grew up in the same neighborhood near Corvin Cinema on Ferenc körút, but did not become close friends until gymnasium, when they decided they would become artists. Neither went to art school: Altorjay had enrolled in the Theological Academy in Budapest, which enabled him to avoid military service, mandatory at the time. Szentjóby had done everything he could to avoid military service, including gorging on chocolates until he was too sick to lift the required weight for basic training.[147] He was expelled from four high schools until finally he ended up at Fehérvári út 10, a notoriously open-minded school, where he was schoolmates with future dissident sociologist János Kenedi.[148] The liberal rector there had given Szentjóby a special status, something akin to a "public intellectual," which gave him verifiable proof that he was not a "loafer" for police, who routinely checked identity cards. Although he did not attend university, he spent a good deal of time at university libraries and the National Foreign Language library in downtown Pest, where and read issues of the avant-garde publication, *Studio Internationale.* At the Theological seminary, Altorjay learned a number of foreign languages and had begun to teach himself English, French, Polish and German. He had become increasingly interested in Polish avant-garde theater, and befriended Tadeusz Kantor while attending the music festival Warsaw Autumn in 1965, which is where he first heard of "happenings." After reading a copy of Dick Higgins's recent book, *Intermedia,* which was brought to him by a friend in Europe*,* Altorjay wrote to Higgins through his publishing house, Something Else Press, in New York;

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146 The sandwiches were mentioned in two interviews: they were Diplomat Sandwiches.
147 Interview, Altorjay, Berlin, May 2009.
148 Szentjóby had not remembered being classmates with János Kenedi, but was reminded of this by Kenedi years later.

Higgins responded with a "flood" of materials.[149]

At the Dumb Poets meetings, the artists ate sandwiches, drank cheap wine and wrote poetry, mostly in the socialist realist style. A topic would be announced—random topics, often from everyday news, the moon landing, or "drunk driver in Budapest," was a popular one—and sessions would be timed, then poems read aloud, after which the group would vote on a winner, and bestow an award like the literary prizes awarded by the state. The poems were searing mockeries of SocReal poetry, their aim was explicitly to further "butcher an already butchered style."[150] The Dumb Poets met for more than a year, their weekly meetings kept private. The poems were never circulated amongst anyone but themselves, although Altorjay eventually typed some out at home. The "inner sanctum" of the Dead Poets club was a place of infectious creative experimentalism that energized the young artists: they worked on "anti-poetry," "anti-art," studied Hamvas, read Warhol and John Cage, and formed a tight artistic and spiritual bond, a kind of "aesthetic brotherhood."

The alliance between Szentjóby and Altorjay, together with emerging avant-garde guru Miklós Erdély, would ignite the avant-garde scene and thrust the trio in a public spotlight. Szentjóby and Altorjay decided in June 1966 to hold a "happening," called *The Lunch: In Memoriam Batu Khan*, which took place in Miklós Erdély's brother-in-law's basement on Buda.[151] Batu Khan was a 13th century Mongol ruler, grandson of Genghis Khan, who had conquered the Magyar armies under Hungary's then ruler Béla IV. From the secret police report attached to the event, we know that an informant had already penetrated the scene.[152] The invitation—illegally printed, a note of which was

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[149]   Higgins founded Something Else Press in 1963, which became an iconic alternative publishing house, producing a number of works on Concrete poetry and Fluxus throughout the 1960s.

[150]   Interview, Altorjay, Berlin May 2009.

[151]   "Summary report and arrangement plan about the Happening in Hungary." Ministry of Inner Affairs, III. Gendarmerie of Chief Group 2./b Sub-Department. 11 May 1968. Translated for author by Veronika Csikós.

[152]   The police files on the "happenings" are attached to Szentjóby's records, under the code name "Schwitters," the name give to him by the secret police, after the German artists Kurt Schwitters. "Summary report and arrangement plan about the Happening in Hungary." Ministry of Inner Affairs, III. Gendarmerie of Chief Group 2./b Sub-Department. 11 May 1968.

made in the police file—was mailed to 150 people, including members of the local press. It was attended by 50 or 60 people, mostly intellectuals, poets, writers, journalists, painters, architects with university degrees, and included artists from the Pál Petri Galla circle.[153] Béla Arany, who worked Cultural Export Trade Enterprise, distributed a foreign book, in which the term "happening" was defined and illustrated by photographs.[154] The performance began in the garden with a "half-naked" Szentjóby sitting at a typewriter pretending to type a journal—playing off the taboo of independent publishing. The artists then poured gasoline on a baby carriage and set fire to it. The audience then moved into the basement where music by German avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, the "father of electronic music," was playing. Chosen for the happening was Stockhausen's "The Triumph," a recording of noises of an air-raid mixed with sounds from a French speech. The artists hid in a bunker covered by dirt. Next Szentjóby and Altorjay ate chicken and vomited into plastic bags. One audience member, Dr. László Végh, was so upset by the performance he declared he was going to host an "anti-happening," one that would not devolve into "anarchy."[155]

A reporter from *Tükör (Mirror)*, a newly launched cultural journal, covered the event and ran story a few weeks title "Lunch in memory of Batu Khan: a meditation about the first Hungarian happening," in which he questioned whether what had gone on constituted art.[156] It was followed by a flurry of commentaries in the state press—*Esti hírlap* and *Népszava*–denouncing the event, and within weeks, the "happening" and the artists involved were at the center of a public scandal. Altorjay and Erdély were taken in by the police and made to sign a statement swearing they would neither hold nor

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[153] "Summary report and arrangement plan about the Happening in Hungary." Ministry of Inner Affairs, III. Gendarmerie of Chief Group 2./b Sub-Department. 11 May 1968.

[154] Béla Arany is mentioned in a number of police files, but he was not an artist, just interested in the avant-garde scene. He was, according to Altorjay, an "innocent bystander," who was targeted by the state. (Interview, Altorjay, Berlin May 2009)._

[155] László Végh was a trusted member of avant-garde circles. He had been giving Altorjay and Szentjóby books on art—for instance, he fed them copies of John Cage—and other literature, like Kafka. It was not until the early 1990s, when the police files were opened, that it was revealed he was an informant.

[156] Folder V-156455, ("Schwitters"), "Summary report and arrangement plan about the Happening in Hungary." Ministry of Inner Affairs. III. Gendarmerie of Chief Group 2./b Sub-Department. 11 May 1968.

speak of "happenings" ever again.[157] (After that, avant-garde artists more often used the term "op-art" or "pop-art" instead of the word "happening" in order to avoid detection.)
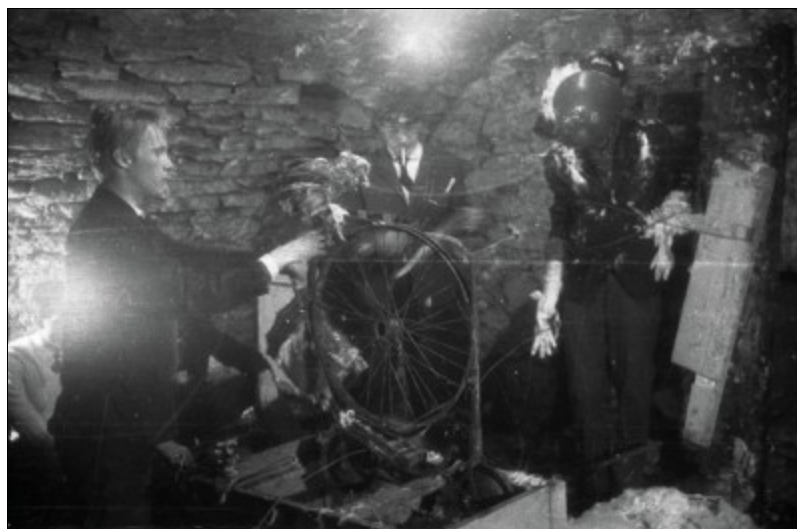
The event was taboo shattering on multiple levels: aesthetically, culturally, politically. "Happenings are about destruction," Altorjay recounted, "and we needed to destroy as many things as possible all at once."[158] Even the informant made note of the dangerous nature of the "happening:"

> happenings... have anti-socialist content, even if that is not propagated openly. It is true, however, that this anti-socialism is not primarily politically understood, but rather it is more a lifestyle and a way of thinking. It promulgates the individual's unlimited right and freedom in expressing itself and in having an opposite opinion, even if its activity becomes close to being vulgar or meaningless.[159]

Szentjóby and Altorjay had definite revolutionary goals in mind: to upset, stir up the system, to shatter taboos and to destroy the traditional artistic forms. Their explicit aim, as they tell it, was to "seize power."[160] Emboldened by their performance, and amid the public fervor over the "happening," both Szentjóby and Altorjay launched solo *samizdat* journals. Szentjóby's *Etlap (The Menu),* was a single

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[157] Altorjay also reported that they had to sign a second document attesting that they would never speak of the first document. Interview, Altorjay, May 2009.

[158] Interview, Altorjay, Berlin, May 2009.

[159] Folder V-156455, ("Schwitters") "Summary report and arrangement plan about the Happening in Hungary." Ministry of Inner Affairs. III. Gendarmerie of Chief Group 2./b Sub-Department. May 11, 1968.

