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From Listening to Distribution: Nonofficial Music Practices in Hungary and Czechoslovakia from the 1960s to the 1980s

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## Abstract and Keywords

This article presents an empirical case study of the wide variety of nonofficial settings and reinventions of music listening, recording, and distribution technology in Hungary and Czechoslovakia from the 1960s to the 1980s. Apart from comparing the two settings, it uses the data to discover how individuals used sounds and to consider the question of what those sounds, coupled with their uses, enabled these individuals to do. It also makes an attempt to conceptualize more abstractly about sound and music as a resource for collective agency and action. It considers the two communist regimes in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in regard to control over music, youth policy, technology, and culture. Both “creative constriction” and “dipping into” are present in each country but take different forms, which are revealed in the article.

Hungary, Czechoslovakia, sound, music, recording, distribution

## Introduction

This chapter presents an empirical case study of the wide variety of nonofficial settings and reinventions of music listening, recording, and distribution technology in Hungary and Czechoslovakia from the 1960s to the 1980s.<sup>1</sup> As much as possible we compare the two sites, but our main purpose is to use the data to discover how individuals used sounds and to consider the question of what those sounds, coupled with their uses, enabled these individuals to do. We also use the case study to think more abstractly

about sound and music as a resource for collective agency and action. Here we are interested in how collective agency takes shape in relation to what we describe as “creative constriction”: the paradoxical situation whereby suppression and control generate new opportunities for creative action. We situate this creative constriction in terms of how its specific sound technologies—their construction, consumption, and appropriation—afforded alternative and socially important cultural practices that were informally learned via sonic/musical experience. These “lessons” in turn provided a springboard for nonofficial<sup>2</sup> modes of being that coalesced at individual and collective levels.

Forms of nonofficial listening, recording, and distribution practices in both countries during the communist era examined here involve attention to radio broadcasts, listening to and trading LPs from the West,<sup>3</sup> and producing *magnitizdat*—self-made recordings. Musical experience, then, is understood as the intersection of sounds, music, technologies, and places. Music, in this understanding, is a flexible medium—a liminal space—one in which all the fine shades of an actor’s lifeworld can be displayed. This display, we suggest, permitted music listeners to pursue—to varying degrees—alternative or independent ways of being and feeling, from dipping a toe in nonofficial waters to plunging in and never resurfacing. We use the term official to describe areas of society and culture that were defined and ordered by centralized powers of the state, manifested not only in institutions and agencies but also in everyday practice, as Jakubowicz puts it, “to achieve a commonality of enthusiastic commitment to building communism” (Jakubowicz 1994, 271).

Central to our argument in understanding the liminality between official and nonofficial worlds is the (social) activity of making music and musical meaning, which Small calls “musicking” (Small 1998, 8). We expand the concept of musicking to take on any number of forms, such as attending concerts, tuning in to the radio, practicing scales, humming, imagining music, singing along to an LP, making sound compilations, and bootlegging performances. The musicking we study provides and sustains a variety of moods, commitments to nonofficial culture, modes of attention to music, and emotional and knowledge structures, which we refer to as dispositions. This congruence of dispositions via musicking is the part of the collective formation of a liminal space that creates “a common shared world of time, space, gesture, and energy, which nevertheless allows diversity and unity” (Pavlicevic and Ansdell 2004, 84).

Throughout, our aim is to consider the two communist regimes in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in regard to control over music, youth policy, technology, and culture. Both “creative constriction” and “dipping into” are present in each country but take different forms. It is important to note that what follows is not intended to be a comprehensive history of sound technology and its uses in Hungary and Czechoslovakia or a fully comparative study as that is beyond the scope of this chapter. We chose to study Hungary and Czechoslovakia because the attitudes of their respective regime to popular music, the level of economic reform in each country, subsequent access to technology, and the lack of informal information exchange between music amateurs between these countries highlight some of the pathways of creative constriction that we identify in nonofficial musical life between 1960 and 1990. In what follows, we address two areas common to both regimes, nonrecordable and rerecordable sound technology. In these nonofficial cultures, two particular modes of production and distribution were held in common:

Samizdat refers to self-published textual material that ranges from manuscripts to material that is typewritten and copied by hand, typewriter, or mimeographed. The existence, form, and context of samizdat, as well as the amount produced for dissemination, varied from country to country (Machovec 2009). Self-publications were created without the permission or consultation of the authorities in either country.

Magnitizdat refers to the recording and distribution of sonic material that was not available to the public, music that was banned or censored, sound that could be seen as potentially subversive, or music that was wanted immediately. Magnitizdat, in terms of distribution in the shadow economy or black market, was not necessarily subversive but instead filled a market gap in times of shortage (Smith 1984). In the Eastern-bloc countries, a certain amount of bricolage, or “situated experimentation,” was employed, of the type found in settings where resources are limited and speedy results are required (Büscher et al. 2001). For example, some of the earliest methods of magnitizdat arose from discarded X-rays in the Soviet Union in the 1950s: The emulsion on the X-ray was a material that one could engrave as one would a record (Ryback 1990, 32–33). The process of production and distribution was known as Roentgenizdat [playing the bones], and playable at 78 rpm on a seven-inch record player.

