

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The collegiate environment in which i participated at the Central European University (CEU) Budapest while earning my doctoral degree considerably shaped my research approaches in two most important ways. CEU's uniquely international milieu—where students, faculty, and staff come from more than 100 countries of five continents—creates an intellectual context in which there is no dominant national culture and narrative framework, and members of the scholarly community are constantly exposed to many different and sometimes opposing perspectives. This is also reflected in the University's curriculum encouraging critical approaches both to ethnocentric or fallaciously universalizing concepts, historical narratives and cultural canons. Furthermore, the Department of Gender Studies where i pursued my doctoral studies was especially keen on practising critical cross-cultural interdisciplinarity as a model of knowledge production. Both these factors contributed insights and understandings that enriched the study feeding into this monograph. My initially rather theoretical and aesthetically oriented “views from nowhere” were productively challenged and i took to a more empirically anchored and more rigorously contextualized inquiry. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professor Susan Zimmermann, Head of the Department of Gender Studies at the time, for envisioning and implementing an academic program from which i as a young scholar greatly benefited. I also wish to thank her as the supervisor of the dissertation from which this book grew, for the continuing support and interest in my work over a number of years now.

I am grateful to the management and personnel both at the Artpool Art Research Centre, Budapest and the Hungarian National Film Archive, who received me with complaisance and a readiness to help. My thanks go to the visual artists discussed in this book, who generously opened their personal archives to me, shared their memoirs on various aspects of my query, and granted permission to reproduce their artworks.

I also would like to express my deep gratitude to my parents and close friends who kept me sane and secure during research and writing, and kept believing in me even in low times when the process was temporarily slackening.

It is a great pleasure to offer thanks to the Editors of the series “Forschungen zur Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Mitteleuropa” for making the publication of the dissertation possible in the form of a scholarly monograph. The publication series is managed and edited at the Geisteswissenschaftliches Zentrum Geschichte und Kultur Ostmitteleuropas e.V. an der Universität Leipzig (GWZO/Leipzig Centre for the History and Culture of East Central Europe). Since 2011, i have been the institution's Research Fellow as member of the project group *Ostmitteleuropa Transnational*, myself currently working on a project entitled “Inscribing socialist Eastern Europe into a socialist world through art”.

The usage of the lowercase “i” pronoun throughout my text signifies my reservations about a unique convention in the English language. English capitalizes and thus prioritizes the first-person singular, which comes across as a remarkably self-centred disposition conveyed by the current *lingua franca*, and as such may deserve to be denaturalized. My usage continues T.R.O.Y.’s practice in his essay “The New World Disorder—A global network of direct democracy and community currency,” submitted for the Utopian World Championship 2001, organized by SOC, a Stockholm-based non-profit organization for artistic and social experiments. The text is available from http://utopianwc.com/2001/troy_text.asp.

Earlier formulations of some parts of this monograph have been published elsewhere. A substantially shorter and far more concise version of Part III appeared under the title “Sites of Undoing Gender Hierarchies: Woman and/in Hungarian Cinema (Industry)” in *Media Research: Croatian Journal for Journalism and Media* vol. 16 (2010), no. 1, pp. 9–30. Chapter 13.2 was published in the Hungarian journal *Café Babel* as “Hova tűnt a sok leány: mesék a hetvenes évek nő(i) művészeitől [Where have the women gone: Women artists’ narratives from the 1970s]; no.64 (2011), pp. 69–76. Chapter 14 is an updated and fundamentally revised version of Part I of my Hungarian-language book *Nemtan és pablikart: Lehetőségek értelmezési szempontok az utóbbi másfél évtized két művészeti irányzatához* [Women’s Art and Public Art: Interpretive Aspects for Art Practices Emerging in the Hungarian Scene in the Past 15 Years], Budapest: Praesens Books, 2005, pp. 9–60. Chapter 14.5 “Boys Don’t Cry? Masculinity negotiated” is based on the essay “Boys Do Cry: Contemporary Hungarian (Male) Artists Engaging with Gender Troubles” submitted to *Engendering Transformation. Post-Socialist Experiences on Work, Culture and Politics*; special issue of *GENDER: Zeitschrift für Geschlecht, Kultur und Gesellschaft*, ed. by Heike Kahlert & Sabine Schäfer, Opladen, Berlin, Farmington Hills/Mi: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2011, pp. 56–71.

