

THIS TEXT HAS NOT YET BEEN EDITED.

SCHRÖDINGER'S CAT IN THE ART WORLD¹

By János Sugár, Hungary

1.

The notion of art as a historical, social and if you like, a political construct hasn't always existed. Its existence can be attributed to the increasingly complex organisation of society, which has combated and compensated for its fragmentation with denomination, so that an object which we now consider and name art, using today's meaning of the word, wasn't necessarily considered as such when it was made.

Due to an elaboration of social-political forces, the concept of contemporary art was formed, a phenomenon which gave legitimacy to those art pieces whose reception wasn't clearly proscribed in their time and which required a contextualizing infrastructure of intermediators and interpreters, independent of the piece itself, who were interested in expanding the definition of art beyond traditional categories and beyond such traditional expectations as beauty and harmony. Entering the stage of public life, the elite functioned to undermine expectations. A continuous re-definition of art caused public taste to be radically altered.

Due to the division of labor, different activities could become independent and each began its own appropriate, self-reflexive development. This process became characteristic of art too, and generally effected the emergence of a duality between high and pop culture, whereby the references to pop culture were widely recognizable and those to high culture hermetic.

Art became free of the restrictive expectation to faithfully reproduce reality after technological advances allowed for an objective means of representation unfiltered by the subjectivity of the artist. This kind of representation was specialized, and enjoying the prosperity of its new freedom, it started to progress independently. In the same way that scientific discoveries revolutionised everyday experience, so radical changes in artistic perspective and attitude became apparent. Impressionism, Cubism, Abstraction, Expressionism, Dada, Surrealism and Suprematism represented profoundly different ways of seeing. The avant-garde's individualism was too radical for a totalitarian mentality based on mass-manipulation and so between 1925 and 1940, the Communists and Nazis outlawed avant-garde progress and introduced state art with restrictions on freedom: Social Realism and Nazi Realism. During the bloodshed of the World Wars, the logic of industrialization dictated that war itself was mechanised, even before the mass production of death began. The two wars were immediately followed by a bloodless propaganda or media war which focused national economies on weapons production, innovation and commerce. The weapon production became the main motor of successful national economies, in sense of production, innovation/development and trading. This Cold War reduced politics to arm reduction negotiations so that game theory became one of the most important sciences of the cold war. Contemporary culture became important from the point of propaganda.

This situation in the eastern part of a western culture divided against itself resulted in an intolerably naive and rigid state ideology controlling the concept of art to such an extent that it was eventually abandoned. The western part of western culture accordingly opposed the eastern concept and exhibited a demonstrative support for total freedom of expression.

¹ A long time ago somebody asked the question "If a tree falls in a forest, and nobody is there, is there still a sound?" The problem is, do things happen the same way when nobody can watch them, and can we ever find out? And what if it's not even possible to watch them? Scientists and philosophers have argued about this for a long time.

Schrödinger's Cat: A cat is placed in a box, together with a radioactive atom. If the atom decays, and the Geiger-counter detects an alpha particle, the hammer hits a flask of prussic acid (HCN), killing the cat. The paradox lies in the clever coupling of quantum and classical domains. Before the observer opens the box, the cat's fate is tied to the wave function of the atom, which is itself in a superposition of decayed and undecayed states. Thus, said Schrödinger, the cat must itself be in a superposition of dead and alive states before the observer opens the box, "observes" the cat, and "collapses" its wave function.

Despite the unfortunate fact that this tactic was also the result of a curious historical nonsense, it brought an immense prosperity to the evolution of art. Questioning the function and definition of art then became the principal basis of art activity. Due to generous state support (or at least to a lack of censorship), practitioners of the arts in the western half of the western world succeeded in sustaining the expansion of arts' boundaries, a process which began at the start of the twentieth century. During the cold war period an infrastructure for the reception and interpretation of contemporary art was established which was able to justify the social utility of subversion.

The emergence of the notion of contemporary art was essentially a consequence of the increased attention given to art's continuous inner terminological redefinition. Galleries appeared as alternatives to museums and to popular culture and advertising began to adopt innovative art's efficiency in grabbing attention. In an environment over-saturated with an indigestible quantity of information, influences and experiences, anything that can attract enough attention to itself (even if only for 15 minutes), has an incredible importance.

The oppressive states, which had discovered the manipulative possibilities of mass communication and abused the safeguards of the democratic system, gave propaganda a central role which was maintained throughout the fight against them. Originally conceived of following mass production and the mass media's appetite for news, propaganda easily found its role in the politics of both the representational democracies and the totalitarian, oppressive systems. Naturally, we can't hide the part played by the innovative, free, experimental and penetrating spirit of contemporary culture in supporting utopias and in sustaining blocked and exhausted intellectual paradigms. But we also can't forget that in its radical nature, contemporary culture has always sought critically to examine and reveal manipulations. In so doing, a kind of race has been instituted in which contemporary culture attempts, in an increasingly effective and provocative manner, to engender immunity to malicious manipulations. It does so by revealing the techniques of social manipulation that function on the horizon of social consciousness.