## Hungary's "Goulash Communism" and Czechoslovakia's "Normalization"

Following the de-Stalinization process in both countries during the 1950s, economic reforms were introduced in the 1960s, which allowed for an opening and a liberalization of the market, social rights, and relaxation of creative constriction. János Kádár, who took power following the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, installed liberalizing mechanisms within Hungary's economy—which remained a socialist-planned economy but contained elements of a market system, such as private businesses and enterprises (Kaufman 1997, 31). This new era of mixed economic models was brought about primarily through Hungary's New Economic Mechanism (NEM).

The NEM also sought economic reform through deregulation, which, for example, granted more licenses to artisans and small businesses, thus reducing the state's monopoly. In this atmosphere, there was added room for amateur musicians, and rock music was permitted to reach listeners via the mass media (Szemere 1983, 123). While the NEM was supported within the Politburo, the Central Committee, and the General Secretariat, it was eventually halted as a result of hardliners' efforts in the party, coupled with the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, demonstrating that the economic business of the satellite states—even after de-Stalinization—was still of much interest to Moscow. The goals of the NEM were thus stalled in the '70s but eventually returned in practice in the early 1980s (Adair 2003).

These new reforms were characteristics of the Kádár regime's "Goulash Communism"—a form of communism particular to Hungary. It enabled the country to be one of the most reputable Eastern bloc states in which to live. Ultimately, Goulash Communism contributed to, as Adam Przeworski (1991, 20) recalls:

an implicit social pact in which the elites offered the prospect of material welfare in exchange for silence. And the tacit premise of this pact was that communism was no longer a model for a new future but an underdeveloped something else... As... Hungarian surveys showed, the outcome was a society that was materialistic, atomized, and cynical. It was a society in which people uttered formulae that they did not believe and that they did not expect anyone else to believe. Speech became a ritual.

Similarly, Anna Titkow (1993, 274) describes this condition as "cognitive dissonance," which emerges in the gap between reality and the representations produced in the state media and official propaganda and

the gap “between the ideals of socialism as preached by the propaganda apparatus and as practiced by the system itself” (Jakubowicz 1994).

During Kádár’s regime the second economy began to swell in Hungary—by 1982, more than 75 percent of the population relied on it to contribute extra income to their formal wage, not just supplementing it but in many cases amounting to a higher income in the second economy (Sampson 1987, 126). The second, or “shadow economy,” manifested in a variety of ways, such as peasants on farms selling their produce, families renting out a room in their apartment, bribing a butcher for choice meat, prostitution, and so on (Sampson 1987, 121). In many parts of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union this second economy provided a “lubricating” function, but this was even more so the case in Hungary, where it was an integral part of the planned economy and helped stem shortages and production bottlenecks (Sampson 1987, 122).

Czechoslovakia, on the other hand, continued its post-1968, Moscow-approved path of social and economic normalization under Gustáv Husák. After consolidating power in 1970,<sup>4</sup> the Husák-dominated socialist state began the first political process of “normalizing” Czech society, which lasted until the late 1980s. As Ulċ characterized the situation in the 1970s, “[The] aim [of normalization was] the reinstatement of the status quo ante and expiration of the liberalizing heresies of the Prague Spring 1968. Prominent among the measures of normalization has been the introduction of thorough censorship” (Ulċ 1978, 26). Although often considered a return to the Stalinist practices of Czechoslovakia during the 1950s, normalization was characterized not by overt coercion but by extrajudicial socioeconomic hardship. For example, if someone’s son or daughter was caught by the police distributing banned material, that person might be prohibited by the state from attending a university (Kreidl 2004)—often such nonofficial practices endangered networks of connections between friends and neighbors.

Along with these economic and political changes in both countries came adjustments to cultural policy. In Czechoslovakia, the reconfiguration of the rock music scene was achieved in part by keeping official rock bands in line with the minister of culture’s new policies, primarily by regulating hair length, limiting musical genres, instigating a “no English” policy, and editing lyrics (Ryback 1990, 143)—a dramatic turn from the thriving bigbit music scene in the latter part of the 1960s. At the center of this creative constriction were required “requalification exams” for musicians. These were taken

every two years in order to obtain a license to play professionally or even as an amateur. As state-run institutions, the licensing agencies functioned as a “censorship mechanism.” They had the authority to determine which musicians were allowed to perform based not only on exams that tested their knowledge of musical theory but also on their familiarity with Marxism-Leninism, their presentation, the lyrical content of the music, and the length of their hair (Vaníček 1997, 33–37). Saxophonist and guitarist Mikoláš Chadima describes seven points that musicians had to abide by if they wanted to pass the exam:

