

Final Report of the Visegrad Fellowship at OSA (April 2-30)

The purpose of my dissertation project is not only to critically and systematically reconstruct the performance and intermedia art's history of the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde, but to map its "second public sphere". The many levels of this "publicity" include a special understanding from the intellectual's point of view, like "second economic sphere", "democratic opposition", "second culture" and "publicity between the lines" as already introduced in the original research proposal. In these readings of their collective's status an identity-construction and image-drawing is inherent. In the first period of my research visit at OSA exactly these notions – from the inside of the underground culture – could be re-formulated and screened, but it turned out to be just as interesting how Western illegal media (and amongst them the most popular) Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty took place in the formulation of the intelligentsia's perception especially abroad. Because if we want to draw a map of a parallel culture we have to take into consideration what influences its form not only from the inside. The methodology of analysis was that of media and communication theory and was set at the qualitative rather than the quantitative level.

In the one month I spent at OSA all stated documents could successfully been monitored (HU OSA 300-40-11 Boxes: 4-12; HU OSA 300-5-45 Boxes: 1-10; HU OSA 300-5-43 Boxes: 2-5; HU OSA 300-6-2 Boxes: 1-8; HU OSA 300-2-5 Box: 31; HU OSA 300-8-26 Boxes: 1-3). The disadvantage of the chosen material was that – in contrast to what was expected – almost no (printed) media of the counterculture was part of the broadcasts or their background material. The Hungarian intellectual history of the 1960s until 1980s is only present in fragments – this could be a general hypothesis. As a conclusion we can say that far-reaching conclusions aren't even possible because of the fragmentary nature of the material we're dealing with. But as outlined in the main statements of Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory fragments are equal parts in a network and have to be analysed in the same depth.

As a sum of the findings I could detect four categories. The first of them is the *Hungarian Press Survey* (printed and translated articles, containing background information for future reports; 1960-1973). The second are Aurél Bereznai records and tangible broadcasts *Open Window* and *Home Press* (audio material, 1963-1971). RFE's *East European Research and Analysis* department provided files with information about the recipient perspective (1962-1989) as the third category. The fourth category brings us back to printed publications (which are from the informative side just like broadcasts) – especially to *Osteuropäische Rundschau* (1966-1971) a German adaptation of *East Europe*.

I. Hungarian Press Survey

Most of the articles are simply (with some comments) translated into English. The information is mediated objectively and includes data from official periodicals. After the careful selection of archived material the following topics can be typified: ideology, morality and ethics in the education of emerging scholars; ideological correctness and development of the intelligentsia; literature and authors should serve also the regimes realism; youth problems of hooliganism; Western broadcasts that are only focused on scandals, sensations; left-extremist views in student circles; sociology as appearing science (at this moment officially respected); doesn't accepted "third-road ideology". After 1963 (end of the strict restriction period that followed the 1956 revolution) the ideological harshness fades away and "softer" formulations and topics appear: West-German Marxist intellectuals next to contemporary Hungarian philosophy's efforts; the parallel existence of socialist realism and neo-avant-garde; interdepending science and politics; control of Western information-flows crossing the Eastern "border"; reports about the existence of subcultural groups (but "anticulture" and "parallel society" is still be seen as negative). There was only one article, which was directly connected to the history and official view of the authorities about the artistic second public sphere. This particular piece was an anti-propaganda text after closing the chapel studio of Balatonboglár in 1973.

The *Hungarian Press Survey*'s collection of published texts doesn't analyse in detail what they are exactly criticizing and scratch only on the surface. In most of the cases these are empty ideological phrases constantly repeated and this is a serious obstacle to investigate on an objective level. Perhaps it isn't even possible if dealing with a culture-political region that's (public) spheres were manipulated into the deepest corner.

II. *Open Window and Home Press* by Aurél Bereznai

These series contained only very few details about the field of culture and intellectual history. General and popular topics were common and a critical tone was clearly visible compared to the *Hungarian Press Survey*. The listeners are very often confronted with sceptical and subjective statements, subject and object are more close to each other. One of the few remarks on art was that closing "intellectual" borders make no sense and the accentuation of the importance of youth culture's opposing movements.

III. *RFE Radio East European Research and Analysis*

The materials I was going through reflected on public opinion about tasks and functions of Western radio stations and their programme. RFE/RL is seen as an adequate source of information about Hungary: reporting about domestic events and it has a political function as well. As many reports showed, the tasks were carried out successfully. Two important questions were touched upon in the questionnaires: one was in connection with listening to RFE/RL as a "hazardous undertaking" and the other was whether the Hungarians wanted to live in a democracy with Western character. Both were answered positively. Image-production as a term in making a picture of broadcasts and the radio itself is very important not only for the dissertation research but for the self-representation of RFE/RL too.

"Sub-societies" and listening habits of RFE/RL users were popular themes, and there was also an extensive review about the role of philosophers (György Márkus, Vilmos Sós, Zódor Tordai, Mária Márkus, Àgnes Heller; 1968) who were excluded from the party. This last example shows modalities of punishment for countercultural actions or

articulations. According to many references RFE/RL sees itself as an active and acting member of the democratic opposition and in this respect somehow overvalues its role in the Hungarian counterculture. We should keep in mind that RFE/RL documents its own history, so mythisation from the inside can't be avoided (not an independent research institution put the question-list together).

IV. *Osteuropäische Rundschau*

This periodical of socio-politics brings us back again to print. *Osteuropäische Rundschau* was left to be the last because it merges the medial and qualitative levels of the previous three categories. Two of three relevant articles try to “polish” the Hungarian contemporary art's and culture's *image* in the West and want to show the quick development, innovativeness and open-mindedness of aesthetics (Imre Kovacs. „Ungarn wirbt um Ansehen“, 1/1966; Aurel Bereznai. „Ungarns kulturelle Öffnung nach Westen“, 5/1971). This is also true for the third article about the literature that proves the most-possible freedom of artistic contents to be published („Das ungarische Regime und die Literaten“, 5/1970).

The success of the research in the Open Society Archives was that the above-described fragments – related to the four countries – in the end became a solid parts of a networked Hungarian intellectual and artistic subculture. Mapping – based on the thoughts of Bruno Latour's ANT-theory – was the main strategy and methodology that was effectually “tested” through opportunities of the scholarship. The material found at OSA enriched with Media Studies' reading was helpful to critically reconstruct image-production for a chapter of the dissertation project *Rebelling (Play)Spaces and Underground-Networks. Mediatized “Second Public Sphere” in Hungary of the 1960s and 1970s*.