

# How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?

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What differentiates postwar Western and East European art is of course their respective ideological contexts. So-called Western, liberal, democratic ideology appeared to produce an opportunity for pluralistic, heterogeneous art (and art history), while in the East the stereotypical view of art, based on a uniform ideological background, seems to suggest a more homogenous image of art and its history. I will argue, at least as far as art history is concerned, that this is not the case; and in fact, quite the opposite. Western art history can be seen as much more homogeneous than East European art history. The reason is that the classic concept of ideology, as in the Marxist-Leninist system, did not play a substantial role in local cultural policy, as Westerners might expect. Instead, in the terms of Louis Althusser, it was Ideological State Apparatuses (in the plural), rather than the classical concept of ideology that governed the art scenes there.<sup>1</sup> What is important is that while the ideology was similar in every Eastern bloc country, the Ideological State Apparatuses differed in each case, implementing different state cultural politics and producing different meanings of comparable art in parallel historical moments in the region. Finally, the point of this paper is that postwar art history in Central-Eastern Europe in particular should include much more of a national or state perspective, rather than a universal one, as in much that is written on Western art history. What is more, the Western patterns of art historical writing are problematic when it comes to understanding the plurality of meanings of art in Central-East European countries, which are created in a more local framework of particular Ideological State Apparatuses, rather than the universal perspective.

First, let us ask how the Western art historical narrative is organised. Mostly along the lines of the concept of styles, or currents, trends, streams etc, more or less from Cubism to Conceptual art and later developments. So the first question would be to ask how these categories work in the context of Eastern and Central Europe. In fact, Eastern Europe has never simply reflected the stylistic narrative of art in the West, and in its artistic practice never accepted the paradigmatic stylistics of specific trends of modern art. The model of a history of

1. Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1969), in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press, London–New York, 1971, pp 127–86

modernism defined in terms of style has always been translated into heterogeneous mutations, both at the beginning of the twentieth century and later. The relevant examples are Russian Cubo-Futurism (in this case the very label is heterogeneous), Hungarian Activism, Polish Formism, and Central European Surrealism (except for its Czech variant). The situation after the Second World War did not change, regardless of the changing political circumstances, the influence of which cannot be overrated. The Eastern European artists, art critics and historians who followed them used the Western labels of particular trends (eg, informal, neo-Constructivism, new Expression or neo-Expressionism), yet quite often they understood them slightly differently from their Western partners. Let me emphasise one example, Conceptual art, which was very popular all over Eastern Europe; however, its Eastern European understanding proved much wider and much more heterogeneous than in the West. In general, the specific character of that kind of art could be seen defined in existential rather than linguistic terms, more ontologically, if not metaphysically, than epistemologically or analytically. In other words, as László Beke has put it:

In comparison to this Western notion of conceptual art, the Eastern European variant was never so rigorous. Rather, it was flexible and elastic, ironic, humorous, non-professional, communicable, always ready to become a social activity of a group of young people or even an alternative movement... On the other hand, the 'immaterial' nature of conceptualist works, and the 'poorness' of the media employed – 'just an idea,' words and concepts, paper and pencil, typewriter, postcards, a telephone call, ephemeral actions – made communication easier and censorship more difficult. This is why conceptual art had to be invented in Eastern Europe, and its function as a strategy for evading authority should be considered a feature specific to its development in the region.<sup>2</sup>

The second point of reference in our discussion is the question of the canon. Western art history has always functioned, at least as regards its mainstream, with reference to the canon of works. Fortunately, that canon has been criticised from various points of view: feminist, queer, Marxist, that of visual cultural studies, etc. All those critiques belong, in general, to the tradition of 1968. However, despite the critical revisions, the canon has not only remained but has also been accepted in many critical theories. It would seem that in writing the art history of the Eastern part of Europe such a Western canon of artworks should be rejected, since it does not reveal real, historically rooted local values and meanings; more precisely, it should be rejected as an art historical value system, which does not mean that it should be neglected as a historical point of reference of art production, since the art of Eastern Europe developed in relation to the Western canon. Yet within our analytical practice it seems far more productive to stress the tensions between the local experience of art and the canon, rather than to place the local art mechanically in the canonical framework of art history textbooks. In other words, our attention should be concentrated on the deconstruction of the relationship between those two domains, and not on the strategies of inscribing the artistic culture of Eastern Europe in the Western canon. That was the case of the huge *Europa, Europa* exhibition curated by Ryszard Stanislawski, and was the most problematic issue of that 1994