First, no English band names! Second, no long hair! Third, no English texts! Fourth, be properly dressed! Fifth, don't play music which is “too wild”! Sixth, learn the rudiments of music theory! Seventh, don't argue with the adjudicators and let them inflate their ego at your expense! (Vaníček 1997, 47)

The agency tested these seven points in musical auditions, oral tests of political theory, and finally a written test of Western music theory (Vaníček 1997, 47–50). While exams to determine a musician's ability to play music still existed in the 1960s, the new requalification exams also established a musician's place in “normalized” Czech society, in that one could not pass the exam without an adequate knowledge of, for example, “the history of the worker's party... who the Minister of Culture was... or their opinions on communism” (Vaníček 1997, 49). Efforts made by the Husák government from 1970 to 1973 to curb rock's growing interest among the youth population culminated in the implementation of the exams in 1973,<sup>5</sup> which segregated musicians as “official” or “nonofficial” in Czechoslovakia for the remainder of the communist era.

In Hungary the state institution for the National Management of Light Music also instigated practice licenses, defined performance fees, and employed musical proficiency tests (Szemere 1983, 131). However, responses to rock music were based on strategies of a modified form of commercial inclusion rather than on a division between official and nonofficial musicians or explicit repression of the latter. At its most visible, this inclusion took the form of giving bands recording contracts but not allowing them to record some of their most popular songs. Moreover, the release of an album could be delayed for years, long after the popularity of its pieces had waned.<sup>6</sup> The second economy, however, took care of this bottleneck through bootlegged, copied, and exchanged audio cassette tapes.

Regardless of the Hungarian regime's restrictions, the situation was still enticing to some since being a rock musician in Hungary during the '70s and '80s permitted musicians to receive royalties and tour extensively not only throughout the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union itself but also in other parts of Europe and the United States if sponsored by the regime. In short, Hungarian musicians still had a degree of freedom relative to their Czech counterparts. The containment was less strictly enforced, and officially there was no censor.<sup>7</sup> As János Kobor of the official rock star group Omega attested in 1987, "There is no strong censor, but they are, you know, careful. When we made our last album, the record company asked us about the title. They said, this 'Dark Side of Earth,' does it refer to Hungary or does it refer to the socialist world? And then after we said no, then it's all right, no problem."<sup>8</sup>

The Hungarian form of control by inclusion also involved a method of tactical overexposure of musicians, which diluted their potential threat. One of Hungary's first punk groups, Beatrice, was subsumed into the official music scene after a series of meetings with representatives of the official culture. This led to a TV spot to discuss punk music, competing in a song contest sponsored by Hungarian radio, and being offered a support-band role in a tour with the superstar groups Omega and Locomotive GT. Seen by fans as "selling out" and leaving their subversive message behind by playing with the establishment bands of Hungary, Beatrice was not helped when the state released a live concert album of the bands (Ryback 1990, 173–74). For the government it was doubly effective: overexposing a subversive band while also improving record purchases by the youth, illustrating the regime's inclination to institutionalize commercial success.

Within Goulash Communism, Hungarian official cultural life had a loose categorization of bands called "the three Ts" (*tu*"rt, *támogatott*, *tiltott* [promote, permit, prohibit]): Certain bands, such as Omega, were promoted, while others were permitted to perform but not to record, and some were not allowed to play under any circumstances.

For both regimes, a key problem was not only how to address restrictions on musical practices but also how to assert policy and control in relation to sonic and technological areas. How, for example, were they to protect radio frequencies from unwanted broadcasts, and should they monitor and assess the ideological content of cultural products? These discussions over policy ebbed from the 1960s to the 1980s; however, restrictions remained in place in both countries until 1989. Moreover, technological innovation—particularly gadgets, sound, and video—themselves raised ideological questions across

the bloc. Since such devices were invented and produced in the West, how could a regime import such objects without destabilizing the foundations of the communist system (Kusin 1987)? Each regime met these issues in different ways, which in turn affected access to the latest technological and cultural products such as albums, films, literature, and clothes. The regimes thus became active participants in how music was experienced by their direct involvement with and control over sonic-related matters.

### Nonrecordable Sound Technology: Radio and LP Listening

Listening to the radio had always been legal in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In fact, it was often either encouraged or compulsory in situations such as collective listening to state propaganda in the workplace or barracks or the more passive listening found in public areas that had loudspeakers (Rév 2004). However, certain radio stations—Radio Free Europe (RFE), Voice of America, BBC—were banned, and listening to such prohibited radio content could lead to punitive measures. Nonetheless, radio, which was ubiquitous, inexpensive, and manufactured in the bloc, provided a readily available entrée into nonofficial musical experiences and did not require the listener to acquire any illegal or prohibited technology; to dip into this nonofficial practice, an individual only had to tune in at certain times to specific radio frequencies. Moments of “dipping in” were made possible simply by listening.