Beata Hock
Leipzig, 2012

INTRODUCTION

This book explores the factors that shaped artistic representations of women and the artistic agendas and self-positioning of individual women cultural producers in Hungary's state-socialist and post-socialist periods. Positing that particular state formations and the dominant ideologies therein interpellate individuals in particular ways and thus might better enable certain subjectivities and constrain others, the monograph sets out to identify the kind of messages that the two different political systems in Hungary communicated to women through their political discourses, actual legislation, and social policies. The research then proceeds to trace how gendered subject positions have emerged in Hungary's changing social context and turned into speaking positions for women cultural producers in the specific fields of cinema and the visual arts. Exploring the spaces, dynamics, and options available for feminist art production in both periods, i.e. the years between 1945–89 and since 1989, the analysis critically reconsiders the alleged absences and presences of feminist art in Hungary within the stated time frame.

The need for a thorough socio-historical framing for the study of creative processes and artworks by women arose out of a conceptual tension encountered between the metanarrative of feminism and the historical experience of contemporary Hungary. This tension runs between dominant narratives of the Second Wave of modern feminism as a grassroots social movement emerging in the United States and some countries of Western Europe around the 1960–1970s on the one hand, and, on the other, the state-administered emancipation programs in socialist East-Central Europe. Gender equality advocacy had different empowerment mechanisms and dynamics within the two geopolitical locations and ideological frameworks. The North Atlantic feminist movement and the cultural critique it developed were most pervasive on a discursive level in the given period, while state-level endorsement of feminist demands through legislative and policy measures followed only later. By contrast, the emancipation program under “actually existing socialism” led to the passing of decrees and implementation of policies pertaining to the public spheres of work, education, politics, law, and culture, whereby creating, to some extent, the institutional and material conditions for achieving gender equality. This program was rather incoherent throughout the period of state-socialism, and in its last decade or so most of the program's major ideological goals were eroded. In the years 1989–90 East-Central European countries underwent a change of their political and economic systems: from authoritarian one-party states they were transformed into multi-party parliamentary democracies and from state-socialist to capitalist economies, which also involved the reconfiguration of the social structure and a break with earlier ideological and cultural discourses, relations, and dependencies. Restructuring the economy also entailed tightening the welfare system that formed the basis of much of the earlier women-favoring policies. Gender scholars

often characterize the transition period as showing a marked turn to re-traditionalizing public discourses conflicting, on the one hand, with the new social roles and self-perceptions women have acquired in the previous system and on the other, with an ever more accessible Western-originated feminist social and cultural critique.

As I embarked on the research leading up to this monograph, I was driven by both content-related and methodological aspirations. I wanted to fill important niches in both feminist cultural theory and gender history as they relate to Hungarian society and, more generally, fill gaps in research done on the socio-cultural history of the state-socialist period. My aim was to evaluate both gender-related developments and the cultural production of the relevant decades within the framework of a carefully conceptualized East/West comparison as well as a state-socialist/post-socialist comparison.

In what follows, a theoretical introduction (*Part I: Constructing and bringing gendered identities into representation*) musters the key concepts, theories and dilemmas that have fed into this study and governed the research. These insights and questions are brought together and thought through to the effect that a situated feminist perspective should be formulated which no longer prioritizes Western feminism as the only specific set of politics capable of undoing multiple patriarchal hierarchies.

Part II: Emancipation: An expendable goal discusses legislative framings, women-related policies and social practices that have conveyed messages for female social subjects in both the state- and post-socialist periods. The chapters draft a detailed picture of both the emancipatory and compelling (if not oppressive) tendencies within the “socialist mode of women’s emancipation”, its effects on women’s consciousness, and the suggested reasons for the relative failure of this emancipation agenda. The exploration assesses in a similar manner the developments of the post-socialist era. In piecing together this picture, i review the existing scholarly literature on the subject. Besides academic sources, i also drew on public discussion events and recently made documentary films that set themselves agendas matching my own inquiry. Part of the literature i have consulted deployed in-depth interviews as a research method to inquire into “emancipation” as lived experience, including the life expectations, self-constructions and career paths of women born and/or socialized in the two different periods. Interviewing appears to be a viable tool in mapping the worlds of speakers whose subject position *vis-à-vis* feminism is obscured (Portuges 1993). Interviews are capable of bringing to the surface reflection on, and criticism of, the ways in which material and social conditions script gender roles and women’s lives; these are reflections, however, which may not always be framed in feminist terms. Having this benefit, interviews were also one of my own tools in exploring female cultural producers’ activity and the interrelated questions of gender and authorship.