2. László Beke, 'Conceptual Tendencies in Eastern European Art', in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s*, eds Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss, Queens Museum of Art, New York, 1999, p 42

Bonn show.<sup>3</sup> The key question was then and remains: what does it mean that the art of the 'other' Europe was developed with reference to the art of the West, and how did that development go on? If we fail to ask this question, we will receive a traditional picture of the tensions between the centre and periphery, while asking it gives us a better chance to understand our subject of study. In other words, we should focus instead on the use and exploitation of the canon, rather than on its mechanical influences. This will allow us to disclose the cultural difference, which is indispensable to determining the identity of place.

While Western art historical discourse is clearly marked by the presence of the canon, the development of a similar system in the art of Central-Eastern Europe, a common canon, is very difficult, if at all possible. The reason for this is simple: while writing art history here one should take into consideration the heterogeneity of narratives to a much greater extent than with their Western equivalent. The history of the region's art, in particular after the Second World War, developed in each country independently from the others. Those discourses were parallel, and at least until now they almost never overlapped. This was due mostly to the scarcity of artistic exchange between Communist countries. Each was reluctant to take part in such exchange, which was dictated by subconscious resistance to the official propaganda of some specific identity for the Eastern bloc as a whole, and a claustrophobic complex of isolation of that part of the continent from the 'true' sources of culture, that is, the West. I am not saying that there was no exchange at all, but that it was always more or less accidental and so sporadic that it could not create the conditions for a common art history, as in the West. Hence, in Central-Eastern Europe we have a number of particular or, more precisely, national art histories and canons, which are often incompatible and not interchangeable. There is no single historico-artistic narrative but many national discourses. Using a geometrical metaphor, I would say, at the risk of oversimplifying, that while Western art history has a vertical and hierarchical form, the Eastern one, due to its plurality, takes horizontal, non-hierarchical and polycentric form.

The question of plurality, or the question of plural national narratives, is the next argument in this analysis. There is, however, a difference in Central-Eastern European culture between understanding the national, or the local, if you like, before 1989 and after. This is perhaps the most important point to discuss: how those two art historical approaches, the Communist and the post-Communist, differ from each other. During the Communist period, when the borders of Central-Eastern Europe were closed, the history of art developed more or less inside them. There was maybe more state narrative, limited to the state, understood as – using Althusser's vocabulary – 'apparatus', both as a repressive and ideological force, than narratives that were national in terms of ethnicity. Now, when the borders are open, what happens in a particular locality is a complex issue of many processes, coming both from outside and from inside. The local is at once something more and something less than the national. It means that it can transgress national (or state) borders, to learn from the national heritage, and at the same time not be reduced to the 'essence' of the nation (nationalism). On the contrary: it can be open to that which comes from outside. In our field of art history in the region, the local would mean a process of elements

3. See my critical study, Piotr Piotrowski, 'Central Europe in the Face of Unification', in *Who if not we should at least try to imagine the future of all this*, eds Maria Hlavajova and Jill Winder, Artimo, Amsterdam, 2004, pp 271–81.

4. Steven Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999
5. See Piotr Piotrowski, *Awangarda w cieniu Jalty: Sztuka Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 1945–1989*, Rebis, Poznań, 2005. The book is still available in Polish only. However, some of my studies related to the issue have been published in English. Among others: 'Framing of Central Europe', 2000+ *ArtEast Collection. The Art of Eastern Europe: A Selection of Works for the International and National Collection of Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana*, Orangerie Congress/Wien-Bozen: Folio Verlag, Innsbruck, 2001; 'The Grey Zone of Europe', in *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1999; 'Male Artist's Body: National Identity vs Identity Politics', in *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*, Laura eds Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl, MOMA/MIT Press, New York–Cambridge, MA, 2002; 'Mapping the Legacy of the Political Change of 1956 in East European Art', *Third Text*, Special Issue edited by Nancy Jachec and Reuben Fowkes, Routledge, London, 20:2, March 2006; 'On Two Voices of Art History', in *Grenzen überwindend* eds, Katja Bernhardt and Piotr Piotrowski, Lukas Verlag, Berlin, 2006