While this mode of listening could have been for either informative, news-related purposes or for musical enjoyment (often the two were wrapped up into one program), this activity was risky and possibly dangerous. For example, if listening in a block of apartments, neighbors could overhear the unusually unusually loud, hourly station update: “This is Radio Free Europe on the 16th, 19th, 25th, 31st, 41st, and 49th shortwave bands” (Rév 2004, 5).<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the radio sound—both volume and content—afforded peripheral modes of listening: overhearing and eavesdropping. Not to be confused with “bugging” or state surveillance methods, overhearing and eavesdropping emerged from the sociopolitical circumstances of living situations such as the overcrowding in urban areas and simply the dispositions of curious people. These practices were part of what can be described as the necessary “skill set” in a second economy and also included skills Grossman calls the “4 Bs of resource procurement, bribery, bartering, black marketeering, and ‘blat,’ ” a Russian term for “connections or influence” (Grossman, quoted in Sampson 1987, 128).



While we do not mean to assert that individuals were inclined to eavesdrop in these situations for malicious purposes, in some contexts information about the tenant living upstairs in a larger apartment with a balcony could be used advantageously if one wanted. On the other hand, a friendly neighbor who overheard someone listening to Western broadcasts was in the precarious situation of possessing unwanted and potentially harmful information. Underpinned by sound, these modes of listening in private spaces—overhearing and eavesdropping—heightened people’s fear and at times placed them in danger.

Moreover, while listening to the radio in private, one was also subject to the noise of radio jamming from centralized locations in Budapest. Listeners in Czechoslovakia referred to Soviet jamming as “Stalin’s bagpipes.” As Rév (2004) argues, the noise let the listeners know that even in the confines of their own homes, the regime was still able to censor, control—and at the very least—be present in the lives of citizens (Bijsterveld 2008). Fear and anxiety could to some extent be alleviated by well-timed listening. It was possible to listen during the early hours of the day or late at night and thus avoid the jamming. Quoting K. R. M. Short (1986, 6), Rév (2004, 25) illustrates the temporal strategy of listening:

The timing of the broadcasts is also important because the twilight hours of morning and evening are the most ineffective of Soviet-originated sky-wave jamming. This is because the western broadcasts can take advantage of the ionosphere’s “solid” condition at these times, while the eastern jamming broadcasts have difficulty in achieving a reasonable reflection in their “broken” section of the ionosphere. This creates a time-related gap in the Soviet defenses.

The strategic listeners were thus able temporally to configure their sonic space and practices in order to hear more clearly and to avoid the omnipresent regime’s jamming noise. One very popular RFE program broadcast into Hungarian-speaking regions was “Teenager Party,” which played Western rock to listeners and accepted postcards and letters requesting songs from the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, the Bee Gees, Paul Simon, and other popular Anglo-Saxon bands.

These radio programs expressly provided an opportunity for informal musical learning through imitation. Nagy Feró, leader of the Hungarian punk group Beatrice, stated that budding musicians turned on the radio and learned music by “listen[ing] to ‘Teenager Party’ and copying the songs

phonetically.”<sup>10</sup> In this way, new informal practices were acquired through musical experience—in this case, imitation and modeling. Similarly, Canadian musician Paul Wilson, who lived and performed in the Czech Underground during the late '60s and '70s, describes radio listening in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s:

One of the things that censorship [before the Prague Spring] did very badly was keep music out of the country. One of the things that was very marked in the 1960s was that although intellectuals found it very hard to get a hold of books it was very easy for kids to be right on top of things because records were brought in and the music was broadcast over Voice of America and other radio stations. So, there was a very current music scene [in Prague], with a lot of knock-off bands and a lot of fans of different groups just the way you'd find them in the West. (Velinger 2005)

Censorship efforts by both regimes to restrict radio listening had unintended results: They fostered a culture of exposure to new music. Each week new sounds came over the ether, and musicians developed listening strategies that in turn provided informal training. They imitated the music they heard and formed “knock-off bands.” Thus, music was passed from one sound technology to another and from person to person through various practices of distribution and musical “information.” These practices ultimately had implications for what actors could do and for how musical experience came to be linked in collective efforts.

Because listening privately was a common practice, it is clear that there were many actors participating collectively yet separately in listening; in other words, while the sonic experience was happening “in the room,” it may not have fostered microsocial interaction but rather a felt, collective experience. Radio broadcasts from abroad, as well as this collective experience and interest, led both Czechoslovakia and Hungary to produce rock radio programming in the 1960s; the regime itself imitated Western forms of cultural technology. This start-up of rock radio programming as a result of popular demand reflected the growing “confusion” produced in these communist regimes by rock music and its growing significance for young people (Ryback 1990, 88). While the state frequencies expanded rock airplay in the '60s, it was inevitably halted in Czechoslovakia after the Soviet-led, five-army Warsaw pact invasion in 1968—radio programming in Czechoslovakia returned to brass-band broadcasts shortly thereafter.