Since the start of the twentieth century, new communications media have been constantly updated by new innovations and appliances and have become more affordable and available to individuals. The consequent consumer behaviour, conditioned by this perpetual change, was first represented in the attitudes of avant-garde artists: through subversive interpretation, that is, the radical testing of the bounds of art's genres and techniques. Since even in one lifetime there were many new techniques and tools to become familiar with and use, the requirement of radically researching possibilities, breaking down conventions and transforming old ways of thinking put avant-garde instruction to the forefront of consumer culture. A large part of the methods of radical avant-garde practice became common in most spheres of commerce (which consequently had fewer preconceptions), because they needed to use the most effective means to capture consumer attention.

At the end of cold war it became evident that state support of contemporary art had been a political decision and not a consequence of the perception that within secularised relations, only culture is able to re-build the connections lost through fragmentation (it's typical that scientific research since the middle of the twentieth century realized the importance of an interdisciplinary approach). No matter how much of a neat conclusion it might have been, the cold war's end, with its apparent hegemony of the complacent and comfort-loving Western states, didn't imply the end of history but rather the predictable collapse of a paradigm of duality.

The elaboration of western and eastern contexts didn't begin within a new and already re-unified western culture. The previous, politically motivated, curious interest turned into a reluctant provincialism. On the one hand censorial tendencies appeared in those places where freedom of expression had been promoted, on the other hand, art's infrastructure became rigid and limited because of the financial profits made during the market interest in contemporary

art. This process has been assisted by a widespread acceptance of the ideological promotion of technology, in which the avant-garde artist's competency in using so called 'new technologies' isn't based on the concept of a free and expressive use of any medium. Rather, it represents an unreflective response to the fast pace of change, which ultimately serves the needs of new innovations with promotional testing. Since the cold war there has been a general return to the commercial, so that today, pop culture is conservative.

Globalisation implies the continuous clash of contexts. Complexity obliges everyone to suffer irresolvable contradictions. The philosophical category of Supercession (Aufhebung) becomes an everyday practice when isolated identities have to appear simultaneously in more than one context, in more than one form. Individual, social and national identities not only acquire new and incredibly efficacious media attributes, but also become multiple and engage simultaneously on a variety of levels. Multicultural homogenization can generate surprising and accidental contexts whose reception confounds well-established mechanisms of social self-definition. Contexts are chained to space and time, and in this sense are similar to living in society.

Modern artists were only able to depart from the isolation of the studio after the realization of a small technical innovation: the tube of paint. At this point, Modern art could branch off from the teleological holistic concept, perceive nature in an individual way and arrive at society; a second nature, transformed by living together. Social-political art is that which demonstratively faces the consequences of being connected to a concrete context, to which the artistic gesture can be interpreted as a direct response. Interpretation of the work against a background of concrete and real social references makes the artistic gesture immediately understandable. At the same time it's necessary to accept that concrete contexts are ephemeral, so that it should be understood that the most important characteristic of art works created in this way will be that of the contextual vacuum created after the actuality has passed. A realization of this contextual vacuum is, if you like, the most important task for each artist. The differences are in the way that they achieve this goal; randomly, through private mythology or through the use of ephemeral and perishable social conflicts. Both strategies are authentic, indeed, avant-garde artists' famous capacity for adaptability, also called 'total competency', demands the adoption of both of them. It is also demanded by the distracted condition of the fragmented, globalized information societies, which can pass by a phenomenon and various forms of human suffering with a self-assured indifference.

The fundamental component of art is attention. We already know what kind of utopian attention can be generated through prohibition. What will the future of this attention be in the era of social reorganization?²

2.

There is a totally invalid presumption, namely that the fall of communism caused effects only in East-Central Europe. The fall of the iron curtain was the long awaited end of a paradigm (the Yalta, or the three-player-game paradigm), the end of approximately 50 years of division within the western culture. This division led to a hostile separation between the rich, mainstream west-western countries and the peripheries, the poor, communist "east side"³ of western culture. In the last chapter in this three-player-game the main battlefield was propaganda, and contemporary art played the role of a sort of a Manhattan project. The west-western politicians were totally unprepared for the end of the game, an end in which they also have had to give up their comfortable positions. They thought that they had simply won, and everything would continue as it was, and they had no doomsday scenarios. This led to several

² A slightly different version of this text is included in *The Subsol Reader*, edited by Joanne Richardson, due to be published later this year by Autonomedia, NYC

³ "lower east side"© by Luchezar Bojadjiyev

tragedies, including the war in the Balkans. This is the so-called Fukuyama Failure of west-western intellectuals.

The role, the social function of art is no longer the same as before. After the dismantling of the iron curtain, massive global communications, and the increasingly seamless nature of politics/culture/entertainment, the cultural environment changed completely after its comfortable Cold War situation. Since 1990 a lot of new states emerged in East-Central Europe, and the political elite changed everywhere, and along with their new priorities they look at contemporary culture as a vehicle constructing/reconstructing national identities.⁴ On the west-western side significant cutbacks took place, the magnanimous state support of artistic radicality stopped, and with this downsizing the arts infrastructure integrated into the attention industry.