arising from the national cultural tradition, as well as those coming from the universal or global art scenes, and last but not least – and this is perhaps the most interesting, most challenging of our considerations – from other localities. In other words: the local means plural, heterogeneous, complex and cumulative processes constituting art historical narratives. This is what we observe right now, when the borders are more open than they used to be during Communist times. At that time, however, the local in culture was not entirely isolated from the universal, or other localities, but limited to the state culture. If we speak about the national or local art historical narratives after the end of the Second World War, and till the collapse of Communism, we should think more in terms of the state understood as an apparatus than of ethnicity.

The next step would be to negotiate the local/national/state narratives and create a sort of meta-narrative of art history in the region; not, however, in order to produce a single narrative of East Central European art, a sort of the alternative to the Western one, but, on the contrary, in order to construct a pluralistic, heterogeneous view. Such negotiations could be carried out on a synchronic level, as particular cuts along historical vectors, at some important dates for the region which very often had a different meaning in local political history: 1948, 1956, 1968, 1968–1970, the beginning of the 1980s, and 1989. Politics produced different contexts for local/national cultural productions in those countries, and as a consequence different meanings of art in particular places. While creating our art historical meta-narrative, we have to negotiate those different local meanings, pointing to both the similarities and differences in the wider, let us call it regional, perspective. Such negotiations are crucial if we want to write an art history of the region. This approach is an alternative to that taken by Steven Mansbach in his book *Modern Art in Eastern Europe. From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939*.<sup>4</sup> Instead of writing art history country by country as Mansbach did, I would stress the need to make comparative studies, negotiating different meanings of local art produced around some focal historical point, such as the above-mentioned historical and art historical dates. Such a comparative meta-narrative would help us to retain its pluralistic, non-hierarchical character. However, before we are able to negotiate particular narratives, we have to realise how different they really were, how different were the meanings of art in particular states.<sup>5</sup> To do so we need something other than a classical concept of ideology which used to create a uniform historical context for art, rather than differentiating. We need Ideological State Apparatuses.

Let me come back briefly to Louis Althusser and his concepts of the Repressive State Apparatus, Ideological State Apparatus and ideology. To put it simply, Althusser points out the function which differentiates those first two notions: the Repressive State Apparatus works by violence, the Ideological State Apparatus by ideology. In practice such a differentiation is not so simple, since the Repressive State Apparatus works by ideology too, and the Ideological State Apparatus can also be repressive. Moreover, one cannot function without the other; both overlap and support each other. Althusser has listed various institutions that serve as Ideological State Apparatuses: Churches (religious Ideological State Apparatus), schools (educational Ideological State Apparatus), press and media (communication Ideological State Apparatus), and last

but not least the institutions of art, literature, theatre etc (cultural Ideological State Apparatus).<sup>6</sup> We are particularly interested in the last, but, before we attend to it, let us refer to what Althusser understands by the notion of ideology. His definition distinguishes the classical Marxist understanding of ideology from his own. For Marx ideology is ‘a pure illusion, a pure dream, ie, nothingness; all its reality is external to it’.<sup>7</sup> For Althusser, ideology, which is ‘a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’, has a real material existence, since it exists always and only in social (material) practice or practices.<sup>8</sup> This is most important for our considerations, since if we take into account the Ideological State Apparatus as a system of institutions in a particular country, we have to think about real material practices in particular moments and places; in other words we have to speak about cultural policy, real politics towards art and culture (as far as cultural Ideological State Apparatus is concerned) in a particular country and at specific historical moments. These practices are more important than a general ideological system as such, which – as Marx has pointed out – ‘has no history’.<sup>9</sup> Ideological State Apparatuses, on the contrary, have history par excellence, and are historical, and as such they create a context or framework for art production, and thus, at the same time, its meaning. We will see how Ideological State Apparatuses, appearing in particular Central-East European societies through cultural policies, differed from each other, and also how art produced in such particular political contexts in the region had different meanings in each country.

In this article, I shall compare only three cases, actually three ‘independent galleries’: one in the GDR, Clara Mosch, the second in Poland, Foksal Gallery, and the third in Hungary, Balatonboglár Gallery. The point is how they worked in the context of those three cultural State Ideological Apparatuses, in other words how they worked in the light of three different cultural policies that stemmed from a similar ideology, Marxism-Leninism, transferred to all three countries as so-called ‘real Socialism’.