## Musical “Cues” for the Room

In addition to the collective-yet-separate radio listening in apartments and houses, people could move easily between collective listening practices afforded by LPs or recordable technology such as open-reel tape recorders, which were not transmitted through the ether. One member of the Czech Underground (František Stárek) described his radio/LP-listening practices in the late 1970s as follows:<sup>11</sup>

FS: While living on the commune, we used to finish meals together and then put on Voice of America.

TH: Where did you listen to the program?

FS: In the kitchen. It was the only room big enough for all of us to fit. We had about ten to twelve people during the week and many more [Undergrounders] at the weekend.

TH: How did you listen?

FS: Well, everybody was silent. Even the kids who normally ran around knew that they should be quiet at this time. We wanted to hear about what was going on in our country.

TH: And did you listen to music programs as well?

FS: Not really. After[ward] we’d listen to Underground [bootlegs] and drink.

The listening experience in this Underground commune illustrates the more general, fluid, and multiple listening tendencies common at the time. As listeners moved from one sound technology to another—from radio to open-reel bootleg concert recordings—the listening practices changed slightly. Listening together in a room that afforded microsocial interaction was not always possible. In such cases, technology created sound for the room: playback for private gatherings and parties in apartments, bedrooms, and weekend homes, where music provided both the backdrop for, and cues to, social interaction. Listeners, technology, and the sociopolitical context repeatedly coproduced the culture of the space—illegal, alternative, and filled with anxiety and excitement.

While the radio offered variation and the possibility of experiencing new music, this new pattern of listening behavior contrasted with LP culture in Czechoslovakia, where large collections were rare, and the same albums

were often played repeatedly in domestic environments. The selection of Western LPs was quite limited in Czechoslovakia, and listeners who wanted to acquire LPs turned to the weekly black markets in Prague or asked relatives and friends abroad to send albums.

The Hungarian Record Company (HRC) had quality record-pressing technology in the 1960s and 1970s and doubled its output of LPs from 1975 to 1980 in an attempt to meet the needs of younger audiences (Szemere 1983, 130). This trend toward pop music stemmed in part from Hungary's policy of moving away from isolationism or Sovietization in the 1950s to a "windows to the West" policy in the 1970s. As Cultural Secretary Aczel addressed delegates of the Society for Dissemination of Scientific Knowledge in 1968:<sup>12</sup>

There are people who demand the closing of our borders to cultural and intellectual exchange; they want to isolate our culture. It would be impossible to implement such a policy, but even if we were to succeed in doing so, we should create a situation, which would leave us ignorant and weak; a robust plant cannot be grown in a hothouse.

The culture secretary's stated position of "peaceful coexistence" with the West helped to widen the gap of rhetoric and practice in Hungary: Although there was an abundance of Hungarian LPs, foreign albums were still highly restricted, and one had to rely on methods similar to those in Czechoslovakia: obtaining LPs from relatives in the West, black markets, or by chance finding a secondhand Yugoslav-pressed album in a store.

Modes of listening are thus tied up with subsequent access to technology and musical recordings—how one would procure an object and where it was listened to all contributed to the shaping of the musical experience. According to Ruth Finnegan (2003, 183), listening as musical experience involves learning "how to feel, how to deploy particular emotions in contexts appropriate to our situation." Moreover, if emotional structures can be the seeds of knowledge production (Witkin and DeNora 1997, 5), it is possible to see musical experience molding a flexible, liminal space—a space where one can view and imagine both the nonofficial and the official lifeworlds (Eyerman 2006). Musical experience is thus at once lived, embodied, and "intertwined with culturally diverse epistemologies" (Finnegan 2003, 183) from a range of cultural resources mediated by its interaction with sound technology.

## Reconfiguration and Repackaging of Music and the Actor

The listening pattern produced by playing LP collections as opposed to listening to diversified radio programming provided a further entrance point into the liminal space by learning how to hear music: Discussing the music in the physical space of listening was one way in which people were able to reconfigure themselves in an alternative manner.

In the late 1960s in Czechoslovakia, a handful of musicians who rejected the newly instigated official music standardization moved to private gatherings to listen to music, talk about music, and share the small collections of music they possessed. Here, in these private gatherings while listening to LPs, they would also experience running monologues and informal lectures on aspects of Czech cultural history, orated primarily by Ivan Jirous, art historian and band manager of the Czech Underground group, The Plastic People of the Universe.

The lectures discussed and explained current Czech rock music within the context of Czech musical revivals, art history, and political history and maintained that “even in the darkest of times, the Czechs had always been able to keep the flame of culture alive” (Jirous 2006 [1975], 7). The notion of a nonofficial lifeworld here, understood not in relation to “the Other” or based on difference, was rather the opposite: that rock music was not just a new phenomenon; instead, it was part of an experiential mode of culture that had long existed in the Czech lands—an alternative mode of being present throughout the country’s history, to which the Czech Underground belonged.