Maybe the single most important thing that changed in East/Central European art after the fall of communism is that contemporary art became less context-bound. Previously there was a very strong repressive attention, a manipulated public life, and censorship, and because of this the general public lost its trust in official forums and learned how to read between the lines, how to take the context of repression into consideration. This formed a strong attention rooted in a kind of social solidarity, but now this is over. Recent works can be understood with greater ease, with less attention, because they are less context-based, more viewer-friendly, and one doesn't have to know the whole sad history of a complicated country to decipher an art piece.

But the situation today is not anymore that naïve and optimistic consumption-centered, upon which earlier the contemporary culture characteristic of Cold (propaganda) War alignment could be built in the West. Now, in this changed new situation the traditional value systems of the popular and the elite have been overturned; the popular has become the dismal terrain of political and commercial marketing manipulations and the previously rightfully scorned elitism is rendered progressive, locally capable of resisting manipulation, a positive value. From the popular manipulative demagogue and commerce can be expected, while from the elite comes direct, i.e., non-mediated (sensory, real-time) experience that can only be directly lived through.

The role of the artist today is to cause problems, producing disturbances in the present, especially nowadays in a world where an easy entertainment aspect is more and more taking over. The artist today should provoke and produce that which is not understandable in an environment where everything is consumable, light and comfortably transparent. In a totally globalized world in which infotainment and political/commercial marketing work in a technical/medial convergence, art, whatever its medium, should keep a spirit of criticism towards any type of prefabricated opinions.

I consider it neither an accident nor a condemnable attitude that there are only “west-western” artists in representative positions within the attentions of the western visual arts. After the disappearance of the Cold War set up, Eastern Europeans lost their political sex appeal, no one is interested anymore in deciphering and integrating their complicated contexts. The west-western art infrastructure looked for new, different territories. Parallel with this big politics also lost its interest in Eastern Europe. The Cold War boom is over and we have to suppose that eventually we follow an outdated model in so far as we consider the west western publicity as an ultimate target. Is it possible to insert back to East/Central European visual art in the official (west western) art history? Does it have sense to recontextualize something into an invalid model? It is a sort of utopia. Why would the toplist way of thinking be still acceptable and valid? (From this point I would pay my late tribute to the ingenious Willi Bongard.) Could a toplist top attention?

3.

Hungary entered the 20th century with a national shock, as in the 1920 Paris peace treaty it lost two third of its territory. Before that Hungary was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and looking back from a historical distance we can say it was somehow until 1920

⁴ In Hungary approx. 800 statues of St. Stephan, the founder of the Hungarian State, crowned in 1000, were erected in 2001.

the best-functioning Central East European community, from Prague to Bucharest, from Belgrade to Budapest. This shock led the country inevitably to the 2nd World War and gave an easy argument to populist politicians when Nazi Germany promised restitutions to the Hungarians. And the end result was that the Yalta treaty placed Hungary among other countries in the Soviet world. This process damaged the national identity, as from a big country Hungary became a small one which has continuously to look for bigger brothers.

With the end of the 2nd World War a short democratic period started in Hungary, the so-called coalition times, in which besides the communist party all the other democratic parties governed the country until 1948-49. In the official lingo a “year of turning” came in 1949, in other words a communist take-over, leading in a very short time to a cruel Hungarian Stalinism. The atrocities of the latter led to the spontaneous and courageous uprising in 1956. I think that '56 Revolution was a watershed for Hungary. This became a long-standing trauma for the politicians as well.

Then came the regime of János Kádár, who after the bloody repression of the uprising, in which about 300 people were executed, introduced a special Hungarian type “goulash communism” starting in the 60's. We have to admit this was a kind of novelty, a sort of a communist consumerism fuelled by western loans and credit. After '56 the politicians had to provide some perspective, some optimism, to the people -- and for themselves as well. That's why Hungary could become a bit more liberal while the other East Block systems became more rigid. Hungarian censorship was based on three principles: support, tolerance, and banning. (Támogatás, Tűrés, Tiltás) In practice the communists used the system intelligently, banning only a few, tolerating a lot and continuously dissolving previous bans. The heavily censored intellectuals were less harassed than in the other communist countries and were mainly forced to emigrate. People were allowed to travel every 2 or 3 years; traffic in information was relatively strong and cultural life *in general* was not bad in Budapest -- there were exhibitions, classical music, a good choice of movies, etc. Book publishing was relatively OK, since most of the tolerated/banned writers had translation or editorial jobs for living, and a broad selection of well translated literature was published. The situation in social sciences, philosophy was completely the opposite, the most important western writers were translated, but published only three hundred numbered copies for the selected party members. The important cultural decisions were made in the highest echelons of the communist party. Public culture was strongly controlled: there was censorship but a vital underground art scene – a so-called “second publicity” (a sociological notion and common term used to denote the cultural underground in repressive societies) started to exist. This real underground or "second publicity" featured art shows, pop and contemporary music concerts, performances, samizdat, etc. – with real personalities and with a strong moral position. Looking back, for me it was like an incubator or a natural park: it wasn't difficult to survive, there was lots of time for talks, meetings, discussions, intensive contacts, partying and of course in most cases not the slightest hope of a practical result. There were no contacts with the so-called “first publicity”, which was the realm of the general public. It was only access to the general public and the mainstream media that was censored, not cultural production itself. The single and most cruel restriction for culture was in fact the blocking of the avenues needed to reach a broader public. As a result there was no competition between the old and new, no aggressive cultural memes, no random spread of cultural inspiration. Only insiders knew about the best things going on in art. It's somehow like a philosophical problem: can anything be valid if no one knows about its existence? Schrödinger's cat in the art world. This situation caused serious damage, not just in art (which became hermetic and context-bound), but also in the general public. People couldn't know anything about this booming period, about this creative capital. It's tragically disadvantageous that even the greatest booms of prosperity benefit only a few hundred people, with censorship restricting the general public from progress. This is exemplified exquisitely by the problem of the samizdat, which due to the necessary