[160] Interview, Altorjay, Berlin, May 2009.

issue journal he made from the menu from the Cafe Hungaria. His purpose was to simply publish *something*, he said, "because they told me I couldn't."[161] In the winter of 1967, Altorjay launched the first issue of his *samizdat* journal *Laura?*, a publication typed on one- or sometimes two-meter long sheets of paper, rolled into a scroll. Altorjay had traded a set of silver candle holders, a family heirloom, for an old typewriter from his neighbor, a German Erika, which had not been sampled by authorities. The title, *Laura?*, was meant to be as non-political as possible (though he later would joke that he had added the question mark so that when authorities came to question him he could say, "*Laura?*, I have no idea what you are talking about.") The project was "top secret," circulated only among small group of friends—in all seven issues of Laura were produced, never were more than 3 or 4 scrolls in circulation at a time. Some of this had to do with the labor intensity of the work, as typing onto long sheets of paper was a difficult process. The publication carried "news from the future," articles Altorjay wrote about futuristic news, as well as current international events, updates on avant-garde exhibits and international and domestic "happenings," and other commentaries. In the first issue, he wrote an article as a surprise for Erdély, a futuristic report about Erdély arriving in Paris on July 4, 1974. Other issues included mundane news: an article on the Hungarian Orthopedic Company's demand for the production of "healthy and trendy kid's shoes," a piece on the warm summer weather. In one article, he criticized news reporter Béla Pomogáts who published an commentary in a youth magazine that was much more "aggressive and ignorant than ever."[162] But issues also carried political news from the west, including the war in Vietnam, along with current events in the international avant-garde scene, with materials being fed to him by Dick Higgins. He published news of a "happening" by Argentinian Fluxus artists Eduardo Costa, Raul Escari and Roberto Jacoby. Likewise, he wrote *15 Actions for Marta Minujin,* a tribute to radical Argentinian artist Marta Minujin, which he would later turn into an action poem for German radio. At that time, Altorjay also began actively communicating with German Fluxus artist Wolf

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[161] Interview, Szentjóby, Budapest, May 2009.
[162] From *Laura?* (draft), provided to author by Gábor Altorjay, translated for author by Veronika Csikós.

Vostell, who published a musical score Altorjay had written for an action concert in an edition

European avant-garde journal *dé-coll/age* in 1967.

Authorities never caught on to *Laura?,* but by the middle of 1967 Altorjay had become a prime

target of police survellience and interrogations. In April 1967, Altorjay and Erdély were invited by

member of the Hungarian Writers Union to hold a happening, which they eagerly accepted: it was not

"illegal," they figured, since they had been invited by a cultural club. After the event was covered on

the front page of the Communist Youth paper, Altorjay was immediately hauled into the police station

and interrogated. Under increasing scrutiny, both he and Szentjóby attempted to leave Hungary that

summer. Szentjóby unknowingly made his escape with an informant, who alerted authorities, and was caught at the Polish border and was returned to Hungary. Altorjay bought a forged passport, brought to him by a German friend, using it to smuggle himself to from Hungary to Germany—via Romania, Yugoslavia, Italy, France—that August. No copies of *Laura?* exist. Anyone in possession of a copy, it is believed, burned it for fear of being caught. All that remains of the journal are hand-written mock-ups (pictured), which has only added to its mystique.

Laura? was somewhat light-hearted, and purposely so: there were no heavy polemical texts or panegyrics on social revolution—though it contained information on radical western artistic events and "happenings," which the police had specifically asked him not to mention. Aesthetically, each issue was more like a work of art, its own Dadaist manifesto, its very own theatrical performance. Altorjay, by then an ardent member of Fluxus, had genuinely to meant bring to Hungary's information-craved artists news on international trends. But *Laura?* had all the dramatic posture of classic avant-gardism: the publication put on display what kind of a hip, international revolutionary Altorjay had become. *Laura?* flaunted the rules, crossed into forbidden territory, turned revolutionary ideas into action—art into life—and hence, *Laura?* was a Fluxus performance itself, a "happening" that broke social and political taboos, not only those on publishing itself but on the internal, psychic constraints of "self-censorship." It was as much an act of psychic disobedience as it was a test of the internal collective, who successfully managed to circulate the publication undetected, before burning every last copy.

From these early *samizdat* activities, a number of prominent themes can be drawn. First, these examples demonstrate an evolution of *samizdat* activity—from artists circulating unpublished Hamvas manuscripts and translations of modern art texts to artists publishing their own, which was catalyzed around a generational and "break" with the advent of the first "happening." From the gatherings of the Dumb Poets circle, to the taboo-shattering first happening, to the birth of the first *samizdat* journals, one can draw a straight line. Much has been studied about the spiritually and psychologically liberating

aspects of "happenings"—for instance, Turner applied his concept of "liminality" to describe the psychic transformation of happenings in the 1960s-era hippie youth culture.[163] While this theory is exceptionally difficult to prove, as it involves going inside the heads of its participants, it is clear, in this case, whatever transformative experiences or "psychic liberation" the "happening" inspired had a good deal to do with the thrill of defying authority. According to Altorjay: "We had finally found something the state couldn't understand and couldn't control. It was brilliant."[164]

This flurry of taboo-shattering behavior and first *samizdat* publications parallels what Poggioli describes as "activist" moments, when certain individuals proceed for the mere sake of doing *something*, or of changing the socio-political structure, shaking up the system, in any way they can.[165] Often, it is for the "cult of the act," or "the sheer joy of the dynamism, the taste for the action, the emotional fascination with adventure."[166] There is something gratuitous in it, but it marks the first stage of an avant-garde "movement."[167]

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[163] See Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and the Anti-Structure* (New York: Cornell, 1969): 138-140.
[164] Interview, Altorjay, Berlin, May 2009.
[165] Poggioli, using ideas developed from German expressionist Kurt Hiller, 27.
[166] Poggioli, 25-27.
[167] Poggioli, paraphrasing Hiller, 25-27.

Chapter 3: Community of Rebels

The year 1968 was the apex of the international youth countercultural movement, when student riots and mass demonstrations shook urban centers in both the west and the east. That spring student movements in Prague swelled into a revolution; in Warsaw, thousands of students revolted after state (and Soviet) censors shut down a beloved play by poet Adam Mickiewicz at the National Theater, leading to mass demonstrations, arrests and strikes over state censorship.[168]

In Hungary, no such mass actions occurred. In late April 1968, Aczél delivered a lecture—which most understood as a warning—underscoring Hungarian regime's stance on ideological and cultural affairs, which was "the consistent adherence to the fundamental principles of socialism and the sensitive consideration of changes taking place in reality."[169] The speech, carried in *Népszabadság,* reiterated the party's "tolerant" position on artistic and cultural life, in hopes of quelling those who might be spurred to action by events in Prague, Poland, West Berlin and Paris.

Authorities became increasingly alarmed over circles of young university students and sociologists aligning themselves with radical New Left. An article in the August-September 1968 issue of *Társadalmi Szemle* discussed the May events in Paris and warned against "drifting in divergent ideological currents," among Hungary's more radical intellectuals who were succumbing to various ideological influences of György Lukács, Italian Communist Roger Garaudy, Che Guevara and—mainly—Herbert Marcuse.[170] That spring a circle of radical Maoist students, including György Pór,

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[168] Neal Ascherson, "The Polish March: Students, Workers, and 1968," *OpenDemocracy.net*, 1 February 2008. The play, *Forefathers' Eve,* is a Polish drama written in the 1830s about the Polish nation under Russian occupation, which according to Ascherson, Poles viewed as an account of "suffering and humiliation under war and foreign domination." In January 1968, after authorities witnessed how Polish audiences were fanatically cheering the anti-Russian lines, they shut down the performance.

[169] "Continuity and Flexibility in Hungarian Cultural Policy," 8 May 1968, RFE/RL Collection Background Reports, Box 34-2-99.

[170] Charles András, "The New Left in Hungary" 16 January 1974. RFE/RL Collection Background Reports. Box 35-5-1. According to this report, the state press refrained from using the term "New Left," but rather used the term "leftist student movements."

were arrested on a charge of conspiracy against the state and convicted to eight-month prison sentences.

Few would speak out publicly against Hungary's participation in the Warsaw Pact military intervention into Czechoslovakia that August—and those who did so were punished. A group of philosophers, including Ágnes Heller, who signed a declaration in Korčula condemning Hungary's role in the Warsaw Pact military invasion into Czechoslovakia, were expelled from the Party and removed from their university positions.[171] In December 1968, a group of young artists held the *Iparterv* exhibit at a design office in downtown Budapest, featuring the day's most progressive artists. The exhibited included Krisztián Frey's *August 1968*, a graffiti memorial of the Czechoslovakian invasion. The exhibition ran for two weeks before being shut down by censors.[172]

The Ministry of Inner Affairs and secret police—known then as the "III/III Gendarmerie of Chief Group 2./b Sub-Department"—had already begun to collect data on "happenings," which authorities deemed exceptionally dangerous in lieu of the connection between those activities and ongoing student and political protests. In May, as a radical group of Fluxus artists, the Situationists, in Paris helped burn down the Paris stock exchange,[173] the police bureau in Budapest compiled a lengthy report and action plan on how to prevent the spread of "happenings" in Hungary.[174] Already, a number of "happenings" had been held: one in December 1967; another, involving Tamás Szentjóby and György Lendvai, at the University Theater in January 1968, which was held in conjunction with an approved theatrical performance entitled "The effect of the Zen-Buddhism on American literature."[175] University Theater director Zoltán Rózsa was contacted more than once by secret police and warned

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[171] "Three Philosophers Expelled from Hungarian Party," 17 December 1968. RFE/RL Collection Background Reports. Box 34-1-1.