These lectures and ritual listening sessions, consisting of copious amounts of beer and dumplings, were described by Paul Wilson during some of his first meetings with the Czech Underground in an apartment in central Prague:

[Jirous] would put on his favorite records on a battered turntable jacked into an old WWII radio... I lay back and listened to the Velvet Underground, Captain Beefheart, the Doors and the Fugs, and as I listened, I began to feel a depth in the music I hadn’t felt before, as though I were hearing it for the first time with Czech ears. (Wilson 2006 [1983], 20)

Here we begin to see how these sounds came to be empowered as exemplary of Underground life: They emerge from the intersection of sounds, sound technologies, and social rituals of listening to help construct a lifeworld; the musical experience clearly afforded Wilson a different form of comprehension or depth of listening. These rituals helped form nonofficial

dispositions that came to structure the flexible medium of the Underground—a cultural space and mode of living that were particular to this community in Czechoslovakia. In this case, the musical sound was a flexible object that came to be symbolic of an alternative way of life as it was combined with other practices of specifically Czech consumption (beer, dumplings, a Czech living space).

To speak of the music's flexible affordances is to highlight how the physical space for listening provided, in part, contextualization cues. DeNora (1986, 91) describes these contextualization cues as "various conventions or ritual practices that, through experience, come to carry certain connotations which serve as the tools for the work of sense-making and meaning construction." In other words, cues help listeners to shape their interactions and appropriations of musical objects and, in the case of Czech appropriation, as they immerse themselves, to varying degrees, in transformation. In the context of Czech listening rituals, the extramusical contextualization accomplished by "running monologues and informal lectures" achieved two goals: a reconfiguration of the musical content and a reconfiguration of the actor's mode of listening and attention from "non-Czech" to "Czech." For Wilson, reconfigured as someone with "Czech ears," the music then became a soundtrack for the placement of alternative modes of being within Czech history.

Reconfiguring the space through active listening during radio and LP playback and collective listening connected actors to networks of feeling, being, and thinking and thus enabled actors to distance themselves from official society and to dip more than a toe into nonofficial culture. How far individuals dipped in and how long they stayed immersed was, of course, dependent on a web of other social and familial ties.

### Recordable Sound Technology: Cassette Tapes and Open Reel

The dispositions formed through radio and LP listening served to develop practices related and translated to other sound technologies, such as the rerecordable technology of open-reel and audio cassette tapes. These sets of practices surrounding the exchange of bootlegged concerts, compilations, and LP copies became extensions of older sound technologies such as radio. These practices allowed for modes of being to shift in accordance with technological change: Cassette tape technology permitted exchange to develop into a mode of communication in its own right. Simultaneously, the new technology and the tape trading that it facilitated during the late '70s and '80s in turn enabled a wider culture of alternative sound as listeners

forged new (and highly nonofficial) practices of musical exchange and recording. Tapes could now be acquired by ordering through samizdat magazines by contacting tape traders through postings in public places, by recording concerts, and by exchanging with friends and acquaintances. As tapes came to be associated with the practice of tape archiving/collecting, the alternative articulations between music and collective action burgeoned. The once collective-yet-separate radio listeners were thus linked via active engagement and practices to one-to-one or many-to-many interactions involved in exchange, thus generating still more network links among the actors.

This burgeoning informal exchange system—within which distribution became a cultural end in itself—in turn augmented the contextualization cues previously associated with radio and LP listening. Overall, these processes removed music from its original associations (for instance, how it was framed by artists) and from the conventional notion of creation/composition as a distinct phase, still further up the chain in arts production (Becker and Pessin 2006). Instead, tape distribution recontextualized musical works by delivering them to consumer groups that their authors were not originally intending to reach. Thus, the music distributed via tape in Czechoslovakia and Hungary during this time derived its meaning and social power from its repackaging and its novel and adaptive forms of distribution. Cassette tapes, as well as the music they contained, heightened and expanded one's personal network: Oftentimes someone owned a tape that had been received through distant connections and copied several times; the audio quality of cassettes copied many times over left a sonically anonymous trail of the network.

In other words, the music was recontextualized by its modes of distribution, which brought into being new systems of collective representations as a result of tape exchange. The sound technology of cassette tapes and open-reel tape recording thus extended the simple act of listening (e.g., to a radio broadcast or to LPs exchanged on the black market) to acts of recording, compiling, and bootlegging. New associations, images, and ideas could, in other words, be hung on tones (DeNora 1986, 93), and here the associated practice of tinkering and the participatory design feature of tape trading/bootlegging come to the fore. Members of the Hungarian punk band CPG were one such group that was persecuted for its participatory design of a compilation tape of music and RFE commentary. The trial of the “punks of Pol Pot County” took place in 1982 in the Hungarian county/town of Szeged. The members of CPG were first charged with incitement for the cassette

tape they were carrying. According to Szo“nyei (2005, 88), sandwiched in between songs on the tape was political commentary on the martial law in Poland, recorded from RFE. Although the musicians were tried and acquitted for disturbance of the community, the police were unsettled not only by CPG and its actions but also by the possibilities of playback in the room and dissemination to a wider audience. The broadcasts, torn from their RFE dispositif, were crafted and adjusted to fit CPG’s own dispositions. In other words, cassette tapes, combined with radio, offered a type of radizdat that yielded an assertion of user control over the sonic environment.<sup>13</sup>

Various practices associated with exchange were in part facilitated by the regimes in each country. In Hungary in 1981, economic reforms that took the NEM into consideration were finally starting to gain momentum. The changes taking place allowed for small businesses, such as record stores, to appear and function within Hungary’s liberalized/ing market. For instance, from 1970 to 1983 the number of private shops in Hungary doubled—to 19,293 (26 percent of all shops) (Sampson 1987, 125).