conspiracy required for its production only reached those for whom it was not so shockingly new.

If someone in a library goes through the papers and magazines of that period won't find any reference, any news or mention about what was really happening, what we consider important now. It's tragic, because the majority of the actual decision-makers and politicians of today are the so-called average people of yesterday -- formerly normal people who had no extra information source besides state media.⁵

Today in Hungary, as it is general, I think, in the former Eastern Block countries, the previous strong, censorship generated attention on art production has disappeared, and people are not able to invest attention into reading between the lines. The perception of contemporary art is now characterized by a special kind of attention-deficit-disorder, where the non-commercial activities are less visible.

4.

4.0

If we start the story with 1945 we have to mention a few previously known avant-gardists who earned their reputations internationally in the 20's and 30's. Maybe the most important were Lajos Kassák (1887–1967) and Sándor Bortnyik (1893–1976).

Kassák, who from 1910 was the leading figure of the Hungarian avant-garde, was a poet, writer, editor, publisher, and activist, and he worked in many areas of visual arts, from typography to painted relief's. Mainly, however, he made prints, collages and paintings. Kassák belonged to the hard core of the European avant-garde. Between 1949 and 1956 he was banned from the cultural life of Hungary. Sixteen works represented him in the big Dada exhibition in Paris in 1966-67. He became the symbol of purity among the young artists of Hungary.

Bortnyik's career is similar, but with a few significant differences. He started in 1910 as a talented graphic designer and during the same time studied at the best painters. He met Kassák in 1917 and became an avant-gardist through him. Bortnyik lived abroad for a while and both the Dada movement and the Bauhaus had a strong impact on him. Because of his designer side he treated art with a certain distance, and his collages and paintings always had some grotesque elements. He earned his international reputation during the period between 1920 and 30s. An active leftist after 1945, he supported the communist (cultural) policy with full commitment. In contrast to his master Kassák, he became a darling of the Hungarian communists, and for twenty years he earned all the prizes and awards of the Hungarian State. He painted a series of caricatures, among others of the masters of modern art. At the end of his life he made replicas of his early work.

4.1

Miklós Erdély, (1928–1986)

Erdély, a filmmaker, poet, writer, conceptual artist, and painter, is unquestionably the most important Hungarian artist of the second half of the 20th century. He had an unprecedented way from the poetical/scientific, interdisciplinary conceptualism to the most innovative, post informel painting. Between 1974 and 1985 he made five long 16mm films, creating a new category of *cognitive film*, a (long awaited, possible) step beyond experimental film. In his films he always investigated something, from the viewer's perception to the truth-content of a particular story. Thus, cognition/understanding of reality with the help of the film medium. In the deepest stagnation of the mid 70's he started a unique activity, a *creativity course* for young people which later became the *Indigo* group. I would like refer here to one of his works which was his contribution to a big avant-garde show in 1980, at the retrospective of the legendary *Iparterv* show of 1968. In this work he shows the proportion of his ideas to their realization in time. We can see how an artist full of ideas could feel in a repressive

⁵ I guess Hungary is not the only country in the former Eastern Block where such a national art history capable of synthesizing formerly official and unofficial art productions is missing.

environment full of aborted ambitions. His (personal) solution was to work with young artists in the Indigo group. From the early 80's until his death in 1986 he worked with the medium of drawing, installation art and painting.

Erdély influenced most of his contemporaries in different ways, and there is rather broad consensus on his significance within the Hungarian arts scene. Many of the leading personalities in Hungarian art either belonged to his circle or were in contact with him. Meanwhile his career was typical in that he had no official acknowledgement, and remained totally unknown to the majority of the general public. For the authorities he was a disliked person from 1956 until his death – his art irritated them. (During the revolution in '56 he put out in broken Budapest storefronts boxes with a shield: “Unguarded Money, The purity of our revolution allows us to collect money this way for families of the victims of the fights”. Even now Erdély's activity is unknown for the conventional wisdom of the Hungarian intelligentsia.

