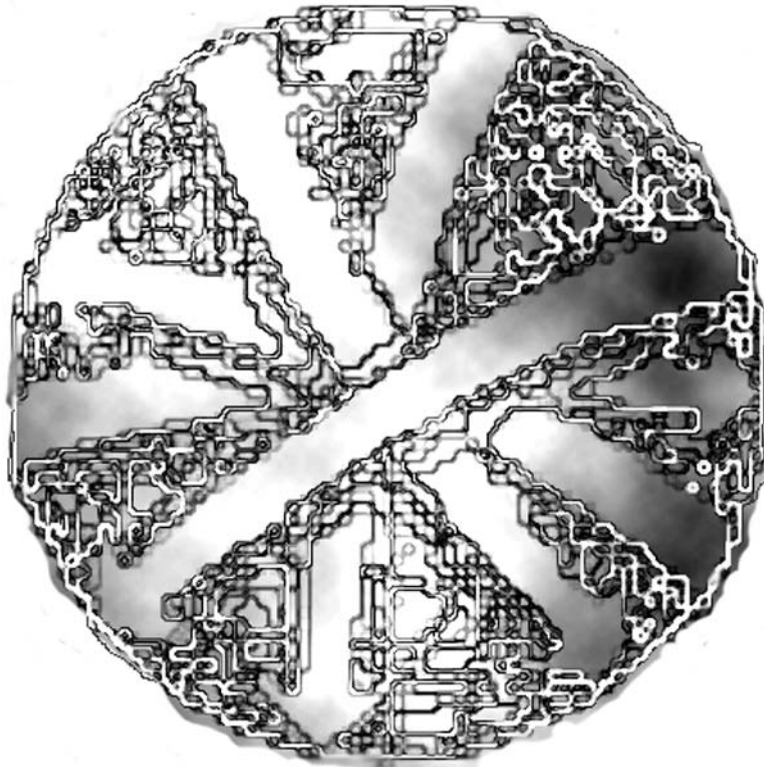


Ed. Note: In this section we are presenting work from a collaborative project that was funded by Artslink, CEC International Partners, 12 West 51 St.N.Y,N. Y., 10001-4415. The final form of the project is a book-length collection (163 pp.) of email exchanges between the collaborators, diary entries, miscellaneous articles, documents, images, five interviews with Hungarian artists and six articles. To give readers an idea of the project, we are including below the original project description, and two articles by the collaborators, with which the collection concludes. Copies of the limited edition of the complete work are available for \$25 by special order from Left Curve, PO Box 472, Oakland, CA 94604. email: editor@leftcurve.org

Globalization & Cultural Nationalism

in Central-East Europe:

*the “nationalist/urbanist” debate
in the arts in Hungary*



(documentation of a process of investigation)

Csaba Polony
Bálint Szombathy

ArtsLink Collaborative Project Description

Globalization and Cultural Nationalism in Central-Eastern Europe: the "urbanists vs nationalists" conflict in the arts in Hungary.

One of the most significant developments that we face in the new millennium is the ever accelerating development and integration of the global network (economic, cultural, mass media, electronic communications, internet, etc.) throughout the world. An effect of this process has been the intensification of the old conflict between "tradition" and "modernity" that first arose with industrial development and modernization. The rapid growth of the new electronic-communication media has further widened the breach between older cultural traditions, with their sense of unique "organic" identity, and the over-all historical trend of mass modern economic and cultural integration. This process has given rise to various kinds of self-protective forms (such as ethnic separatism, fundamentalism, etc.); to desires for "otherworldly" escape (such as beliefs in extra-terrestrials, UFO's, religious sects, etc.) or technological fantasies that we will "transcend" the human condition (Artificial life, virtual/post-humans, etc.).

In this collaborative project, we propose to investigate, from a cultural/artistic standpoint, effects of this process within the Central-East European context, using primarily Hungary as an example. Since the demise of state socialism in the Central-Eastern European region this problem has taken form primarily as the conflict between those who defend national/ethnic uniqueness and those who wish to more effectively integrate the region within global economic and cultural developments. As a result, old repressed, never quite healed wounds and grievances have resurfaced, as exemplified most obviously in the violent conflicts of the former Yugoslavia.