In part because Hungary had a more open market since the mid-1960s, the practice of taping was somewhat different from that in Czechoslovakia. Artist György Galántai was an avid taper who used a Sony tape recorder purchased through relatives in Vienna. Galántai, the founder of the alternative art archive Artpool recorded concerts for posterity and exchange abroad while receiving demo tapes from Hungarian bands.<sup>14</sup> In the early ’80s, Galántai began to produce a series of cassette tapes to exchange as mail art, which were described as “cassette-radio, radio work” called “Radio Artpool.” The cassettes were a bricolage of interviews, music, ambient recordings, documentation of telecommunications concerts, improvisations, sound art, found sounds, spoken words, and so on. The eight-part series merged sound, posterity, distribution, and exchange into one object as an audio version of a cultural journal, thus indicating a mode of listening attention that was active, critical, and expressly disseminated via the postal system.

Sound technology and distribution in Czechoslovakia took on a different role. With a stricter regime line on popular music, there was less foreign music on the official market as there was in Hungary. Officially, there were few places to buy Western LPs, although a Czech label did release some American jazz imprints, and select albums could be purchased or ordered through the record clubs, Gramofonový Klub and HiFi Klub (Vaníček 1997, 121). Moreover, cultural centers in other countries served as places to pick up foreign music. At the Hungarian Cultural Center in Prague, for example, it



was possible to listen to or lend albums by Omega and other Hungarian rock giants.

In this rather large gap between official and nonofficial musical acquisition, Czech magnitizdat labels and distributors came into existence. One such label, S.C.T.V (samizdat cassette tapes [and] videos) was primarily run by Petr Cibulka from his apartment in the Moravian capital of Brno, where his mother took care of the administrative side of the label (Vaníčěk 1997). While many people in the country were still using open-reel recordings, Cibulka in 1976 was credited with producing one of the first samizdat compilation tapes, which comprised many bands of the Czech Underground, who at that time had been imprisoned and set the stage for the launch of Charta 77.<sup>15</sup> Similar to the ways that Hungarian tapes were constituted, this first Czech compilation tape instigated the use of manipulatable, rerecordable technology as participant design and signaled the formidable quality that cassette tapes afforded as a do-it-yourself (DIY) set of practices.

A similar independent initiative was started by Mikoláš Chadima, who ran a small label, Fist Records, from his apartment.<sup>16</sup> Fist Records' approach differed slightly from that of S.C.T.V. in that Cibulka held that magnitizdat and samizdat should be spread widely and in quantity, echoing dissemination as an alternative mode of being. Chadima similarly used distribution as a creative mode of being; however, he focused on releases that met his idea of quality music and created cover art and liner notes for many of his releases (Vaníčěk 1997). Although a majority of the taping and copying was done by these two individuals, the trading and exchange operations were carried out between friends, siblings, and acquaintances and thus involved a collective of people dipping into and reconfiguring a musical experience linked not only to listening but also to magnitizdat creation and distribution. With tape exchange, the informal learning shifted the contextualization cues from the physical space of the room, as described earlier, to the social ritual of distribution. Actors, in turn, became reconfigured by "dipping in" while simultaneously reconfiguring the sound technology for their own use and purposes.

For example, Chadima's Fist Records often did not have sufficient personnel to complete all of the liner notes and every piece of cover art; thus, graphic designers or individuals who could help copy the art and liner notes would offer their time to Chadima, thus "dipping into" alternative practices a little bit more as tape distribution opened up new avenues.

Liner notes could sometimes be found in samizdat magazines such as Vokno, which was printed and distributed by the aforementioned Underground commune in Czechoslovakia. Translated roughly as “memory loss” and also a play on the word “window,” Vokno’s samizdat distribution web spread across the republic from 1979 to 1989 and provided, as a part of the tape exchange, the contextualization cues for listening that the physical space afforded. In addition to liner notes, Vokno often contained artwork and details of recordings, not to mention order forms and inventory for S.C.T.V and Fist Records. Those who read samizdat or listened to magnitizdat were thus drawn further into a set of consumption practices that linked listening, technology, and contextual cues provided by magazines such as Vokno and the practice of exchange.

If the creative constriction of performing, recording, and distributing music in each country helped to set up exchange and taping as novel practices, they also led to novel forms of musically mediated learning. More specifically, they paved the way for the individual and collective learning of new dispositions associated with how to live/be nonofficially. Indeed, they provided object lessons in how to communicate nonofficially.