4.2

Tamás St. Auby (Szentjóby) (born 1944) / IPUT

The most important contemporary artist in Hungary. He started as a poet and conceptualist. He was extraordinary influential, but the most indefinable figure of the Hungarian avant-garde. He made happenings and was involved in concept art and fluxus. He was censored because of his artistic radicalism, in 1974 he was arrested and in 1975 the authorities forced him to leave the country. He lived in Switzerland, in 1976 in Geneva he established IPUT (in Hungarian: TNPU), or the *International Parallel Union of Telecommunication* (which is since then a kind of cover up institution of part of his activity, in some cases he refers to himself as the interim dispatcher of IPUT). During his emigration he had no professional contacts with Hungary and returned only in 1991, when he applied to run a small Budapest gallery, *Bartók 32*, which under his one and a half-year directorship in the spirit of *Unikon* became a leading gallery, presenting mainly young, non-commercial artists. In 1991 he was invited to the newly-established *Intermedia* Department of the Hungarian Art Academy in Budapest, where he has been teaching ever since. Not surprisingly, given the above, he made a strong impact on the young art scene of the 90's, both with his art and his other activities. (In contrary to other members of his generation he refuses commercial aspects not having sellable art production.)

In 1992 he realized (after the idea of Julia Lorrensy) the *Statue of Liberty's Soul*, which was a huge white cover with two black dots (at the place of eyes) on the Budapest and the country's landmark Statue of Liberty. This was the time when the removal of previously, during the communism-erected monuments, was on agenda, but this was the only attempt to change not the physical place but the spiritual content of such piece.

In 1996 St. Auby was given the opportunity to use all of the space of the newly renovated Budapest Kunsthalle (that time director László Beke), and he exhibited 3334 “Baddrawing” (titled with “Badtitles”), all of the same size, on the walls. The only object was a monumental modernistic wooden throne. The title of the show was CATABASIS SOTERIOLOGIC, and it had virtually no critical feedback.

4.3

György Jovánovics (born 1939)

Jovánovics studied for two years abroad in the mid 60's after attending the Budapest Art Academy (he was one of the few, if not the only, to be allowed to do so), and later too; he lived abroad regularly, mainly in West Berlin with a DAAD grant between 1980 and 1983.

In 1968 he initiated the Iparterv Exhibition, which became a generation's landmark exhibition, in which he presented his Lying Figure (1969), a white plaster cast of a man lying on red plastic foil. The piece was highly praised, by Miklós Erdély among others, and indeed it represented something completely different from the

contemporary attitude of that time, seeming to embody minimalism, pop-art and conceptuality in a very original way. His simplicity of approach made him rather different than his contemporaries.

His other important piece was a large, irregular, table-like plaster cast, which followed the complicated floor plan of the exhibition space in 1970. Mainly all of his works are white and made out of plaster.

From the mid 70ies he moved toward a complicated narrative of projection and illusory spaces, in which he gave more and more sophisticated contexts for his black and white photographs of the different mirrored images of a lifesize, dressed, plaster figure, Liza Wiathruck. From the 80's on he makes larger, architectural, abstract plaster reliefs and a few large-scale installations based again on a complicated system of art historical references and quotations.

From 1991 on he taught sculpting at the Hungarian Art Academy. In 1992 he won the competition for the Memorial of the Martyrs of the 1956 Revolution – with the resulting work seen by many (including himself) as his most important sculptural statement.

In 1995 represented Hungary at the Venice Biennial.

4.4

In this point I have to mention a film studio, the famous **Balázs Béla Studió** (BBS), which was established in 1960 and soon became the home of experimental films (also of documentaries and poetic short films). Since it had a triennially changing five member board, from the 1970's on artists from other areas, for example visual artists and musicians, could realize short, experimental films there. The BBS was a unique phenomenon in the Eastern Block: in the ocean of counter-selection a little, state-sponsored island for progressive usage of filmic expression and challenging the political tolerance. The BBS produced critical documentaries and independent/experimental short which were rarely shown.

One of the most important board member was the filmmaker **Gábor Bódy** (1946–1985), who remains one of the Hungarian directors that is best known internationally (a group including Miklós Jancsó, Márta Mészáros, István Szabó, Béla Tarr, Ildikó Enyedi). Gábor Bódy represented a very strong intellectual attitude in filmmaking. In 1973 he organized the first experimental film project of the BBS, a film series on the Language of the Cinema, involving other filmmakers. His broad range of activities earned him the role of a central figure from the mid 70's until he committed suicide in 1985. From 1975 on his films earned him international success; he received several festival prizes for his feature films, which included “Narcissus and Psyche” (1980) and “The Dog's Night Song” (1983). Although from 1982 Bódy lived more or less abroad, mainly in West Berlin during the boredom of 80's he energized the Budapest art scene in many ways. He initiated projects, and represented a fresh, co-operative internationality. His innovation was in linking technology with philosophy, a linkage which appears in his films as a very consciously-controlled visuality. And it may be because of this that he understood what video is best. From the early 80's he became a leading figure on the international video-art scene. He was the founder of *Infermental*, a video art magazine on VHS tapes, and several other international cooperations, like EMAN (European Media Art Network), he published books on video, and had a teaching job in WestBerlins Film and TV Academy. While he was preparing a new film he also continuously made video works. One of his aim was to produce philo-, liro-, mitho-clips. [his own terms, *De Occulta Philosophia*, 1983, 13Min; *Dancing Eurynome* 1985, 3Min; *Walzer* 1985, 3Min; *Theory of Cosmetics* 1984-85, 12Min] Before his death he worked on a feature film on Bauhaus. One strange new development in his story came to light in 2000, when the opening of Hungary's secret police files revealed that he had spied on his closest colleagues and friends⁶ in the 70's.