[172] Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 41.

[173] The Situationist International (SI) participated in burning down the Paris stock exchange in May 1968. See the earlier reference to this event in the section under "happenings" in Chapter 1.

[174] "Summary report and arrangement plan about the Happening in Hungary." Ministry of Inner Affairs, III. Gendarmerie of Chief Group 2./b Sub-Department. 11 May 1968.

[175] Ibid.

not to permit any more "happenings" from happening on the university's stage. Similar warnings were sent to the Communist Youth League at ELTE and the leadership at the Eötvös Club, that by the authority of the Ministry of Education and the Education Department of the Council of the Capital, they should not grant permission to "happening" performances.[176]

In 1969, Miklós Erdély and Tamás Szentjóby managed to hold a Fluxus concert, a "happening," at a community center on the outskirts of Pest.[177] According the center's manager, the leader of the center's literature club had enlisted an "unknown artist group" to present their work, to be followed by a discussion. Although it was requested several times, the artists submitted an unintelligible script of their performance a day before the presentation and it was too late to call off the show. The manager directed the club organizer stop the performance if anything against the political system was detected. Not only was the performance devoid of political content, it was, according to the manager, "lacking culture" as well.[178] "One performer ran towards a piano with a crash-helmet on his head; another performer brought a cake with five burning candles on the stage, and he snuffed out the candles and stuffed [the cake] in his own face."[179] Then they showed an "obscure and incoherent" film. When the center's manager asked the audience members—most of whom where friends of the artists—if they'd noticed any political significance to it, "their answer was a strong '*no*.'" The center's manager nevertheless reported what had gone on to the Ministry of Inner Affairs.[180]

Following this, Erdély was put on a "3/a-type" control, a phone tap, in order to monitor his activities:

> Erdély is an active organizer of the "Happening" movement. He possesses
> hostile connections; he takes part in different kinds of assemblies. One of his

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[176] "Summary report and arrangement plan about the Happening in Hungary." Ministry of Inner Affairs, III. Gendarmerie of Chief Group 2./b Sub-Department. 11 May 1968.

[177] Letter from István Subicz, Director of the Community Center for the Builders of the 20th district, Ady Endre Street 90-92, Budapest, to Ministry of Inner Affairs Budapest. Folder No. V-156455 ("Schwitters"). 24 February 1969. Translated for author by Veronika Csikós.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Ibid.

known connections with Tamás Szentjóby, a central person of the "Happening" movement. We request especially the recording of the telephone conversations that concern preparations of the "Happening" performances or refer on that topic. The term "Flux" or "Flux concert" is going to be mentioned. This means "Happening." It can also be expected, that the speakers will refer to books or books with poems what is similarly important for us. Furthermore, all the information which is useful for compromising this person or initiating disruptive actions towards the movement.[181]

Artists continued to push forward, testing the bounds of "tolerated" behavior. For instance, the "R" club held an exhibition in 1970 by a group of avant-garde artists was promptly closed after visit from Cultural Minister György Aczél. The Cultural Arts Center at the Ganz MÁVAG Factory, likewise, which hosted dozens of progressive exhibits by artists in the 1970s, ran into problems with authorities after it hosted an "illegal" performance by the István Kovács Studio[182] without first securing authorization for the production, and for the event's poster, which was illegally produced and distributed.[183] In 1970, art critic Géza Perneczky launched a *samizdat* journal, *Important Business N.1*, a collection of works and writings by Hungarian and East European artists, and began distributing it at official events.[184]
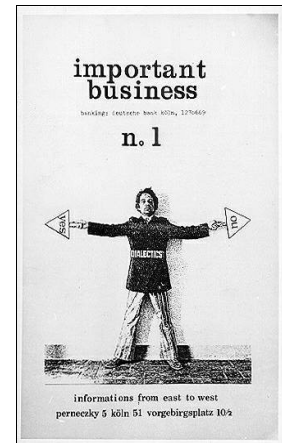
The summer time exhibitions at Balatonboglár had become a catalyst for a public campaign against progressive artists, who became the center of media attention, both domestic and broad. In July 1971, an article appeared in *Somogyi Néplap* (Somogy County Paper) under the following title: "Some Avant-garde Artists Defy the Law: Illegal Exhibitions and Programs in a Leased Chapel," in which reporter demanded organizers of the Chapel Exhibitions account for the illegal exhibitions and for the distribution of propaganda materials, urging district official to start legal proceedings against them.[185]

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181 "Introduction of the 3/A-Type Regulation" for Miklós Erdély, Ministry of Inner Affairs, Management of the Chief Group. III. Gendarmerie, 2/b Sub-Department, 26 April 1969.

182 István Kovács was the name given by authorities to László Rajk Jr, son of show-trial victim and former Minister of Interior László Rajk, after he had been put into an orphanage. The group was headed by Laszlo Najmányi.

183 The performance entitled "The Life and Unfortunate Death of Grigoriy Yefimovich Rasputin," was banned by authorities after appearing at the GANZ Cultural Center without proper permission.

184 Tibor Várnagy, "Hidden Story: Samizdat from Hungary and Elsewhere," exhibition curated by Tibor Várnagy and John P. Jacob, Franklin Furnace, September 27 - November 10, 1990.

185 Horányi, Barna, "Törvénytelen úton néhány avantgard," (Some Avantgarde Artists Defy the Law), *Somogyi Néplap,*

The daily paper *Magyar Hírlap* ran an article*,* "A Bitter-Sweet Stroll at Lake Balaton" denounced the events of the Chapel Exhibitions in daily paper *Magyar Hírlap.*[186] In 1972*,* Hungarian Television (MTV) shot a film on the chapel and its surroundings, which it aired on in the program "Téka."[187] Hungary's trouble-making artists were covered by international press: a program called "The Spotlight of Gallicus" on *Radio Free Europe* commented on the article "Some Avant-garde Artists Defy the Law" published in *Somogyi Néplap*. In January 1972, *The New York Times* ran an article on the Halász Theater group,*"*Hungarians Seek Stage," written by James Fernon, who happened to pick up Halász while he was hitchhiking to Balatonboglár.[188] That same year, a program on the Balatonboglár exhibitions appeared on a German television station, Saarbrücken TV.[189]

Growing attention and conflicts with authorities sparked a response from painter Árpád Illés, who in a letter written on behalf of the older generation, gave Galántai and his fellow artists a "friendly warning" to be careful, cautioning them against organizing happenings, which he called "'irrational, a display of irresponsible bravado which may carry grave consequences.'"[190] He continued: "If the police disapprove of the organization of the exhibitions, they should be ceased for a while. Yet, it is possible to get proper patrons who help obtain authorization and start it legally all over again."[191] That hardly seemed a deterrent: the year marked an apex of oppositional activity, sharpened by continued confrontations with authorities. Artists became more defiant, more radical: Szentjóby, in 1972, performed a solo street action, "Sit Out: Homage to Bobby Seale," in solidarity with American Black Panther, in which he sat for twenty minutes, bound and blindfolded in front of a hotel in downtown Budapest, before police arrived.[192]

1971/07/08. From chronology of events on Balatonboglár provided by digital archive at Artpool.
[186] Chronology of events (1971) on Balatonboglár provided by digital archive at Artpool.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 42.
[189] Chronology of events (1971) on Balatonboglár provided by digital archive at Artpool.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.
[192] László Beke, "The Hungarian Performance: Before and After Tibor Hajas," *Interrupted Dialogue: Revisions in Contemporary Hungarian Ar*t (Budapest: Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide - Soros Foundation, Mücsarnok,

Community of rebels

By 1972, the avant-garde scene had begun to crystallize around a group of the most radical artists, most of whom had been banned or blacklisted, their works prohibited from appearing anywhere in public. This coincided with a burst of underground publishing activities: a *samizdat* project called Imagination/Idea (1971-1972) by art historian László Beke involving 31 artists, along with Beke's solo journal, *Móriczka* (1972-1973); an issue of *Schmuck* (February 1973), an international journal featuring Hungarian artists; and the journal, *Szétfolyóirat* (1972-1973)*,* the truest attempt to create a "classic" *samizdat* journal. All of these projects were intricately connected not only in terms of the individuals involved, but likewise, they went on simultaneously, often in tandem. But it is the project by László Beke, which offers a glimpse into the collective psychology of avant-garde artists, and *Szétfolyóirat,* a project which brought together the most radical members of the artistic subculture, which will be considered in depth.

Imagination/Idea

In August 1971, László Beke launched a project called *Imagination/IDEA*, in which he invited 28 artists to write down on paper, in *text* form, their unrealized art projects—the "IDEA" being that by writing down their projects, they would be "realized." His aim was to "make a situation report on the current state of a few tendencies in contemporary Hungarian art . . . and to find solution for the well-known difficulties of exhibiting, publishing."[193] In the spring of 1972, Beke held an underground exhibit at his home of all the written submissions. More than 80 people, over the course of three months, were taken by appointment into his home to view the materials.