### Conclusion: The Liminality of Nonofficial Musical Experience

We have described how sets of nonofficial musicking practices took shape in relation to and in turn shaped sound technologies.<sup>17</sup> This mutual structuring process also gave rise to situations within which individuals could test alternative dispositions and underground culture. Within these situations, the musical object was simultaneously an aesthetic item and its distributive technologies. Opportunities for musical experience in Czechoslovakia and Hungary provided a liminal space, one poised between official society and nonofficial life, affording fine degrees of commitment and deliberation. Because of the heterogeneity of this space, which was neither official nor nonofficial, it was possible to gradually move into deeper, nonofficial waters and to learn about and adopt new, alternative dispositions in informal and not necessarily conscious ways. If we were to theorize about music’s role in relation to collective action and collective consciousness (and so to build upon earlier work on this theme in ways that seek to delineate the actual mechanisms through which music provides “exemplars” for action and collective mobilization [Eyerman and Jamison 1998]), we would suggest that the musical experience, importantly, provides a two-way flow between individual and collective world building: (1) an aggregating conduit to the development of dispositions (learning how to) and (2) a

collective distillation of dispositions (from many experiences to one collective experience). This definition of musical experience as liminal space enables individuals to take either the first steps into nonofficial life or to reaffirm and constitute their alternative disposition through control—or choice—over the sonic environment. In what we have described, the musical experience has two parts: a sensory aspect (as in listening) and an active facet (as in participating in distribution as creation).

The social changes in these nations in the late 1980s—breakdowns in different parts of government and dissident political initiatives by opposition groups—rested, we suggest, on a technologically dispersed, linked population of actors who had, at one point or another and to varying degrees, dipped into and informally acquired alternative modes of being. This “dipping in” (from toe to fully immersed) was, we suggest, a critical resource for the reconfiguration of dispositions and the increasing rejection of the creative constriction imposed by official institutions.

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## Notes:

(1) The research involved ethnographic interviews of more than twenty individuals in both the Czech Republic and Hungary conducted 2007 and 2009. These interviews focused on musical experience related to sound technology. Interviewees were people involved in the practice of making and distributing samizdat and magnitizdat (see later explanation), as well as consumers of the material from the late 1960s to 1989. Additionally, archival resources were gathered from the Open Society Archives and Artpool in Budapest, Libri Prohibiti, Institute for Contemporary History (Ústav pro soudobé dějiny), and the Archive of Security Forces (Archiv bezpečnostních složek) in Prague. Grounded theory methods were employed for analysis of the interviews and archival data (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

(2) Throughout, the term nonofficial is used not only to describe underground or alternative movements in each country but also to discuss the actions of any individual (as opposed to an organization or an office)—from a dissident to a merchant to a teenager.

(3) The "West" is described by one Czech listener as primarily the UK and the United States.

(4) Husák was both the president of the country and secretary general of the Communist Party.

(5) For example, Supraphon, the national recording label, halted or canceled all music projects that contained what were considered to be too extreme Anglo-American themes. Instead, the company played and recorded brass band music.

(6) Interview with Tamás Szócsányi by Trever Hagen, Budapest, Hungary, July 5, 2009.

(7) *Ibid.*

(8) Charles T. Powers, "Changing Times for Hungary's Pop Music Giant Omega," *Los Angeles Times* (Sept. 5, 1987), 1. Retrieved in HU-300-40-2 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, Hungarian Unit, Subject files.

(9) As Rév (2004) notes, exiles from Hungary, who were surveyed by Radio Free Europe, consistently remarked on the volume level of the hourly updates in comparison to the volume level of the programs.

(10) Agnes Sesztak, "'Punk' Star Interviewed, Describes Trials, Tribulations," *Mozgo Vilag* 12(86-91) (1984), 48. Retrieved in HU-300-40-2 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, Hungarian Unit, Subject files.

(11) Interview with František Stárek by Trever Hagen, Prague, Czech Republic, Apr. 21, 2009.

(12) Radio Free Europe research report, "Hungary's Windows to the West," Oct. 28, 1970; <http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/34-6-85.shtml>.

(13) Radizdat means dissemination by radio, transmitting banned sonic material back to the country of its production. It also refers to the transmission of Western music and news into the bloc.

(14) Interview with Julia Klaniczay by Trever Hagen, Budapest, Hungary, July 1, 2009.

(15) Interview with Miloš Mueller by Trever Hagen, Prague, Czech Republic, February 3, 2007, and interview with František Stárek by Trever Hagen, Prague, Czech Republic, Apr. 21, 2009.

(16) Interview with Mikoláš Chadima by Trever Hagen, Prague, Czech Republic, Jan. 28, 2009.

(17) The musical experience we have described has covered tuning in to the radio and listening to vinyl or illegally recorded material; it should be noted that jam sessions, rehearsals, and live performances would also need to be included in a broader definition but are not discussed here.