In Hungary, within the cultural and artistic sphere, this conflict (as elsewhere in the region) is usually referred to as "urbanists" vs. "nationalists." The former self-describe their position as "cosmopolitan, open, democratic and defenders of universal human rights"; whereas the latter think of themselves as "defenders of national traditions" that hold together the bonds of community and family and wish to have their traditional cultural specificities recognized as such without negating them to what they believe to be a "groundless cosmopolitanism." What is most striking to an outside observer is the almost complete absence of constructive dialogue between these two contradictory cultural realities. Mutual condemnation or silence is usually all that is evident. This absence of constructive dialogue is dangerous, since without some kind of eventual understanding the potential for more serious conflict is always present. It also prevents the development of cohesive social structures, the absence of which hinder efficient and productive economic development, leaving the region open for external political and economic exploitation and continued backwardness.

This proposal for a collaborative project between Csaba Polony (Oakland, CA) and Bálint Szombathy (Sremska Kamenica, Vojvodina, Yugoslavia) would explore this conflict through a recorded dialogue between ourselves and the presentation of work by writers and artists who adhere to regional cultural national traditions and those who work within a global internationalist framework. We will collect representative works (essays, artwork, literary writing, music, etc.) that exemplify the conflict, and those that look for constructive solutions.

Nationalist/Urbanist, Local/Non-Local

Bálint Szombathy

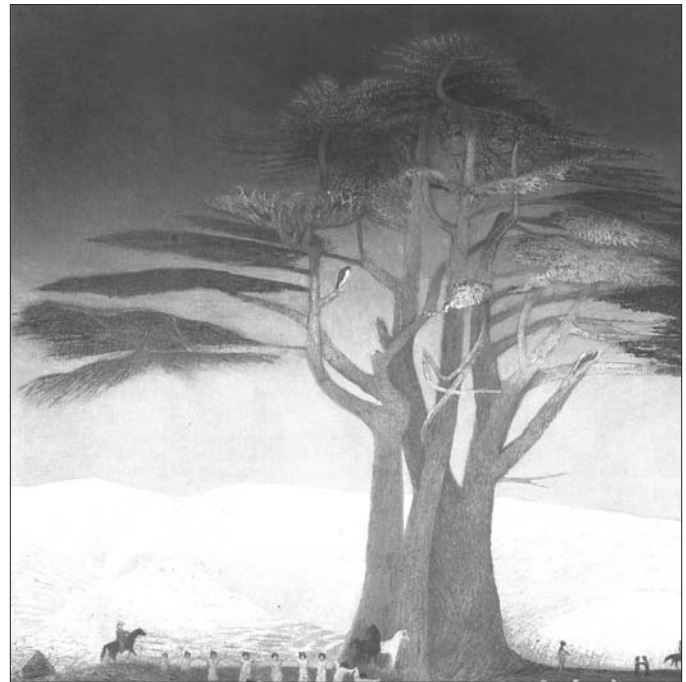
The nationalist-urbanist, local-non-local, national-cosmopolitan antithesis not infrequently collide within an individual. András Veres¹ delineates a striking example by pointing to the schizoid characteristics that appear in the life histories of two important Hungarian poets, Dezső Kosztolányi and Attila Jozsef. These schizoid characteristics in part reveal themselves within the problematics of our topic.

Kosztolányi becomes a nationalist when, in the aftermath of the Trianon peace treaty, Szabadka (Subotica), his place of birth and where his father and siblings live, is detached from Hungary. At the end of 1919, the poet starts to work with the far-right journal, *Új Nemzedék* [New Generation] and edits irredentist articles. In 1920, however, he leaves behind his political activities and changes his role from *homo moralis* to *homo aestheticus* and quickly starts to work with a liberal-conservative journal. Let me cite Veres: “He said to the nationalists: ‘I am Hungarian, I write in Hungarian, and I can give no greater testimony of my love for my people.’ To the internationalist his message is: ‘I am a human being, I write in the language of humanity, and naturally I feel one with the suffering of my fellow human beings.’”

The temperament of the tragically fated Attila Jozsef wasn't spared fluctuations either. At one time or other he moved through the anarchist movement, the populists, communist party membership, as well as the social-democrats. He finally settled with the *Szép Szó* [Beautiful Word], a leftist-liberal journal based on an urbanist outlook, which he helped to found, wherein he would work at trying to bring the ideas of Marx and Freud together.

Apart from the radical manifestation of the temperamental form, of Dezső Kosztolányi and Attila Jozsef, many similar situations could be given; however, let's return to simpler examples, since our investigation's original topic isn't nationalism, but populist, and not cosmopolitanism, but urbanist (though we realize that in many cases these things mean the same thing).