⁶ after in a weekly published original document, thanks to his report the authorities successfully blocked the invitation of Miklós Erdély and other leading representatives of Hungarian contemporary art on the Venice Biennial, in mid 70's.

One artist who can be considered a follower of Bódy in at least in one way is the video artist **Péter Forgács** (born 1950). Since 1983 Forgács has run the *Private Photo and Film Archive*, and he became famous with his carefully edited compilations of Hungarian private or family's films of the 20's, 30's, 40's, etc. The first piece of his "Private Hungary" series was made in 1988; recently he finished the 12th. Beside this series he also makes documentaries and video art. Starting in the early 90's he received awards at the most important international festivals.

One very important achievement was the **Balaton Boglár Chapel Exhibition** series from 1970–73, which was initiated and organized by the Budapest graphic artist, **György Galántai** (born 1941). This exhibition- and event-series served as the most important forum for artistic meetings and exchanges for four years, until the Ministry of the Interior finally closed it down. Several years later, in 1979, the same artist established the **Artpool** as a consequence of his mail art activity. Since that time the Artpool has organized exhibitions, events, and publications mainly in co-operation with the international mail art community. After 1989 they enjoyed the support of the city of Budapest and opened a new space in the center of the city. The Artpool functions as a public archive as well, with the most extended, professionally-organized archive on Hungarian non-official art of the 60's, 70's, and 80's, plus one of the largest and best-known archives of mail art. They organize events, festivals, and exhibitions on a regular basis and even run a small gallery. As a natural medium for their activities they use the web very consciously, and all information on the Chapel Exhibition series, on Artpool, and on György Galántai can be found at the Artpool's website: www.artpool.hu. (The site is an excellent source for many other topics; a bilingual publication of the Chapel Exhibition series will come out soon.)

4.5

Gyula Pauer (born 1941)

Pauer started as a sculptor with no academic background. (in the 60's and 70's the admission to the Academy of Fine Arts was unrealistically difficult and limited, and that's why certain artists had no chance to enrol.) He worked as a decorator and from the early 70's he started to work as a stage designer for what at that time was the most progressive state theater, in Kaposvár. His stage designs revealed a strong visuality and sense of concept; he had a big part in the success of that theater. Parallel with this activity he developed the concept of Pseudo-Art. (see: Gyula Pauer: The Manifesto of the First PSEUDO Exhibition. Budapest, October 1970)

In 1978 Pauer created the *Forest of Demonstration Signposts*, 131 signs of the type protesters used to held at demonstrations, stuck in 400m² of ground in natural surroundings. The texts on these signs were rather poetic. The original work was destroyed by the authorities the day after it was set up. In 1996 the C3 (Center for Culture and Communication, Budapest) made a virtual remake of this monumental piece.

From the 80's on Pauer concentrated on the human body, creating the pseudo sculpture of *Maya*, and he became interested in plaster-casting the naked human body. Besides his sculptural work he is now an independent art director and set designer.

4.6

Indigó group (1978–86)

The Indigo group was active between 1978-86 in Budapest and was organically integrated in the progressive art scene of this period. Members of the group were young artists and intellectuals whose activity was barely tolerated and sometimes prohibited outright. The name of the group is a shortened form of the Hungarian for "interdisciplinary thinking"(interdiszciplináris gondolkozás) and at the same time it refers to carbon paper (indigo) as an art medium. Indigo as a medium and a way of thought combines the essential ideas of the avant-garde art of the 70's: reiteration, sequence, conceptuality, intermedia. The leader and spiritual father of the group was Miklós Erdély, and among the group members we can mention such artists recently renowned abroad as András Böröcz, Ildikó Enyedi, László Révész, János Sugár and János Szirtes. We can regard the consecutive *Creativity Exercises* (Krecso) and *Fantasy Developing Exercises* (Fafej) -- art education courses conducted by