Although Beke had invited 28 artist, three additional artists—István Bálint, Dezső Korniss and

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1992).

[193] László Beke, *Imagination/Idea, 1971: The Beginning of Hungarian Conceptual Art.*" (Budapest: Open Structures Art Society-tranzit.hu). Forthcoming in July 2009. English translations provided to author by L. Beke, 2.

Péter Legéndy—also sent in materials, which Beke "gladly accepted."[194] Beke expressed some

frustration with a number of artists who sent in materials late: "Although most of these artists regarded

my invitation as important, only a few of them met the deadline (wrongly indicated as the 31st instead

of the 30th of September), and I find it typical that some of them only made up their minds to send their

material in December."[195] The project spurred something of a debate among the participants. For

instance, Ilona Keserü sent two letters, the first in which she claimed: "the birth of the work means the

same as the realization of the art object," and for this reason, she rejected the concept.[196] But in a

following letter, she expressed enthusiasm for the idea and submitted a project. Likewise, Péter Donáth

reported doubts over the validity of IDEA, which regarded as "logical contradiction that the idea of a

work could itself be a work," arguing the action could only be regarded as a "desire-satisfying

surrogate," adding the project could be mistaken for "a war of independence fought by art."[197] Beke

responded: "The IDEA is not a triumph over difficulties, but merely an interim solution: a compromise

creating the *illusion* of victory."[198]

Some entries were handwritten; others were typed. Most came, as asked, with specific

instructions on how the project would be realized. Some Beke rejected for not "meeting the criteria of

the IDEA," either because the projects had been carried out or because they were too close to the

"ground of reality."[199] Beke, an ardent proponent of conceptual art, had stepped into his role as art critic

—a realm of discussion which had been increasingly absent in the avant-garde scene, and which had

always played an integral role within Hungary's avant-garde. Since mentioning and writing about

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[194] The artists included: Gábor Attalai, Imre Bak, Jenő Balaskó, András Baranyay, Attila Csáji, Tibor Csiky, Péter Donáth, Miklós Erdély, János Fajó, Ferenc Ficzek, Gyula Gulyás, István Haraszty, Tamás Hencze, György Jovánovics, Ilona Keserü, Károly Kismányoki, László Lakner, Ferenc Lantos, János Major, László Méhes, István Nádler, Gyula Pauer, Sándor Pinczehelyi, Tamás Szentjóby, Kálmán Szíjártó, Dezső Tandori, Péter Türk, István Bálint, Dezső Korniss and Péter Legéndy.
[195] Beke, *Imagination/Idea,* 3.
[196] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 3.
[197] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 3.
[198] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 3. Emphasis added.
[199] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 3.

unofficial artists was prohibited, art criticism, even internally among avant-garde artists, became

virtually non-existent.[200] Hence, while it appears odd, given the constraints on exhibiting, that Beke

would reject any submissions, this demonstrates a concerted effort to maintain the illusion of

"normalcy," of autonomous artistic integrity, within an increasingly restrictive reality.

Conceptualism, meanwhile, had become the mantle of 1960s-era artistic and social movements,

a keynote of the anti-establishment countercultural strategies that rested on re-imagining and

reconfiguring power, inasmuch as it was, for progressive western artists, a radical rejection of

traditional forms and the commercialized art market.[201] But in Hungary and Central Europe,

conceptualism had an added dimension of political subversion, as it had become a strategy of eluding

censorship.[202] Its "immaterial" nature, the "poorness" of the materials employed, based on "words and

concepts, paper and a pencil, typewriter, postcards, a telephone call, ephemeral actions that were "just

an idea," made communication easier but more difficult for authorities to control.[203] The bedrock of

conceptualism turns ideas into products, or as American conceptualist Sol LeWitt insisted: "idea itself

is as much of a work of art as any finished product."[204] To that, Beke added: "the WORK = the

DOCUMENTATION OF THE IDEA."[205]

For this group of Hungarian artists, who had no public space to exhibit, this came with an

intensified obsession with re-conceptualizing *space.* Attila Csáji proposed a building a room, "a huge

box," the walls of which would inflate slowly if someone is inside, forcing all visitors to eventually

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[200] Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 46. According to Forgács: "Erdély...badly missed a formidable opponent, [saying]: 'Most of the critics have ceased critiquing... to reveal the meaning of an independent artwork, that is, to 'scrape it off' the wall as if it were a mural, is a very demanding job, from which the art critics have long distanced themselves. … I need help with the interpretation of a fine and complex artwork, and I cannot perform it on my own work. I can do it when it comes to someone else's work… but when it comes to my own, there is nobody to do the job.'"

[201] Blake Stimson, "The Promise of Conceptual Art," In *Conceptual art: A Critical Anthology.* eds. Alberro, Alexander and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000): x.

[202] Beke, "Conceptual Tendencies in Eastern European Art," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999): 42.

[203] Beke, "Conceptual Tendencies in Eastern European Art," in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999): 42.

[204] Stimson, "The Promise of Conceptual Art," xii.

[205] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 11.

escape.[206] Ferenc Ficzek declared "my objects SHAPE space; my objects CREATE space; my objects DOMINATE space," and wrote: "I imagine a city whose buildings are arranged according to my concept."[207] Gábor Attalai suggested reconfiguring the monuments in Budapest: "In various locations of Budapest, places that show the most exciting spatial possibilities, geometrical monuments are erected. The color of each monument is red. Their size is huge." György Kemény had an idea to replace the lion sculptures on the Chain Bridge with sculptures of poodles:

> By now the lion, as the symbol of strength, beauty, nobility, etc., has become obsolete. We know that the lions of today living in zoos and in African and other reservations are a tame, sorrowful specimen serving as a spectacle for wide-eyed elementary school children and tourists, not to mention the appalling lion acts in circuses...At the same time dogs are enjoying an unbelievably increasing popularity all over the world and their number is growing rapidly. It is probable that in the coming years both the total number of dogs and the proportional number of poodles will increase at an even more rapid pace, and before long they will become, in place of horses, etc. (which will become extinct), the most loyal and virtually the only companion to people. To sum up: the replacement of the lions of the Chain Bridge with the more modern, sociable, amiable and at the same time handsome form of sculpted poodles, who accurately symbolize our economic growth, is entirely justifiable. With the Buda castle in the background they would merely enhance the already acknowledged beauty of our townscape.[208]

One artist, Gyula Gulyás, stitched up a mountain side: "The location would be a wall of the mine in Villány and stitches running up a 15-meter long crack in it intended to prevent the impending collapse of the mountain."[209] Dezső Korniss, member of the older generation, offered his plan for a "space lattice," which can be built on a "flat empty terrain or on top of a hill or mountain," made using either "reinforced concrete," or "corrosion-proof metal," or "copper plates galvanized with gold."[210]

Artist István Harasztÿ, whose projects had been banned a number of times, wrote: "The exhibition is in a basement 4-metres deep underground, sheltered from outside noise and from governmental support."[211] Likewise, Tamás Hencze submitted his idea for an "underground project" which he said could be "constructed in any part of the world on whatever scale is preferred. The

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[206] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 4.
[207] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 25-26.
[208] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 35.
[209] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 5.
[210] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 37.
[211] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 29.

recommended size is as *monumental* as possible."[212] The "underground" was envisioned as a sanctuary, a kingdom even. It was both real—in that radical artists were no longer able to participate even the "semi-public" sphere—and imagined, in the sense that it became a fictitious artistic territory, an "other world," where artists imagined they would be free to create outside pressures from the state, a world that had become in "equal measure an institution and an illusion."[213]

Many came with meticulous detail: "The second vertical line lies at a distance of 71 mm from the first. It originates 5 mm from the upper edge and is also perpendicular to the horizontal line with a length of 121 mm. In the left rubric of the area enclosed by the second vertical line, to the left, it reads: 'Location:' The right side of the same rubric bears the word '*Museum*.'"[214]

This project spawned a spin-off by Gyula Pauer, a "circular letter" inviting 16 artists to submit ideas for works of art on index cards used in museum inventories. He wrote: "*THE INDEX CARD IS THE ONLY DOCUMENT THAT CAN PROPERLY IDENTIFY, AND VERIFY THE EXISTENCE OF A WORK OF ART.*"[215] This inspired a energetic response from artists, many of whom had been excluded from the world of legitimate museums. The museum cards came in with the words "*imaginary*" scrawled across the card, describing their project's condition as "gradually deteriorating."[216] Endre Tót, who was preoccupied with the problem of "nothingness" and "disappearing" submitted an index card with a blank white space.[217] As if to send his fellow artists a tiny "pea-sized" ray of hope, János Urbán, who had emigrated to Switzerland, submitted a "pocket sculpture with light," a "small sized sculpture-like thing which will emit autonomous light for twenty-years or more."[218]

Szentjóby, ever defiant, turned in a photocopy of his ID on the museum card—making a