In the history of the artistic culture of the GDR, I can distinguish three moments of hope for a more liberal policy. The first came in the late 1950s, as a result of the Soviet ‘thaw’ at the beginning of Khrushchev’s rule. Martin Damus calls that process ‘Stalinist de-Stalinisation’,<sup>10</sup> which is indeed telling. Yet even the ‘Stalinist de-Stalinisation’ did not last long, since already in 1959 at a Party ideological conference in Bitterfeld a decision was taken to return to ‘socialist principles’ in culture. The second moment occurred at the end of Walter Ulbricht’s rule and the beginning of Erich Honecker’s turn in power in May 1971, when Honecker, just like Nicolas Ceaușescu in Romania before him, seemed to be a ‘liberal’, calling for a policy of *Weite und Vielfalt*, openness and diversity. That period is of particular interest to me. For the sake of completeness, I should also mention a third moment of change, in the late 1980s, marked by resistance to the policies of the same but very different Honecker, which ended with the fall of the East German state.

German sources report that the GDR in the 1970s had some 40 private and unofficial galleries.<sup>11</sup> They were quite different in character and did not usually function for long. I will concentrate on the Gallery

6. Louis Althusser, op cit, p 143

7. Ibid, p 159

8. Ibid, p 162, pp 165–6

9. Ibid, p 159

10. Martin Damus, *Malerei der DDR: Funktionen der bildenden Kunst in Realen Sozialismus*, Rowohlt, Reinbeck bei Hamburg, 1991, p 123

11. Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR. Gruppen, Konflikte, Quartiere, 1970–1989*, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, 1997, pp 42 and 112



of Clara Mosch in Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz) which, in terms of my chronological framework, was opened rather late in 1977 and closed in 1982. The year 1977 was a unique moment in the history of the GDR, with growing political tensions and the resistance of local intellectuals to the oppressive and repressive policies of the regime (the Repressive State Apparatus). Significantly, the target was not the regime itself (particularly not the ideology), but some of its policies, which was a paradox characteristic of that country where intellectuals would criticise particular measures, but never the system itself. That paradox has been interpreted as an aftermath result of the Second World War – of the Nazi trauma and the national sense of guilt treated with the anti-imperialist and anti-Nazi discourse of Communist ideology. In that respect, a small circle of dissident intellectuals (as well as alternative artists) followed the course of the political establishment. The tensions of that period were related to the so-called Wolf Biermann affair, when that popular singer was ‘banished’, that is, deprived of East German citizenship while visiting West Germany. The regime simply took the opportunity to get rid of the rebellious bard, but most likely it was surprised by the range of intellectuals protesting in defence of Biermann. Incidentally, the Central European dissident movements came into being more or less at the same time: in Poland the Committee for the Defence of Workers (KOR), which led the way to the rise of *Solidarność*; in Czechoslovakia Charter ‘77, perhaps less effective in terms of social organisation, but extremely important as a moral and intellectual movement against the so-called ‘normalisation’. Clara Mosch Gallery was opened exactly at that moment, at the peak of the refusal to accept Biermann’s banishment, when the regime must have been hesitating over how to respond. The artists benefited from that atmosphere of uncertainty and were allowed to open the gallery. As things went back to normal, official consent was withdrawn.

Eugen Blume, the author of a study on GDR art, as seen through the focus of the activity at Clara Mosch, stressed the unoriginality of that art, pedestrian open air painting sessions, creations giving a false sense of freedom, imitating Western models, etc.<sup>12</sup> All that must be true, but this is not the point, since the activities of the Clara Mosch Gallery artists were undertaken under circumstances that were quite different from those in the West at the time. In the West there was no state control, no undercover secret police agents mixing with artists, or at least Western artistic circles remained under much less strict surveillance than those in the East. While the so-called universalist criteria of artistic value were developed in the West, and applied to the historical experience of Eastern Europe, they do not match the processes and works produced in the eastern part of the continent. Even if we accept Blume’s critical perspective, the status of at least one artist from the Clara Mosch Gallery circle, Carlfriedrich Claus, is beyond doubt. Claus was one of the most fascinating figures in the postwar history of German art. Both his life and his art were highly unusual. He drew on many different inspirations, from the Western tradition of philosophy through mysticism, the Kabbalah, Taoism, alchemy, various branches of natural science and esoteric knowledge, as well as Marxism and the theory of Communism. In his *Sprachblaetten*, transparent sheets covered with writing on both sides, he used many different language codes, sometimes quite hermetic.