Miklós Erdély -- as antecedents of Indigo which can be conceptually paralleled with the results of creativity research both in the USA (Watzlawick et al) and in Europe (E. Landau) and with the mentality of Fluxus (J. Beuys, R. Filliou). Dóra Maurer and György Galántai also contributed to the direction of the Creativity Exercises. (The most complete documentation concerning Indigo can be found in the Artpool Art Research Center in Budapest established by György Galántai.) The way of thinking developed during these courses was objectified in exhibitions. At the beginning, the participants made environments collectively, and in some cases they also presented performances at the opening of the exhibitions. Through devising and creating these environments the group functioned as a creative entity, using the paradoxicality of collective artwork. The exhibitions were characterized by questioning and trying to expand the limits of contemporary concepts of art, and they primarily concentrated on mediativity. The group's creative method was built on processes well-known nowadays, such as brain-storming and group therapy. At the beginning of the 80's the group's inner collaboration gradually loosened, and their exhibitions consisted of individual works mostly belonging to the genre of installation and object. In 1981 they took part in the *Postconceptual Tendencies* show of *Tendencies* exhibition-series that represented the Hungarian art of the 70's. In 1982 they were invited to the Paris Biennial but they didn't receive official permission to leave. In 1982-83 they worked at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest where, by creating a drawing course, they practised drawing's imitative-constitutive and subjective-gesture-like characters on the basis of themes previously worked out. Their exhibitions usually took place at the cultural and educational centers of factories and at the centers of the underground culture of that period (i.e. The Young Artists' Club, The Bercsényi Club). The group established an alternative to the academic art education in the détente decade, and it provided a spiritual community for one of the greatest Hungarian post-war artists, Miklós Erdély, who received extremely little academic appreciation during his life. (by Sándor Hornyik)

4.7

András Böröcz (born 1956) / László L. Révész (born 1957) Performances 1977–87

Both promising students of painting at the Art Academy and members of the Indigo group. Along with the painter Gábor Roskó they followed a kind of narrativity in their painting, something which had no real tradition in Hungary, and it was completely new at that time. Perhaps as an extension of their painting they developed a special type of performance in which they analysed one topic, in the most different ways in a theater-like environment, and with a series of actions they constructed a dream-like absurd narrativity. They always used an outstanding young philosopher, Gábor Bora of the Uppsala Universitet, to read of texts. In most of their performances they wore costumes and had clumsy props, and they also invited other artists to participate in their performances, including musicians, singers, and dancers. Their big performances were proposals for a new type of theater with a revue concept. These real big productions that included films as well, took about half a year of preparation. They invented something which could lead (in a friendlier environment) to a new type of theater. In 1986, along with the painter and performer János Szirtes, they got invited to the *Fete Permanente* performance section of Documenta 87, thus becoming the first Hungarian artists in Documenta.

Since 1987 they haven't made any performances. Böröcz lives in Brooklyn and does grotesque sculptural works using carved pencils. Révész, who lives in Budapest, is an important painter, and his narrative style has several followers. He has worked for TV programs and made experimental films, and besides painting he works on multimedia projects.

4.8

I must mention three institutions which are rather different, but playing an equally important role:

Liget Galéria (ligal@c3.hu)

Run by the artist Tibor Várnagy since 1983, this small gallery has an excellent international record. In the last 20 years the Liget Gallery produced a series of important events. Artists around the gallery represented the new wave of photography.

Knoll Galéria (knollgaleria@elender.hu, knollgalerie@aon.at)

In 1988 Hans Knoll, a Vienna gallerist working with Hungarian artists, decided that instead of a new heating in his gallery he would open up a new branch gallery within the Eastern Block. He opened his Budapest gallery in 1989 with Joseph Kosuth, and since that time the Knoll Gallery has been functioning. Knoll organized not just gallery shows but also a broad scale of the most different forms of co-operation, from group shows to book publications, from curatorial education forums to open studio programs. He's very active in most of the Central and East European countries.

FKSE (Studio of the Young Artists Association, studio@c3.hu)

In its name this is a follow-up organization to the (former) official association of young artists, but in the meantime it has become a unique agency-type institution which is extremely active nationally and has a lot of international contacts too. This is a launch-pad for many young artists, curators, and writers under the age of 35. The association has the right to ask elderly members to join to its senior membership. The association organizes international exchanges and curated group-shows annually. They have a small gallery too.

4.9

At this point I have to include myself. Besides the Art Academy I belonged to the Indigo group and through it to the underground scene. It was a perfect experience at a time when there were no practical perspectives. I started exhibiting when I was kicked out of the postgraduate program.

János Sugár (born 1958)

Sugar studied in the Department of Sculpture at the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest (1979-84) and worked with *Indigo*, the interdisciplinary art group led by Miklós Erdély from 1980-86. His work includes installations, performances, as well as film and video. He has been teaching art and media theory in the Intermedia Department of the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts since 1990, and has exhibited widely throughout Europe including at Documenta IX, Kassel (1992), Manifesta I, Rotterdam (1996). He completed an Artslink residency at the Cleveland Institute of Art in 1994, and fellowships at Experimental Intermedia, New York (1988 and 1999). His films were screened at the Anthology Film Archive in New York in 1998.

Among Sugar's early pieces was a large installation (*Exhibition Set*) in 1985 which was also the set for a film he made (*Persian Walk*, 1985, BBS) (see more in the interview made by Cs. Polonyi: 99PolonyiJS); and a theatrical performance in which two opera singers sang about video-technology (*Immortal Culprits*, 1988). He also had a performance series for 5 years between '84 and '88 titled *Fastculture*.