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[212] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 31.
[213] Hegyi, Lóránd, "Central Europe as a Hypothesis and a Way of Life," in *Aspects/Positions: 50 Years of Art in Central Europe, 1949-1999* (Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, 2000): 32.
[214] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 55, emphasis added.
[215] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 49.
[216] From László Lakner, in Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 8; the "gradually deteriorating," comment from György Jovánovics, in Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 7.
[217] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 4.
[218] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 7.

criminal act into a work of art. In his "index card action for crime and process," he submitted a

photocopy of his own ID, which was illegal to reproduce or photocopy, along with a letter:

> On Oct 27, 1971, the author deliberately violated the prohibitive decree in Paragraph 15
> of the 'Miscellaneous Matters' section on page 30 of r.m./a. The prohibitive decree states:
> It is forbidden to make a certified copy of the identification document or its data.
> The author, in the afternoon of the aforementioned day, copied pages 2 and 3 of his
> identification document (no. AU-IV. 914887) with the help of a shop assistant of
> unknown identity, using the photocopy machine of the Ofotért Photo Shop (Rákóczi út
> 80). By this act, he, on the one hand, committed the crime prohibited by Paragraph 15 of
> the Decree on Miscellaneous Matters, and, on the other, made the unsuspecting shop
> clerk—taking advantage of her helpfulness in offered in good faith—his accomplice."[219]

Szentjóby's cunning radicalism aside, the Imagination/Idea project demonstrates a collective

urge to reshape, rescale, reorder: these artist were holding together mountains, fixing things in concrete,

rearranging cityscapes. Unable to show in museums, they wrote themselves into the inventories. With

this, they were collectively exerting power and control over the physical world—over the spaces from

which they had been excluded—turning the imaginary into the *actual*, through the act of documenting

their ideas. Making text into art, art into text, meanwhile, was not only an experiment in conceptualism,

but was ultimate subversion of the system which, at this point, had become openly hostile to both.

While this has special resonance in the Hungarian context, the strategy of "imagining power"

had become the centerpiece of the youth countercultural movement. For instance, it was the motto

among students at the Sorbonne, who, in their manifesto they had posted to the university's entrance,

announced: "We are inventing a new world. *Imagination is seizing power.*"[220] This follows Marcuse,

who wrote: "Poetry, art, imagination, the creator spirit is life itself, the real revolutionary power to

change the world."[221]

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[219] Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 58.
[220] Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture,* 22, (emphasis added). Or, on a lighter note, the imaginative powers were at work when a group of long-haired "superhumans" — "witches, warlocks, holymen, seers, mystics"—joined together to "levitate" the Pentagon during an anti-protest in 1967, with the aim to "cast mighty words of white light against the demon-controlled structure." See Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture,* 124-125.
[221] Roszak , *The Making of a Counter Culture*, quoting Marcuse, 118.

Szétfolyóirat

This coincided with, in the spring of 1972, the first issue of *Szétfolyóirat*. The journal, the title of which means "writing that flows apart," was a collaborative effort by a group of Budapest's most notorious radicals, well-known by authorities for their "inimical" behavior—most, if not all, were under survellience or "3/a holds," though few were aware of how closely they were being watched. The project included Béla Hap and Árpád Ajtony, who launched the journal, as well as László Beke, Miklós Erdély, Tibor Hajas, Péter Lajtai, Dóra Maurer, Tamás Szentjóby, underground theater artists István Bálint, Péter Halász and his wife Anna Koós, and dissident sociologist and poet Miklós Haraszti.[183] It would be in circulation more than a year before an informant filed a report, by which time the project had fizzled, though copies remained in circulation.[184]

Szétfolyóirat was the clearest attempt to create a "classic" underground journal. It ran five issues before the project unraveled in the spring of 1973. Árpád Ajtony and Ádám Tábor had collaborated to create a literary anthology, but the project fell apart over editorial differences.[222] *Szétfolyóirat* came with instructions: each volume should be made in five copies, then sent to five trustful recipients. Recipients should add a certain percentage of new content, at least 15 pages, and the new material should be sent to five new recipients. Other than the volume made by Dóra Mauer, the editors of each issue were not named, because according to Szentjóby, underground art should be anonymous.[223] Never were more than 25 copies of each in circulation at a time, as the explicit aim was to avoid drawing attention.

Béla Hap, who created the first issue, worked as an editor at Corvina Publishing house, and as Czech and French language translator.[224] He was a regular at Balatonboglár and at Péter Halász's

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[222] Csilla Bényi, "Egy underground lap a 70-es évekből: a *Szétfolyóirat,"* in *Reflexió(k) vagy "mélyfúrások"? A kultúrakutatás változatai a "Kulturális fordulat" után.* eds. Havasréti József – Szijártó Zsolt, Gondolat Kiadó, Budapest–PTE Kommunikáció- és Médiatudományi Tanszék, Budapest-Pécs, 2008: 187-201.

[223] Interview, Szentjóby, May, 2009.

[224] Bényi, "Egy underground lap," 192.

apartment theater and he often invited artists and intellectuals to his flat to listen music.[225] His volume

of *Szétfolyóirat* included experimental poetry, theoretical works, sound poetry by Czech contemporary

artists, poems from his wife, Anna Szeredi, Péter Lajtai and dissident sociologist and poet Miklós

Haraszti.[226] Hap gave his volume for copying to László Beke, Miklós Erdély, Tamás Szentjóby and

Ágnes Körber, a colleague at Corvina.[227]

A second, separate volume was created by Árpád Ajtony, writer and filmmaker, member of the

Béla Balázs Studió (BBS) where he made the films *Six days in Surány* (1972) and *Drama* (1973).

Along with *Szétfolyóirat*, he had written several short stories and a longer occultist treatise, a rejoinder

to theses of Béla Hamvas, titled *Szürke Mágia* (Grey Magic) which remained an unpublished

manuscript until 2002. His volume of *Szétfolyóirat* included poetry and writings by Péter Lajtai, János

Szerb, István Bálint, Miklós Erdély, Tibor Hajas and Tamás Szentjóby. On one page, Ajtony made a

piece of paper with an indigo under it, so if someone pulled the indigo, the following text appeared:

"*Make your invisible wish visible! Ah, laugh at the imperialist publishers!*"[228]

In late 1972, another volume was edited by Péter Halász and his wife, Anna Koós, based on the

volume by Béla Hap. It included writings by members of the Kassák Studió, a translation of an article

reviewing acoustic poetry originally published in the French journal *Ou*, a number of poems by István

Bálint and Péter Lajtai, an essay by Halász entitled "To a piece of yellow paper," which mocked

scientific texts.[229] There was significant tension within Kassák group, debates over the proportion of

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[225] This was confirmed by "Zoltán Pécsi," who reported listening to Stravinsky at Hap's flat in December 1973. In "Szétfolyóirat," Ministry of Inner Affairs, III/III-4-a- Sub-Department, 3 December 1973.

[226] Miklós Haraszti had been under watch by the regime for his radical writings and New Left sympathies since the late 1960s. At young writers' congress in 1969, he had denounced the era of socialist consolidation for abandoning the "final goal" of socialism for the sake of "tranquility." In: Charles András, "The New Left in Hungary," Radio Free Europe Background Report. 1974/1/16, Box: 35-5-1. According to this report: After literary journal published a poem by Haraszti in which defended Che Guevara's "mistakes," he was expelled from university. He later went to work at a local factory, about which he wrote *Piece-work (Worker in a Workers State)* a sociological essay on conditions in a Budapest factory, a manuscript that began circulating in sa*mizdat* channels in 1973.

[227] Bényi,"Egy underground lap," 193.

[228] Bényi,"Egy underground lap," 194.

[229] "Szétfolyóirat," Ministry of Inner Affairs, III/III-4-a Sub-Department, Report filed by "Zoltán Pécsi," 1973 November 20, (Report issued, Jan. 8, 1974).

writings about the theatrical life, which some in the group claimed was too dominant versus writings about the literature.[230] The group planned to edit another volume devoted to theatrical plays, but this fell apart over editorial disputes.[231]

In winter 1972 László Beke also continued the volume of Béla Hap, and at the same time he began to publish his own underground journal, *Móriczka,* which ran two issues.[232] His *Szétfolyóirat* carried a report on an evening gathering with poet János Szerb, an article by Miklós Erdély on pop art and two writingsby Ken Friedman about concept art.[233] Dóra Mauer edited a new volume in February 1973, based on the volume of László Beke. She started a "pseudo journal," *MA,* after Kassák's journal, which ran three volumes (the first was identical with the *Szétfolyóirat* volume, the second was a production of *Schmuck*, the third was a poster-like journal, similar to the Stuttgart journal, the *Um(n)welt* Design).[234] In her issue of *Szétfolyóirat* , she ran a piece by Klaus Groh, along with critiques by Hap and Groh critique of Halász's flat theater.[235]

While each volume reflected the specific characteristics and tastes of its editor or editors, the project in general exhibited a clear attempt to connect with the international scene—Fluxus, op-art, conceptualism. Likewise, the continued appearance of Haraszti's banned poetry, recycled in each of the issues, reflected a growing alliance between radical artists and intellectuals. As with the birth of the "little magazine," *La Revue indépendente*, which brought together the "rebels of politics and the rebels

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230 "Szétfolyóirat," Ministry of Inner Affairs, III/III-4-a Sub-Department, Report filed by "Zoltán Pécsi," 1973 November 20 (Report issued, Jan. 8, 1974).