12. Eugen Blume, ‘In freier Luft – Die Kuenstlergruppe Clara Mosch und ihre Pleinairs’, in *Kunstdokumentation SBZ/DDR, 1945–1990: Aufsätze, Berichte, Materialien*, eds G Feist, E Gillen and B Vierneisel, Musaeumspädagogischer Dienst/DuMont Buchverlag, Berlin, 1996

I cannot enter here into details of Claus's achievement, which should be better recognised. Suffice to say that as an artist Claus existed on the margin of East Germany's artistic life, both official and unofficial, although he was not totally unknown. What is more important is the status of culture in which he and other artists connected to the gallery were inscribed. Most definitely it was a kind of 'niche', tolerated by the authorities to a certain extent and at a certain moment so that the artists could enjoy some independence. My point is that, contrary to the claims of Eugen Blume, the GDR's independent art was of key value, and made it possible for the work of artists such as Claus to come into being. The art that Claus and his colleagues produced was non-conformist, at the level of ultimate abstraction, completely inaccessible to the East German censors. What the censors did not like about such a hermetic culture was precisely its independence, a crucial aspect for the analysis of alternative culture, ignoring the propaganda and state control. Yet the East German artists had to struggle to maintain their status. It was not given or granted, but rather snatched from the authorities by all kinds of pressure, applications, even alliances with the more liberal officials, and so on.

In the 1970s the situation in Poland was quite different. There the privilege of experimental art was, as it were, granted by the authorities who had abandoned the idea of control of the work itself. Of course, that did not come out of the blue, but became real in consequence of decisions taken in the mid-1950s, which had eliminated Socialist Realism from culture, giving artists the right to work as they pleased. In principle, in Poland, one could do anything, make any kind of art without recourse to marginal, isolated institutions. An enormous number of the so-called independent galleries were financed by the state – not just tolerated but supported. While in the 1960s some conflicts took place and the authorities responded by closing down a few galleries, in the 1970s, when the new and so-called liberal Communists sized power, led by Edward Gierek, a former miner in Belgium, such cases were really incidental. In other words, Polish artists could enjoy almost unlimited liberty – I say 'almost', because any political criticism was out of the question. That was the key term of the tacit agreement between the artists and the Communist Party. The Party officials seemed to be saying, 'You can do whatever you want, as long as you don't get involved in politics', and the artists respected that condition. They did not ask themselves questions about the degree of control and limitations, but felt quite comfortable in their gilded cage. Of course, there were some temptations to become politically committed and some exceptions brought about by the political tensions after 1976 when overt, and to an extent tolerated though still illegal, opposition came into being. Its symbols were the Committee for the Defence of Workers (KOR), the Movement for the Defence of Human and Civil Rights (ROPCIO), the Confederacy for Independent Poland (KPN) and, finally, the free trade unions (*Solidarność*). Some Polish artists, in more or less convincing ways, took up that challenge, for instance, Elżbieta and Emil Cieślars, as well as Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek, who were connected to the Repassage Gallery in Warsaw. All in all, however, they remained exceptional.

Foksal Gallery in Warsaw, currently still in business, was founded in 1966 and was a symptom of resistance to the official art of the decade.