Part III: Women and/in Hungarian cinema (industry) and *Part IV: Artworks and subject positions: Women visual artists from 1945 till the 2000s* explore how the interplay of changing numbers of female creative workers, the ideological and material underpinnings of film and art making, and a possible cultural impact of feminism interrelate and create particular subject and speaking positions for women

artists within a given social and discursive context. I chose cinema and the visual arts as two distinct fields that possess different social statuses and production conditions, but are often tackled in conjunction as constitutive parts of our visual culture. Both **Parts III** and **IV** open with an introductory section where i probe the applicability of the theses of feminist film and art theory for the analysis of Hungarian cinema and visual arts scenes in the chosen periods. As the critique of representation problematizes the dominance of male producers of representations, i also address the relation between the number of women cultural practitioners and the kinds of gender representations offered in my two chosen artistic fields. As most theorists agree, this relation is certainly not automatic, yet, transformations in dominant modes of representation will hardly take place without an increased number of women participating in creating them.

Outrun perhaps only by television, cinema is arguably a medium of mass appeal that has enjoyed the greatest exposure to audiences for the most part of the period considered here. For its wide reach and capacity to inscribe ideologies, a range of political and economic forces have seen film as an important propaganda tool—and so did their critics, including the feminist critique of dominant cinema. My work on Hungarian cinema is based on original research involving theoretical analysis that for the first time applies feminist film theory to the Hungarian film corpus of the second half of the 20th century. I seek answers to the question of whether state-socialist emancipation rhetoric and policies targeting women's employment and social inclusion have also affected 1) the domain of creative work; and 2) the kinds of representations of women circulating in visual culture?

Unlike movies, contemporary visual art is a less accessible cultural form and is more removed from large audiences. This is increasingly so in Hungary nowadays, although visual art enjoyed more prominence in the 1960–80s. Art professionals often link contemporary art's marginal status to the fact that no proper art market has yet developed in post-socialist Hungary, but these claims rarely reflect critically on the complex impact of market relations on cultural production. While not denying the beneficial effects of private investment on the art scene, some other voices point to a relative advantage resulting from the lack of a strong art market that would heavily influence and “streamline” artistic practice. Situated on the margins of both economic and state interests today, contemporary art may conceptualize itself as one of the last sites of manipulation-resistant “free speech” and subversive attention: a counter-public sphere indeed for the cultivation of critical thinking, and hence a potential site of feminist cultural interventions. In this part the creative pursuit of contemporary Hungarian women artists is examined in the field of paradoxical forces shaping their praxis.

The analysis in this monograph emerges from interdisciplinary research, both on the level of theoretical inquiry and methodology. It brings together the approaches and insights of a number of scholarly fields (art history and theory, film studies, feminist theory and social science, post-colonial criticism) to explore the degree to which the material and ideological conditions of cultural production impact issues of both content and style as well as authorial positions. To argue a complex case i employ a range of methodological tools (original primary research in-

cluding many types of written documents and a substantial amount of visual material, quantitative surveys, interviews, theoretical analysis, interpretation of art works and literature review). This approach—reading society as a heterogeneous “text” and regarding cultural producers as social subjects—maps the interplay and mutual determinations of social formation, the prevalent codes of art making, and the ideologies operating both within a given society and art world. My inquiry is also informed by post-colonial theory and the “Second World reworking” of this theory’s major arguments. Shifting the terms and adjusting the focus of Western feminist scholarship within the various disciplinary areas that my project engages have been the primary analytical perspectives running through the investigation. Similar efforts have already been made by social scientists to map women-related social processes in Hungary; i substantially drew on these explorations in **Part II**. Within film studies, no comparable endeavor has been made to test the applicability of the analytical tools of feminist film theory; this is one of the tasks **Part III** of the monograph sets out to accomplish. In the field of the visual arts, a feminist criticism-aware discourse circulated for a few years; i spell out my discontents with it in Part I, and attempt to resolve these and operate with a different conceptual framing in **Part IV**. Another guiding perspective has been to employ a scholarly and historically concrete approach both to the study of the women-related social changes and the cultural production of the state-socialist period. To achieve this re-assessment, i had to develop arguments to contest and overrule a persistent Cold War intellectual attitude. Pieces written with that stance are often reluctant to dedicate serious scholarly efforts to the analysis of the cultural-social history of the time, and tend instead to dispatch the social and cultural processes of more than four decades as unchanging, undifferentiated, and debilitated by “totalitarian” politics.

Gender figures in my analysis as a relational category to capture the different places or roles women and men occupy or assume in cultures and societies. From this perspective i am working with a limited application of the term as i only occasionally imply aspects of gay and lesbian studies or queer theory. These are not omitted because i regard issues and insights offered therein irrelevant but because i set out to accomplish a task long due but moderate in scope: to embed the examination of Hungarian women cultural producers’ creative activity in their larger social and cultural contexts.

Finally, I hope my work can provide a viable methodological model for re-inscribing the national in research without reproducing notions about a pseudo-homogeneous national context. Focusing on a particular society, i was able to retrieve and analyze singular empirical material; my methodology, however, consciously avoids a narrow nationalist history approach as it strives at every turn to retain references to an international context.