231 Bényi, "Egy underground lap," 194. The police suggests there were inner tensions around the content of group's volume. In: "Szétfolyóirat," Ministry of Inner Affairs, III/III-4-a Sub-Department, Report filed by "Zoltán Pécsi," November 20, 1973 (Report issued, Jan. 8, 1974). Translated for author by Veronika Csikós

232 *Móriczka* was distributed to people who made seven copies each, and then passed it on. It contained essays, cartoons, and international news. Interview, László Beke, April, 2009.

233 Bényi, "Egy underground lap," 195.

234 Bényi, "Egy underground lap," 196.

235 Bényi, "Egy underground lap," 196.

of art," this journal very much endeavored to do the same.[236] In classic avant-garde style, the journal

came with a manifesto. According to Béla Hap's *A Silent Hungarian Underground* manifesto, carried in

Maurer's issue of *Szétfolyóirat* :

> *WHAT IS UNDERGROUND? Unofficial art. It is an artistic movement that*
> *neither supports nor attacks the establishment, but remains outside of it.*
> *Any attack on the establishment would acknowledge its existence. Being a*
> *real, organized movement would be another form of engaging in the game*
> *of the superficial world. The underground does not forbid its supporters from*
> *political subjects, as it does not forbid or order at all, but the appearance*
> *of such subjects is the private business of the artist. The coordinates of the*
> *underground are freely shifting. What does the Hungarian underground*
> *want? It wants to be a form of unidentifiable, un-analyzable, ungraspable*
> *and incorruptible, outsider art. PRIVATE ART.[237]*

Hap's manifesto expresses the notion of the underground as "outside" society, a world separate

from politics, a notion very much in line with the inward, anti-state trajectory of 1960s-era social

movements. It coincides with what Marcuse called a "*new sensibility,*" a total disengagement with the

dominant culture, a negation of the needs and values on which "the establishment" is based."[238] It is

neither surrender nor defeat: instead, it is the ultimate rejection of state power, establishment values and

traditional modes of confrontation.[239] "The real fight is not the political fight," wrote Marcuse, "but to

put an end to politics."[240]

The volume in which the manifesto appeared would be the last *Szétfolyóirat* issue produced.

Dóra Mauer passed her issue to a group of artists—Alpár Bujdosó, László Fábián and Tamás Vekerdy

—but none continued editing the journal. A number of explanations have been offered as to why

Szétfolyóirat collapsed. Some argue it was "laziness," expressing frustration with the lack of

commitment among artists to continue the chain.[241] That explanation resounds from within the

Hungarian artistic community, especially among those involved. Yet to be sure, the journal itself came

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[236] Poggioli, 11.

[237] Hap, Béla, "Silent Hungarian Underground Manifesto," in *Szétfolyóirat,* February 1973. Translation of manifesto in: István Hajdu, "The Illegal Avant-garde," *The Balatonboglár Chapel Studio,* 116.

[238] Kellner, *The New Left,* 22.

[239] Kellner, *The New Left,* 22.

[240] Roszak , *The Making of a Counter Culture*, quoting Marcuse, 118.

[241] Interview, László Beke, April 2009; interview, Tibor Várnagy, April 2009, this is also noted in Bényi's article, 199.

with a multitude of "rules," some of which proved to untenable, even if for practical reasons alone: each issue was essentially a solo project—except for those involving the Kassák Studió—which shifted what was a rather cumbersome editorial workload onto a single person. Internal strife, especially among the members of the Kassák Studio, seemed to play some role. Meanwhile, the plan itself in some ways backfired: though it was meant to "flow apart," the project instead spiraled inward, around a handful of hard-core individuals, an increasingly small number of which seemed willing to take on the risk, or burden, of the editing tasks.

There is, however, a precedent of short-lived avant-garde and underground journals. It follows the trend of the early 20th century literary-art press which were sporadic publications, limited in circulation, often falling apart as much over internal pressures as external ones—such is the emotional and creative bluster of avant-garde movements and circles. Meanwhile, as Poggioli suggest, the avant-garde journal more a "spiritual endeavor," its value is in the deed, the act itself, rather than in its end-run achievements or in the durability of its theoretical documents.[242] *Szétfolyóirat,* hence, can be measured in this way: its value lay in the act of publishing itself—an act of defiance, of collective deviance, of "psychic liberation"—performed by members within what had certainly become an isolated "military unit," a "community of rebels."

Crackdown

Another explanation for the journal's discontinuation was, simply, it was increasingly dangerous —avant-garde artists and intellectuals by 1973 had come under under intense scrutiny. In the summer of 1973 the Chapel Exhibitions, by that time operating without proper licensing and permissions, had summoned the widest circles of artists and intellectuals. Galántai mailed out 2,000 invitations that May, on which he printed the names of his "circle of friends," including members Kassák Studió, the István

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[242] Poggioli, 24.

Kovács Studió and other banned or controversial intellectuals, artists and musicians.[243] A police file noted the Chapel's visitors included a number of law and medical students, an employee of state radio and television station, as well as a member of the Hungarian writers association.[244] The Chapel that summer became the site of numerous visits from health department officials—who were trying to shut the facility down for sanitary reasons—as well as by members of local and district councils. Likewise, there were frequent police raids and identity checks, and all the while the events were being reported on by a number of different informants. In August, Kassák Theatre staged a week of performances, including two separate performances of their production of *King Kong*, a three-act play which spanned three days. On day two of the second *King Kong* performance, police raided the Chapel at dawn and 17 people were hauled off by police.[245]

Growing concerns around the boldness of radical youth groups prompted an intense state campaign against young artists and intellectuals. Miklós Haraszti was arrested for the circulation of around 11 copies his *samizdat* study, *Worker in a Workers State*, and charged with "incitement against state."[246] In jail, he began a hunger strike and would have to be force fed. András Hegedüs, István Kemény and Iván Szelényi and other members of the "Budapest School" school of sociologists were expelled from the party for having expressed "ideological and political views . . . opposed to Marxism-Leninism and the policy of the HSWP."[247] Ferenc Fehér was arrested in July for attempting to smuggle Haraszti's manuscripts abroad.[248]

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[243] The invitation was mailed in May, according to the Artpool digital archive; a III/III file notes the invitations were not printed legally, and suggests tracking where the materials were published, in: "The assemblies organized at the chapel at Balatonboglár," III/III Department, Chief Prosecution of Somogy County, Kaposvár, August 22, 1973.

[244] "The assemblies organized at the chapel at Balatonboglár," III/III Department, Chief Prosecution of Somogy County, Kaposvár, 22 August 1973.

[245] The first performance of *King Kong* was held August 13-14 and the second performance on August 16-18; the police raid occurred the morning of August 17, 1973. See Artpool digital archive.

[246] See description by György Konrád, "Forward" In Miklós Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism,* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988): xi. Haraszti's *Worker in a Worker's State* (London: Penguin Books, 1977) was published in English translation several years later.

[247] William F. Robinson, "A New Blow Against Hungarian Nonconformists," 6 November 1974, RFE/RL Collection - Background Reports, Box Number 35-5-287.

[248] Robinson, "A New Blow Against Hungarian Nonconformists." "A New Blow Against Hungarian Nonconformists," 6

In late November 1973, secret police caught wind of *Szétfolyóirat* and produced an "action plan" to obtain one of its volumes and to disband the groups involved.[249] There were at least two informants who reported information on the journal, one code-named "László," believed to be artist László Algol, and the other, "Zoltán Pécsi," who was a poet and trusted member of avant-garde who had been secretly feeding police information on various activities since the late 1960s.[250] The reports are lengthy and extremely detailed: there were four reports on this subject alone. While "Zoltán Pécsi" noted the journal appeared "free from any kind of political writings," some could be deemed to have "anti-communist" leanings.[251] According to the bureau report *Szétfolyóirat* has a "dangerous factor, because the editors and the distributors are of an inimical and opposite mind."[252]

Halász's involvement was especially problematic, in the state's eyes: every attempt by authorities to control Halász had failed and by then he had become *les enfants terribles* of Budapest's dissident artists. Since being banned from performing in public in July 1972, his apartment theater had become the center of gravity of Budapest's underground scene. His flat was placed under constant surveillance, its audience members intercepted going in and out, and a number of informants were assigned to record every detail of the scene. Halász's audiences were small, around 20 to 25 people, but often included György Konrád, Miklós Haraszti and occasionally János Kenedi, as well as international avant-garde artists and art critics.[253] Of particular concern was the affiliation between Halász and György Pór, who had been tried and convicted in 1968 for Maoist agitation.[254] By one informer's account, the group's members displayed "anti-social behavior, [and] do not observe the rules of the

November 1974, RFE/RL Collection - Background Reports, Box Number 35-5-287.

249 Folder No. O-16268/2 ("Fishermen") Report on *Szétfolyóirat* and action plan for attaining one of its volumes, Ministry of Inner Affairs, III/III-4-a Sub-Department, 14 December 1973.

250 Bényi, "Egy underground lap," 197.

251 Folder No. O-16268/2 ("Fishermen") Report on *Szétfolyóirat* and action plan for attaining one of its volumes, Ministry of Inner Affairs, III/III-4-a Sub-Department, 14 December 1973.