Still, the official Polish art of the 1960s, unlike that in the GDR, was not Socialist Realism; it was simply nothing, products with no specific features at all. It was not political either but appealed to the petty bourgeois taste of the formless and bland elite. In fact, the Foksal Gallery was by no means unique – in the 1960s there were many galleries of that kind, anticipating a massive increase in their number in the following decade. The developments in art of the late 1960s and early 1970s were critical of establishment culture, though on the other hand they were not subversive. Despite their critical character, these developments still belonged to the paradigm of the artwork's autonomy gained in the late 1950s and were not unique but, on the contrary, quite characteristic of the whole region.<sup>13</sup> They rejected modernist ideas of painting – its visual identity and abstraction – but did not question its autonomy in respect of outside reality. The heyday of the Foksal Gallery came in the 1970s. In this era of the pseudo-liberalisation of culture, it developed quite interesting international projects, inviting prominent artists both from the West and – unfortunately less often – from Central Europe. The gallery was not a centre of alternative activity – quite the opposite: though physically small, it was a significant institution, financially supported to a degree by the authorities. In fact, it enjoyed much freedom, neither fully official, as were a network of state exhibition halls called in Poland the Bureau of Artistic Exhibitions (BWA), nor unofficial like the Clara Mosch Gallery in the GDR. With time, in the mid-1970s, the Foksal Gallery started competing in the market of similar galleries and groups with a similar programme, which was expressed by the famous essay, 'Pseudo-Avant-Garde', written by its director, Wiesław Borowski (1975).<sup>14</sup> Borowski opposed the conformism of the so-called 'pseudo-avant-garde', the art using neo-avant-garde poetics, but because of its mass character totally deprived of any significant artistic value. In that respect, he was quite right. The run-of-the-mill conceptual art and body art of the times were indeed good for nothing. In the context of the history of Central European art it was probably a paradox: in the GDR artists dreamed about liberty which in Poland was, as it were, granted, although its results were often miserable. The problem with the Foksal Gallery was that Borowski while writing his essay did not declare any political commitment, at the moment when political opposition became active in response to an impending crisis that culminated in 1980 with the rise of *Solidarność*. The Foksal Gallery and its artists, particularly Tadeusz Kantor, who was considered their artistic and intellectual leader, remained totally indifferent to what was going on outside their ivory tower. One might even be more demanding: such a prominent gallery, with so much theoretical consciousness and a unique position in Eastern Europe, ought surely to have offered some gesture of solidarity with the growing body of dissent. Instead of initiating a meaningless polemic with the pseudo-avant-garde, Foksal should have condemned conformity and rejected the pseudo-liberal policies of the regime which promoted the restricted liberty of a 'velvet prison'. Such rebellious gestures of solidarity with the opposition were risked by many writers, scholars and scientists, which makes it even harder to understand why the Foksal Gallery artists did nothing to denounce pseudo-values.

Thus, we have two galleries, two institutions working in the context of two different Ideological State Apparatuses, which stemmed

13. See also Piotr Piotrowski, 'From the Politics of Autonomy to the Autonomy of Politics' in *Art and Politics: Case Studies from Eastern Europe*, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas (conference proceedings forthcoming).

14. Wiesław Borowski, 'Pseudoawangarda', *Kultura*, Warsaw, 1975, no 12



nevertheless from a comparable ideology, namely a sort of liberal version of classical Marxism-Leninism or so-called 'real Socialism'. This difference of particular Ideological State Apparatus produced different meanings in those two countries. While in the GDR there existed a sort of 'niche' where independent culture was produced and, because it was a 'niche', such culture could be relatively free, or at least non-conformist, in Poland there was no 'niche' at all, but rather an avant-garde culture supported by the authorities, and the fear of losing such a privileged position meant it was not really free but rather conformist. The platform for the 'liberal' compromise took place at almost the same time, when those two Ideological State Apparatuses as well as artists' strategies emerged, namely in the 1970s. If we add more countries and their Ideological State Apparatuses to this analysis we will get a real picture of pluralism in Central-East European art history, hardly comparable to its Western counterpart. This is why the general picture of an art history of Central and Eastern Europe worked more or less according to the national or state framework, and finally the platform of their negotiations is much more heterogeneous than the Western one in which both the Ideological State Apparatus and the national/state cultural policy seem less effective.

The third gallery is Balatonboglár Gallery in Hungary. Its origin goes back to a private initiative to create an artist's studio rather than a gallery. The story is that in 1968 György Galántai rented a Catholic chapel in Balatonboglár, originally for his own studio. However, in the summer of 1970, he decided with a group of friends to hold an exhibition there, and this was the beginning of the most important Hungarian neo-avant-garde gallery, where almost all of the artists identifying themselves with this movement participated in its programme. Not only Hungarian but artists from other Socialist countries, eg, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, were also invited. It was a very dynamic art centre, particularly active during the summers, a place where people came to work and live together. Many important art projects were carried out there: for example, Tamás Szentjóby's *Expulsion Exercise. Punishment Preventive Auto-therapy* (1972), which was something like a police investigation. The artist sat with a bucket over his head and was asked several, sometimes very 'sensitive', questions by the audience.