After such literary examples, let's turn our attention to visual art. In his book, *Tény-kép* [Real-picture]², the art historian Lajos Lóska on several occasions takes up the question of the correlation of local and universal values. About Imre Bukta, one of the Hungarian exhibitors at the last Venice Biennial, who has been described as an “agricultural artist” because of his use of local, village motifs, Lóska writes the following: “If we look at the orientations of our artists, we find two types of creative work among Hungarian visual artists. One type connects to European currents, while the other is the type that constructs a personal artistic path. At beginning of the



Tivadar Csontváry Kosztká; *Cedars of Lebanon*, 1907. Oil on Canvas, 200 x 260 cm.; Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs, Hungary.



József Rippl-Rónai, *Painter with Models*, 1910. Oil on cardboard, 70 x 100 cm.; József Rippl-Rónai Museum, Kaposvár, Hungary.

century, a representative of the former was Jozsef Rippl-Rónia, who started work among the Nablis artists; whereas an example of the latter is Csontváry, who created a specifically Hungarian form of visionary painting. Rippl-Rónia is sensitive to universal currents from which he forms his mode of expression, whereas Csontváry builds a personal mythology without reference to any outside influence. We can find these two types of artistic modes today as well.” Lóska here is referring on the one hand to new wave, or postmodern

painters (Imre Bak, János Szirtes), and on the other to artists whose work draws on regional traditions, within which he also categorizes Bukta.

So a consequence of Lóska's thought is that an artist who is open to European or universal artistic traditions can't be considered as being one who takes an original, personal path in his art. The question that then comes up is whether or not it is at all possible for there to exist an isolated artistic practice which isn't based on existing values—either as starting points or as a point of reference. I think that the originality and significance of an artist isn't so much determined by the extent to which he utilizes local or universal motifs, but rather whether or not he approaches them with talent.

Lóska's position is that it isn't possible to appropriate in an original way spiritual values from other cultural areas. "With us [in Hungary] evidence of the sharing of such values can perhaps best be followed in the (critical) literature. For example, the westernizers were condemned by contemporary official criticism for the imported aspects of their art. But this duality existed in the skirmishes between the populists and urbanists between the two world wars; in fact, the literature of the '70s was also frequently assailed by the critics for following western models."

Concerning the already referred-to Imre Bukta—whom Lóska sees as a typical advocate of valid Hungarian themes—it should be noted that he uses natural agricultural products, utensils or elements (corn, stumps, tree branches, hay stacks, alfalfa or plowed fields, grazing

meadows, a plow, a tractor, etc.) in his site-specific actions, installations and objects. In his materials and use of the environment, Bukta is really unequalled and stands alone in Hungarian art.

Few of like mind can be found anywhere in Europe as well, but with respect to the orientation of his medium and language, his opus is very much a part of the standards of contemporary international art (installation, sculpture, performance, action, graphics, painting). His style is universal, his spirit however is local and regional.

The local/non-local problematic also presents itself in the art of the Novi Sad-born Tibor Bada, who now lives in Budapest; as well as in the work of László Kerekes, who was originally from Bácska [region of Vojvodina, Serbia -tr.] and now lives in Berlin.

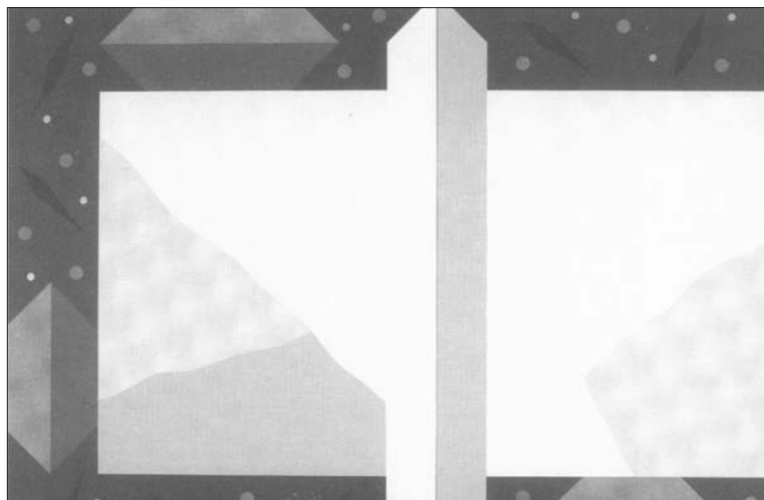
Both the new primitive language of Bada and Kerekes' 80s new savage pictorial starting point employ universal stylistic methods, but the contents of their work are very much linked to their homelands. In Bada's images, besides Mickey Mouse, Superman, the Oscar Award figure, etc., everyday local heroic figures also appear. In Kerekes' engaged art the Balkan wars—that is, the lost homeland—are likewise

constant themes. For the most part the concrete materials used in the objects and installations obviously refer to their place of origin.