252 Ibid.

253 Western theater critic Gautam Dasgupta visited the apartment theater in the 1970s, see his reflections on the event at: Gautam Dasgupta "Nature Theatre of New York," *Performing Arts Journal*, 7/1 (1983): 7-20.

254 Folder No. O-16268/2 ("Fishermen") Ministry of Inner Affairs, III/III-4-a Sub-Department, 1974. January 24.

socialist social community life;" and their performances are "injurious to common morality," which borders on criminal.[255] After discovering his activities with *Szétfolyóirat,* authorities planned "the further use of the regulation in order to keep the inimical activity of Halász under a strict control...and to measure the disruption of the group."[256]

The informant, "Zoltán Pécsi," admitted he "regrettably" had published his poetry in the *Szétfolyóirat* volume produced by Halász in 1972. Halász for sure had no idea that "Zoltán Pécsi" was an informer, as he reported having run into Halász and Koós at the Academy of Music on November 30, 1973, when the couple invited him to a performance at their apartment, after looking at him in a "trustful and affectionate way."[257] The following night, "Zoltán Pécsi" went to a small gathering at Béla Hap's flat, where he asked Hap for a copy of the journal, under directions from the secret police. Hap showed certain "signs of retreat and fear," and insisted he had no copies of the first volume but thought Miklós Erdély or László Beke would.[258]

In the middle of December an article appeared in *Népszabadság*, "Happening in the Crypt," denouncing the activities at Balatonboglár, and reporting rumors of "group sex" at the Chapel. The reporter described the gatherings as "immoral," and "a parody of good taste" its members displaying a "hostile attitude," and concluded: "it [is] something a socialist community [can] no longer be satisfied only to write about. It should be prohibited!"[259] Meanwhile, the discovery of *Szétfolyóirat* prompted a heightened effort by the Ministry of Interior to break up radical intellectual and artistic circles. A secret police report from January 1974 came with a 16-pointed plan on how to disband the groups.[260] Halász, Koós, István Bálint, Péter Breznyik, György Galántai, Miklós Haraszti—who had been given an eight-

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[255] Folder No. O-16268/2 ("Fishermen") Ministry of Inner Affairs, III/III-4-a Sub-Department, 1974. January 24.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid.
[258] Ibid.
[259] László Szabó, "Happening in the Crypt." *Népszabadság*, Dec. 16, 1973. In Radio Free Europe, Hungarian Press Survey. No. 2325. 21 Jan. 1974.
[260] Folder No. O-16268/2 ("Fishermen") Ministry of Inner Affairs, III/III-4-a Sub-Department, 24 January 1974.

month suspended sentence—and Tamás Szentjóby, were put on "confidential holds," and two new "network informants" were assigned to the case. While the reports indicate one of the agents had read the copy of the journal, and provided details of what it contained, it is unclear whether the secret police ever recovered an actual copy.

But that spring, an article appeared in the cultural journal *Irodalmi Folyóirat* proclaiming the existence of a *samizdat* journal, stating it was then in circulation in Paris.[261] The secret police suspected that Ajtony, who had defected in February 1973, had taken the journal with him to Paris, which where it was being circulated by "western rightist emigrant circles."[262] László Beke, Miklós Erdély and Tamás Szentjóby were summoned by the Information Office of the Ministers' Council to explain their participation in the *Szétfolyóirat*. They were told they would have to sign a statement attesting to their participation, otherwise they would be turned over to the police.[263] The trio claimed they had no idea what the Minister's Office had heard and that they were not responsible for what was said about them in *Irodalmi Folyóirat*.[264] The three were released, but after this, most of the editors burned their volumes.[265]

In October 1974, the List Publishing House in Munich reported to Radio Free Europe that writers György Konrád, Ivan Szelényi and Tamás Szentjóby had been arrested after a search of Szentjóby home, where a manuscript of Konrád and Szelényi's *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* was confiscated.[266] The report said that the manuscript, which had already been in circulation, contained "evidence of incitement against state institutions" and that the three intellectuals had been

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[261] Bényi, "Egy underground lap," 197.
[262] Folder No. O-16268/2 ("Fishermen"), Report on the Szétfolyóirat and action plan for attaining one of its volumes, Ministry of Inner Affairs, III/III-4-a Sub-Department, 14 December 1973.
[263] Interview, Beke, Budapest, May 2009.
[264] Interview, Beke, Budapest, May 2009.
[265] Bényi, "Egy underground lap," 197.
[266] It was later published: *The Intellectuals on The Road to Class Power* (New York : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

charged with "planning and partially carrying out an act violating the Hungarian penal code."[267] Charges were eventually dismissed, and the detainees were released after being "advised" to emigrate from the country.[268] Szentjóby left for Switzerland before the end of the year.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The state's crackdown in 1972 prompted a wave of *samizdat* projects and oppositional activity, This parallels what Poggioli describes as "antagonism" moments in avant-garde movements, where avant-garde artists gather collectively in opposition *to* society, or in this case, to officialdom.[269] It is when, according to Poggioli, groups begin to display a "sectarian spirit," form collective identities in opposition to "the establishment."[270] That opposition would manifest, albeit privately, in the collective performance of an act that remained strictly taboo: *publishing*.

Beke's Imagination/Idea project brought the full force of illusion into fore: *samizdat* was a road to conceptualizing power. More than accentuating the durability and power of the word, this project affirmed the incalculable potency of the *act* of putting ideas to paper, the transformative aspects of the creative process itself. The documentation of the idea is art, art is the documentation of the idea. It affirmed creative capacity of the mind, the power of the imagination, no matter if, as Beke said, the freedom it was meant to garner was an *illusion*.

Szétfolyóirat was more serious, buoyed by the weight of a movement under pressure. Its contents alone—banned writers, foreign artists, taboo ideas on contemporary art—made it an exceptionally dangerous publication to be affiliated with or to possess, as indicated by Hap's reaction above. It was a "heavy" journal, reflecting the serious moods of artists, many who by then operated in what had become an "underground." Where Beke's Imagination/Idea project was far lighter—playful,

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[267] William F. Robinson, "A New Blow Against Hungarian Nonconformists," 6 November 1974, RFE/RL Collection - Background Reports, Box Number 35-5-287.
[268] Interview, Szentjóby, Budapest, May 2009.
[269] Poggioli, 30.
[270] Ibid, 30.

irreverent—*Szétfolyóirat* oozed with subversiveness, demonstrated by the fact that those in possession

of copies destroyed them once police caught on. But its value is can be sought not so much in its

content or longevity, but for its role as a organizing force *within* the avant-garde. In this way,

Szétfolyóirat gave shape to and membership within a dissident intellectual subculture—as Poggioli

states: "hostility isolates, on the one hand, but reunites on the other."[271]

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[271] Ibid, 30.

Conclusion: Art, Politics, and the "First *Samizdat* Generation"

The arc of samizdat projects, from *Laura?* to *Szetfoiyorat,* mirrored Hungary's avant-garde movement itself—from an initial burst of buoyant experimentalism of the mid-1960s to the more laborious, heady depths of the dissident "underground" by the mid-1970s.

 By 1976, the entire theater group of Péter Halász and István Bálint, along with philosophers Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, György and Mária Márkus, sociologist Iván Szelényi had emigrated to the west.[272] Several artists had already left in the early 1970s, including László Lakner, László Méhes, Krisztián Frey, Gábor Tót, Gyula Konkoly and art critic Géza Perneczky.[273]

Underground publishing in this era moved in stages, beginning with "activism" moments around the first "happening," and early solo *samizdat* journals, and peaked around the "antagonism" moments of the 1970s, where a wave of collective *samizdat* projects appeared during the initial round of state pressure. In the 1970s, artists became more political, more radical, sharpened around opposition to authorities, and as the avant-garde coalesced into a broader dissident intellectual movement.

The circulation of Hamvas' early texts laid the groundwork—ideologically, spiritually—for the emerging avant-garde subculture. While the actual reproduction of those texts revealed some level of disorganization within artistic and intellectual circles, the Hamvas project was immense and very much defied the classic *samizdat* model—these were no slim volumes of poetry or journals passed around in private circles, this was, as Altorjay recalls, thousands of pages "scattered across kitchen tables and flats around Budapest."[274] It reflected, at the very least, an overwhelming demand for Hamvas's texts as

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[272] Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 47. After a short stay in Paris and the Rotterdam, the group moved to New York City where they opened Squat Theater, an avant-garde theater in storefront in Chelsea. The group became the center of alternative cultural life in New York, and in 1981 won an Obie, the independent theater award, for the play, *Mr. Dead and Mrs. Free*. See a review by Roger Copeland, "Squat Theater Explodes Convention," *New York Times*, Oct. 17, 1982.

[273] Forgács, "Strategies of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde," 47.