4.10

Tamás Komoróczy (born 1963)

Komoróczy studied painting at the Art Academy and was a member of the **Ujlak Group**, (Ujlak csoport, 1989 – 96), the most important group formation of the late 80's, in which young visual artists (Komoróczy, Kálmán Ádám, Zoltán Ádám, Gábor Farkas, András Ravasz, Péter Szarka, and István Szil) worked in a very intensive atmosphere together. They staged their events in squatted places, in the spirit of intimate, Arte Povera type conceptualism. They started in an abandoned cinema where they ran a very good gallery

program with one-night exhibitions. When they had to give it up in 1990 they moved to a small factory-type loft, continuing their gallery activities, inviting foreign artists, and publishing catalogues. When they had to move yet again they got a proper small gallery called UFF. That went well for a while but as the group's activity finally moved toward an emphasis on individual work, the gallery closed down.

Tamás Komoróczy has always had a sensitive, intellectual but very diverse and energized body of work and activity. Early in his career he mainly made installation art, and from the 90's he turned increasingly to the techno scene, computers and digital video. He has a strong, intensive graphic language, making rolls of digital prints and using them as wallpaper. He tends to present an absurd narrativity in his video works.

In 2001 he represented Hungary at the Venice Biennial.

4.11

Intermedia Faculty of the University of Fine Arts, Budapest (1990+)

Head of the Faculty: Miklós Peternák; Members: János Sugár, Tamás St.Auby, Zoltán Szegedy-Maszák, József Tillmann, Zoltán Sebök, etc.

This new faculty at the 150-year-old Hungarian Art Academy (since 2000: University of Fine Arts) started work right after the political changes in 1990. From 1993 it has the legal status of a university faculty, so beside the traditional faculties of sculpting, painting, graphic art etc. students can choose Intermedia for their studies. The Intermedia Faculty focuses on art, new media and science/theory. This may be the first program in a Hungarian (East European?) art institution, which is based on the new, post-cold war, media-conscious set-up. Intermedia gives a professional education in digital media, both in practice and in theory, but the so called old media (drawing, photography, film, video) is also present during the 5 years of studies. A majority of Intermedia's graduate students are very active in the young arts scene and definitely not only in digital arts. In seeing its influence we can risk saying the Intermedia is not just the new faculty of an old Academy, but possibly a new artistic paradigm for a new global situation.

<http://intermedia.c3.hu/>

<http://www.intermedia.c3.hu/theory/index.html>

4.12

Róza El-Hassan (born 1966)

El-Hassan studied sculpting and got her degree in the years of political change in 1989-90. Her main characteristic is to connect conceptual, scientific and political content to such classically sensitive art forms as sculpture and drawing. In her case it may be worth warming up the category of context art (© P. Weibel). Early in her career she concentrated on creating minimalist objects, later she moved more to physical and social situations.

First Hungarian participant in Aperto in 1993.

Manifesta I. Rotterdam, 1996

In 1997 represented Hungary at the Venice Biennial.

4.13

Attila Csörgô (1965)

Csörgô studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest then went to the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam for a year. His art works are in most cases carefully designed complex mechanical machines that produce an unusual, or a strange, nonsensical/virtual effect. His works are often similar to demonstrational objects intended to illustrate a scientific or mechanical thesis. One of his early pieces was a rotating small barrel-like container containing oil, the thick brown surface of which became a perfect mirroring half-sphere because of the centrifugal rotation.

In 1999 represented Hungary at the Venice Biennial.

4.14

In the East-Western societies the cultural peripheries turned to each other instead of turning to a completely impenetrable Center. They started to communicate with each other in such an efficient way that they created a second (underground) form of publicity. This on the one hand contained all the options generally inherent in an institutional system of publicity (stars, a social life, the circulation of information, fashion, politics, art, etc.) and on the other hand the corrupting factors of first-level publicity were no longer present (power, money, public access). In the 80's experimental filmmaking, contemporary music, theater, underground pop music, and visual art were in an intensive interaction.

Among a few others the most original theater community was the so-called Kassák Színház, founded in 1969, but the theater group is often named after the actor, director, and writer **Péter Halász** (born 1943). The group included István Bálint, Péter Breznyik, Éva Buchmüller, Anna Koós and others, and its concept was of performance as form of life, with a simple but strong visuality. The authorities couldn't tolerate Kassák Színház, and in 1976 they forced the whole group to emigrate. In 1977 they ended up in New York where they opened the *Squat Theater*, which lasted for about eight years and achieved international success through performances such as: Pig, Child, Fire; Andy Warhol's Last Love; Mr. Dead and Mrs. Free; etc.

From 1992 on Péter Halász regularly worked in Budapest, and recently he has been running the small theater (Városi Színház) in Budapest with another director (filmmaker András Jeles).

It's also important to mention contemporary music, promoted and presented by young composers such as Zoltán Jeney, László Vidovszky, László Sály, and András Wilhelm at the **Új Zenei Stúdió** (Studio for New Music), and the famous ensemble **180 csoport** (Group 180) which interprets contemporary music under the leadership of Tibor Szemző.

Since even pop and rock music was under state control, new movements couldn't achieve much publicity. Just to mention the main underground groups: Kex, Bizottság, Trabant, Balaton, Európa Kiadó, Neurotic.

János Sugár, April 2002 Budapest