—translated from Hungarian by C. Polony



Bukta Imre; *Man with Ermine*, 1987. Wood, metal. 200 x 17 x 70 cm.



Bak Imre, *Postmodern*, 1994. Acrylic on Canvas, 200 x 300 cm.

1. Veres András, "Változatok századunk ember(kép)ére." [Human(image) variations in our century], *Kritika* no. 10, Budapest, 1999., p. 20.

2. Lóska Lajos: *Tény-kép*. Új Művészet Kiadó, Budapest, 1999., p. 35, p. 175.

Globalization and Cultural Nationalism:

remarks on the populist/urbanist debate
in the arts in Hungary*

by Csaba Polony

In this article, I wish to address some of the most important issues (personal, historical, political, artistic and philosophical) with which I had to grapple concerning the “populist/nationalist and urbanist/internationalist” debate in Hungary within the context of Globalization.

From personal issues of cultural identity to global politics

On a personal level, while working on this project, I found myself being forced to come to terms with my own social/national identity (or lack thereof). I was born in Hungary, came to the U.S. in early childhood and became largely acculturated into American culture through the course of growing up. However I never really “felt at home,” and in much of my life I’ve had to struggle with a deep-rooted sense of an “absence” and “lack of place.” This problem became magnified by the nature of the work to which I have devoted my life; that is, an exploration of “art-making,” fundamental aspects of which involved the interplay of problems of representation, origins, “the ground of art,” in relation to the trajectory of modernism and concrete historical change.

In part, through the course of my life, I maintained my Hungarian identity because I began to view it as a means to experientially come into contact with a sense of “origins” that was not based on an arbitrary choice, but was part of my own history that extends back before “historical time.” That is, it made it possible to connect to a “pre-rational, archaic, mythic” consciousness—a mode of awareness that I was unable to experience in my day to day life in the U.S. The Hungarian language itself was more visceral, “archaic,” the words closer, sometimes seemingly synonymous with their referents. And this would be so for most of the elementary words of life. For example, “sibling” (*testvér*) is a compound word of “body” (*test*) and “blood” (*vér*). The word for “woman” (*nő*) is the same—almost as if it were a sound—as “grow”; “man” (*férfi*) it is a compound of “(to) fit” (*fér*) and “young” or “son of” (*fi*). The language was also entirely genderless, there being no pronouns for “he” or “she.” I appreciated the painful beauty of the old folk music, its

structure (pentatonic scale) being more Asian than European. Whenever I would meet other Hungarians, I invariably felt a more direct, visceral connection than I would with other people.

On the other hand, my concern with the “the trajectory of modernism and concrete historical change” lead to the recognition of the relativity of cultural systems and a subsequent search for cultural communality that would be applicable to our species as a whole, understood in an evolutionary sense—from the nature of the physical and biological universe to the unfolding of human history through time. Such a position, practically speaking, made me an “internationalist.” Much of my efforts have been concerned with trying to find adequate forms for a non-illusory (non-metaphysical) synthesis between such universal concerns and an awareness of a sense of place, origins and ground that issued from my own experience—as opposed to its being an abstract construction.

A significant particular form of my experience, transposed into historical time, took the form of a strongly felt concern for the fate of the Hungarian people and to the many tragedies they have suffered over the centuries,¹ and how little the outside world knew about it, much less cared. On the other hand I was also aware of the significant negative aspects of recent Hungarian history, such as the mistreatment of their own national minorities during the period of the Dual Monarchy (1867-1918), the chauvinism directed against neighboring peoples, anti-Semitism and the alliance with Nazi Germany during WWII. But over all, I felt that in general Hungarian culture had been repressed/oppressed and I hoped that with the fall of communism, it would have a chance for a rebirth.