[274] Interview, Altorjay, Berlin May 2009.

much it showed an insatiable craving for "the forbidden" among young artists and intellectuals. Moreso, it stands as an early indicator of a young generation self-consciously orienting themselves around an alternative "world view." That spiritual turn among Hungary's artists and intellectuals was in step with the mass exodus among the 1960s-era youth generation away from traditionalism and toward mysticism, Zen, the exotic cosmos of one's own mind—or according to Roszak, the inward "trip," toward higher levels of self-examination.[275]

Much of what evolved in the 1960s sprung from "happenings," the advent of which in Hungary transformed both the cultural climate and dynamics within the avant-garde and between the avant-garde and officialdom. Certainly, the events would obliterate the bounds of anything that resembled "traditional" artistic expression—as "happenings" did anywhere, East or West. But the taboo-breaking experience in socialist societies may have carried more energy, a bigger thrill, than those in the West, where "happenings" had, at least in the United States, become a more popularized anti-establishment ritual of the countercultural scene. That the two individuals who commandeered the first "happening" would, within months, each launch *samizdat* publications is an indicator that, at the very least, something revelatory had transpired. The publicity around the event, their newfound dissident celebrity certainly added to the revolutionary boost. Those early *samizdat* projects—Szentjóby's *The Menu*, Altorjay's *Laura?*—were sheer avant-garde experimentalism, meant to shatter taboos, and to revel on the anti-stage the young revolutionaries were busily destroying. It was a performance, an expression of art = life, a "happening," that matched revolutionary thought with radical action.

The burst of *samizdat* journals and projects that appeared in the 1970s operated somewhat differently: most notably, these were group projects, which brought together various avant-garde "circles" in what had evolved into collective, oppositional subcultural movement. Likewise, the underground publications appeared when tensions between artists and authorities had reached an apex, which

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[275] Roszak , *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 63.

demonstrates the inherently reactionary, or defensive, nature of these projects as much as it does the state's role in fueling collective dissent. Namely, it is the *illegality* of the endeavor itself which transforms these collective writing projects into collective acts of defiance, of deviance, of rebelliousness and subversiveness—amplified by and in reaction to state pressure.

The structure of Kádárism itself added to it: the so-called three Ts is some way marked off territory for "prohibited" activities—spots where one might go when one wanted to do the most salacious, forbidden things: the private domain. Cauldrons of dissident activity and "other thinking," these private enclaves provided a sanctuary, where young intellectuals and artists formed close intellectual and creative bonds and social networks that transcended government-controlled channels of communication—where underground publications were planned, produced, distributed and housed.

Yet it is important to look closer at to the "private" nature of these projects: circulated in secrecy, among small circles of artists and intellectuals, the aim was neither to stir the crowds like the 19th century pamphleteers, or to "instruct" the broader public like Romantic bourgeois journals.[276] Nor were artists sitting openly in cafés editing pages of their radical "little magazine." The rebellion at work here was internal—the aim was to stir and to instruct themselves. While this was, in part, due to obvious restrictions, it was also very much in keeping with then contemporary *anti*-political ethos of the era's countercultural movement, and with ideas from Marcuse, who urged for the total rejection the establishment, the "end of politics," and for the new generation's spiritual transcendence from "politics to poetry."[277]

"Artistic" v. "political" samizdat

This draws back to the question of how this of era of underground publishing might be situated within both the broader underground literature and *samizdat* tradition, and how closely these *samizdat*

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[276] Poggioli, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 24.
[277] Roszak , *The Making of a Counter Culture*, quoting Marcuse, 118.

projects resembled a form of "classic," even at a "pre-Gutenberg" stage. Among civil society adherents, *samizdat* is often seen as a step toward the growth of Habermas's "public sphere" and the creation of a democratic political community.[278] The concept of civil society, however, so narrowly configured around western democratic systems, transfers awkwardly into socialist societies. Howard, for instance, offers a widely accepted definition of civil society, which he sees as a "community of citizens, who come together and associate within the public 'space' that is distinct from the individual, family, and friendship networks, on the one hand, and the state and market, on the other. This space consists of intermediary groups, organizations, and associations that are *formally established, legally protected, autonomously run, and voluntarily joined by ordinary citizens*."[279] According to Howard, civil society requires a degree of "routinization and institutionalization," which omits, by definition, protests and demonstrations, social and countercultural movements,[280] informal associations, "unofficial groups," many which are either purposely excluded from or strive to *not* associate with formal state institutions.[281]

Civil society proponent John Keane, for instance, examining the relationship between media and democratic change shows that from the time of the English revolution, the call for "liberty of the press" has been a core aspect of modern democratic revolutions.[282] Yet whether this era of *samizdat* fits that model is questionable: while, to be sure, a push against censorship was at the very heart of the entire avant-garde movement and continued government control over arts and culture was the core idea around which artists and intellectuals would rally. But the movement itself, and the publications it

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[278] This is the dominant perspective from Skilling and 1980s-era *samizdat* scholars, as reviewed in the introduction. See pp. 10-11.

[279] Marc Morjé Howard, "Why Post-Communist Citizens Do Not Join Voluntary Societies," In Gabriel Badescu and Eric M. Uslaner eds. *Social Capital and Transition to Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2003): 116, emphasis added. See also Howard's work on civil society in: *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[280] Scholars treat "civil society" and "social movements" differently. For this see: Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, "Towards An Integrated Perspective on Social Movements and Revolution," in *Ideals, Interests, and Institutions: Advancing Theory in Comparative Politics*. Marc Irving Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[281] Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society*, 39.

[282] John Keane, *The Media and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991): 22.

inspired, was more radical than classic bourgeois upsurges—it was anti-bourgeois, anti-establishment

—entrenched in the 1960-era culture of "antis," and the spirit of avant-gardism, which stood in opposition

to traditional values, modes of behavior, forms of interest articulation, civic engagement and protest.[283]

While this is not argue that those movements were "anti-democratic" or would not somehow contain

inherent democratizing forces, but rather to suggest that in mode, style and mission, this era's *samizdat*

diverged radically from the classic western liberal media model, in which a "free press" is cast as the

defender of liberty against despotic states, a check against state power.[284]

It is in part for these reason that "artistic" *samizdat,* and the "artistic underground," has been so

long overlooked by western scholars: it jostles against western political theory which seeks out forms of

institutionalized political participation, "visible protest" or classic modes of political contestation—street

demonstrations, marches, public petitions—ways in which groups assert a set of civil rights and attempt to

make changes within the existing political system.[285] Hungary's avant-garde would making no such claims

—rather, it was aligned with the countercultural movement's missions to build a new world from the

inside, via "psychic liberation" or "spiritual liberation," one that that foregrounded the revolutionary

capacity of art, and artists, in creating social change. It was a movement fueled by the core avant-gardist

mission that sought to destroy the lines between art and politics, between art and life.

This demonstrates, too, the deficiency of purely content-based analyses of *samizdat*, the effort to

organize by theme, by genre—which extracts the materials from the environment in which they were

created, from its producers, from the scene around which they were created. It has been the pervasive trend

among western *samizdat* scholars to scour content for evidence of political intonation, for signs of

democratic sensibilities, so that we might categorize underground writing by "political," and cordon off

the "artistic," as a separate, lesser category of dissent. Not only has this led to a distortion of the deeply

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[283] Roszak , *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 45.
[284] Keane, *Media and Democracy*, 16.
[285] See the work by social movements and protest by: Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, From Contention to Democracy (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998)

political, the anti-political, nature of so-called "artistic" *samizdat,* but it has missed the point of the activity, of the "deed" itself. Although the subversive, political nature of these publications was not always overtly detectable in its content, the politics of the endeavor was entrenched in the *act* of publishing itself. For as much as we can dice up and evaluate *samizdat*, its most potent and basic force may just come down to what Szentjóby articulated when explaining the motives behind his first *samizdat* project: it was prohibited.

Post-1990: Legacies, Martyrs and Heroes

The legacy of the "first *samizdat* generation" is growing: there is now a hall of now martyrs and heroes where there once stood a blank spot a in the historical record. Among those who were cast off in the 1960s and 1970s, some returned home. Peter Halász, who had gone on to run one of the most innovative experimental theaters in New York, the Squat Theater, returned to Budapest after 1990. He ran an independent theater until his death from cancer in 2006, before which he staged his own funeral at the Palace of the Arts in Budapest—his final life into art, art into life act—an event covered by media all over the world. Halász's imprint on Hungary's cultural history is still unfolding, but already he has become a mythic, nearly sacred figure of Hungary's avant-garde and dissident history.

Many of the most radical participants of the avant-garde have moved on to hold prestigious positions in post-1990 artistic life, and are now in positions to re-make their own legacies. László Beke, now director of the Art History Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, recently mounted his Imagination/Idea exhibit in Budapest, four decades after he had smuggled 80 people into his home to look at those pages of text on a his wall. Szentjóby, who returned to Budapest after 1990, now holds a job as a professor at the University of Fine Arts in Budapest, although he insists he knows nothing about "anything," especially art.[286]

Gábor Altorjay remained in Germany after 1990, and though his stint in the spotlight as radical

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[286] Interview, Szentjóby, Budapest May 2009.

artist in Hungary was brief—from the first "happening" to his journal *Laura?* to his escape from Hungary was a little over a year—his impact is pronounced by the fact that interest in his *Laura?* has only grown in recent years. Altorjay likes to think they had this all planned from the beginning: that one day Beke would be running the Academy of Sciences, that Szentjóby would be a university professor, wielding his enigmatic powers over the next generation. That it all stemmed from the first "happening" that June in 1966, when the police made them famous revolutionaries.

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