The issue here is not to analyse what went on in the gallery, but rather to consider how it worked in the context of the Hungarian State Ideological Apparatus. It is strikingly significant that when Galántai wanted to 'legalise' the gallery – to change the rented chapel from a studio into a public exhibition space, as many like this were functioning at the time in Poland – the administration said 'no', and the gallery was finally shut down in 1973.<sup>15</sup> The situation was quite different here in comparison with Poland and the GDR, since nothing had been guaranteed. The State Ideological Apparatus in Hungary worked along the lines of the famous '3Ts' (*Turni, Tiltani, Tamogatni* – Tolerate, Forbid, Support) which can serve as a metaphor for Hungarian cultural policy, and resulted in a deep sense of uncertainty so that the artists had no temptation to 'play games' with the Communist establishment. The Balatonboglár Gallery story shows this very clearly. They had nothing to lose, and at the same not too much to gain. Therefore, from the late 1960s, the Hungarian neo-avant-garde had come to be the most radically politicised of all the similar

15. See the very interesting documentation, including the correspondence between the gallery leader and the authorities, Júlia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári, eds, *Törvénytelen avantgárd: Galántai György Balatonboglári Kápolnamutermé, 1970–1973*, Artpool, Budapest, 2003.

circles in Eastern Europe. At least several Hungarian artists, such as László Lakner, Gyula Pauer, Tamas Szentjóbý and Endre Tót among others, more or less openly criticised the Communist system in a way that would be hard to do in the GDR or Poland. They did so not because they were more interested in politics or more affected by politics. They wanted, as Tamás Szentjóbý once told me, simply to make art, but they realised that the police and other institutions were trying to control their work. In contrast to the Poles, they had no reason to play any game with power, since they got nothing, or at least not too much, from the authorities. Sometimes the latter allowed artists to exhibit their works, as at the famous IPARTERV shows (1968, 1969), or tolerated a quasi gallery, like that in Balatonboglár – but then they would suddenly change their mind. The Hungarian authorities, after the bloody repressions following the Budapest Uprising in 1956, were by the 1970s not as restrictive towards art and cultural activities as in the GDR, but definitely less welcoming of modern art than in Poland. The Hungarian State Ideological Apparatus tolerated the neo-avant-garde movement and at the same time forbade it in the ‘official’ way (as the Balatonboglár story shows), but definitely did not repress it, as in Czechoslovakia.

Such an instability in cultural policy produced, maybe paradoxically, a relatively free space for critical art activities, including those reacting to the Warsaw Pact troops’ invasion of Czechoslovakia and the suppression of the Prague Spring in August 1968, such as Tamás Szentjóbý’s *Portable Trench for Three Persons* and his *Czechoslovak Radio* (a simple brick), as well as László Lakner’s *Wounded Knife*, a sheet of paper with two handwritten inscriptions ‘Sept, 1968’ at the bottom and ‘wounded knife’ in the middle. That was only the tip of the iceberg, and many more Hungarian artists expressed their protest in one way or another.

To conclude: while writing a history of Central East European post-war art, one must be very sensitive to critique of the Western art historical paradigm. Many categories in the Eastern European region simply describe different processes, and very often art which looks almost the same, say, as Constructivist or Conceptual art has a different meaning from that in the West, since it is related to the different context that the Ideological State Apparatus had produced. What is more, one cannot invent a single historical framework for the whole of Central European art production, even for that of the same time, say circa 1970, since each of those countries differed from one another for many reasons. What unified them was, of course, Soviet political domination and mainstream Marxist ideology, officially expressed by all Communist parties in Eastern Europe. However, such an overarching ideological framework is not very useful in particular historical analyses. It proves far more fruitful to use the notion of State Ideological Apparatuses or the cultural policies of a particular country. This method can reveal how Central European art at that time was pluralistic, polycentric and dynamic. To put it simply, not ideology but rather political praxis created the historical context for Central European art production; and Louis Althusser’s term, the Ideological State Apparatus, can help to demonstrate the art of these regions in their multi-faceted perspectives.