Before the collapse of “really existing socialism,” I was always bothered by the lack of public awareness in the U. S. of the existence and fate of the many diverse, historically unique, cultures of Eastern Europe. This was also true among U. S. and Western European leftists, who, while constantly lending support to “national liberation struggles” and minority rights domestically and internationally, were completely unaware or dismissive of the ways in which the different national/ethnic cultures in Eastern Europe had also been repressed/oppressed by dominant foreign powers.² And then, after the collapse of

* In Hungarian, the debate is called, *népi-urbánus vita*. The word *népi* literally means (“peoples” or “populist”), though it can also refer to *nemzeti* (“national” or “nationalist”). In Hungary the two words are often used interchangeably. In this work I will use the English “populist” and “nationalist” interchangeably, depending on the context.

the supposedly monolithic Soviet Bloc, the “return of the repressed” national/ethnic grievances that broke out were dismissed as “conservative,” “reactionary” or even “proto-fascist” by many progressive people without their bothering to understand the reasons for such sentiments. I wondered why this “double standard” existed. A reason for this can be gleaned in the following quote from an article I ran across recently:

...the First World continues to be portrayed [in western cultural studies scholarship] as a rather homogeneous entity, except for the recognition of Third-World (immigrant) communities within it. This view does not, for example, acknowledge various forms of European colonialization, such as the subjugation of socialist countries by the USSR after 1945 or the ongoing colonization of Eastern by Western Europe since the late 1980s. The revolutions in Eastern Europe have opened to global capitalism previously unavailable areas toward which paradigms of “democratization” and “modernization,” hitherto predominantly pushed onto Third-World countries, continue to be directed. As a result, the territory of Eastern Europe is currently being subalternized by the politics of the IMF and partial promises of inclusion into First-World organizations like NATO and the European Union.³

What Claudia Sadowski-Smith points to is the persistence of the bipolar logic of the Cold War, in which the “Soviet Bloc” was considered as a socio-cultural unit of sameness, the “Second World,” with which the “First World” was in mortal combat. Once that Bloc ceased to exist, a process of (re)colonization (in the name of democracy and free markets—or more generally, the impact of globalization) began, and any resistance to it was taken to be “conservative” or “reactionary”—and such resistance invariably took on “nationalist” forms; that is, forms of resistance which varied according to the unique historical experience of each of the different peoples of the region, one form of which, for example, has been the so-called “red/ brown” coalition between (ex)communists and nationalists in many areas of the region (as in Russia, Belarus, Serbia). However, significantly, this is not the case in Hungary.⁴ And that is just one example of the many differences that exist within the region.

In any case, this project forced me to come face-to-face with my pre-conceptions about my Hungarian identity vis-a-vis the actuality of contemporary Hungarian culture. And what I came to realize was that much of that identity was an idealized construct that I had “created” as a counterweight to my negative experience of U. S. culture as a reified, fetishized world in which “image” or material possessions counted more than the quality of human relationships. Simply put, I am much more familiar with American culture and can more readily see beneath its illusions than I am with actual lived-experience in Hungary. And though I can relate to the Hungarian context, have friends, get to know my relatives who live there better, and so on, I also had to admit that I really didn’t belong there either.

So my lack of sufficient experiential familiarity with contemporary Hungarian reality made it much more difficult for me to see the underlying social dynamics of that society, as compared with those of the U. S. That was so, I now believe, because the causal mechanisms that erect social veneers (ideologies) are fundamentally different in Hungary. In the U.S. the commodity-form is ubiquitous, all pervasive, a “second nature.” In Hungary the “free circulation” of the commodity form, though it has made rapid inroads in the last decade, is still less important than the presence of deep-rooted historical layers of an incomplete, derailed, process of “nation-building” and modernization.

Socio-psychological effects of this include feelings of “backwardness” and “inferiority” in relation to the developed world. Speaking very generally, among “nationalists” this produces attempts to dispel such negative feelings by a defensive exaggeration of the value of one’s own culture and, looking for scapegoats (Big Capital, the decadent West, Jewish financiers, etc.) to blame for the country’s subaltern position. They castigate the “urbanists” as wanting to sell-out the country to foreign interests. On the other side, the “internationalists/urbanists” try to become accepted by Western cultural institutions, which they view as inherently “progressive,” and tend to overly mimic whatever is seen as the latest trends in the West while blaming the provinciality of the nationalists as being a primary impediment for advancement and the overcoming of the backwardness of the country.

So, an important key to a better knowledge of the particular constellation of forces that circulates below the surface in Hungary has much to do with the “populist/urbanist” conflict.

The past as living present: a brief historical survey of the origins of the populist/urbanist debate in post-communist Hungary

Embedded within the psychic key that sets apart the social psyche of the whole East European region from that of the First World is the overwhelming living presence of history. In the West, and most quintessentially in the U.S., a postmodern “new subjectivity” (the so-called “death of the subject”) has emerged since the ’60s, one that has been characterized as “...the loss of any active sense of history, either as hope or memory. The charged sense of the past—either ague-bed of repressive traditions, or reservoir of thwarted dreams; and heightened expectancy of the future—as potential cataclysm or transfiguration—which had characterized modernism was gone. At best, fading back into a perpetual present, retro-styles and images proliferated as surrogates of the temporal.”⁵ In Hungary, as I’m sure is the case in other countries of the region as well, such a psychic world is simply unknown in the experiential sense, even among those who have a good knowledge of the latest western trends

or attach the label of “postmodern” to their work. “Post-modernism” in Hungary is a style, whether in art or fashion; in the U.S. it is an embodiment of social being, or a condition in which the distinction between style and social identity has evaporated.

I’m going to now give a brief historical summary of the background to the *népi-urbánus vita* (populist-urbanist debate) by following the excellent 1997 monograph on the subject by Tamás Fricz, *A népi-urbánus vita tegnap és ma*⁶ (“The populist-urbanist debate yesterday and today”) [my translation]. Fricz begins his analysis by placing the debate within an over-all historical process:

The populist-urbanist debate, though it concretely takes place within a given country, can nevertheless best be understood within the context of a general world historical development; or, more to the point, it makes its appearance as a consequence of such a development. The most important characteristic of this historical development through the course of the centuries, particularly beginning in the 16th century, is the evolution of a center and periphery and their subsequent mutual interaction. That is, a few major powers came into being that dominate the world economy and at the same time provide an economic, political and cultural model for the remaining, more or less, backward regions. (Immanuel Wallerstein’s *The Origins of the Modern World Economy* delineates this over-all development). This center-periphery relation comes into being throughout the world as well (the so-called Third World problem, or the North-South contradiction), but it also exists within Europe in the different levels of development between Western and Eastern Europe.⁷

Fricz goes on to make a clear distinction within Eastern Europe between the region of Central-Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, and parts of Croatia) and that of South-Eastern Europe (Bosnia, Albania, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Russia). The differences are historical, cultural and above all religious, in that the former areas fell within the sphere of the Western Roman Empire and as such subsequently came under the influence of the modernization process of Western Christianity; whereas the latter fell under the socio-cultural influence of the Byzantine Orthodox Church and in so doing became even more separated from developed Western Europe. This distinction, though it began more than a millennium ago, has its influence down to our own day—as can be seen in the subsequent differing responses in the two regions to the tidal wave of democratic revolutions of 1989.⁸ In any case, the point is that the self-perception of their “backwardness” in relation to Western Europe was different in the two regions. A consequence of this was that, as the process of modernization reached Eastern Europe in the 18-19th centuries, two distinct models of addressing the problems of underdevelopment emerged among the region’s intellectuals and politicians, a “Western” and an “Eastern.” The former, by and large, saw the Western European model of modernization which had to be adopted by the developing countries of Central-Eastern Europe as being universally applicable; whereas the East-

ern Orthodox region tried to turn their own forms of “backwardness” to their advantage. This was done by viewing their own autonomous historical, cultural and national values as the basis for further development. Accordingly, the Western model should not be followed, since the “Eastern” process of development is as valid, if not more so, as that of the West. (An example given by Fricz is the Narodnik [Populist] movement in Russia in the latter part of the 19th century.)

This situation developed differently in the Central-East and parts of South East Europe in that the majority of the region’s leading political and intellectual elements always viewed their cultural heritage in relation to the Western sphere. The question was not whether or not to develop on the basis of autonomous, indigenous traditions that would be distinct from the West, but rather: what would be the best modes of modernization by which to close the gap, to overcome underdevelopment in relation to Western Europe. Of course there were those who opposed this formulation and advocated a more “Eastern” or “Western” answer to the problem, but such views were less influential and in the minority.

Underdevelopment in Central-Eastern Europe presented itself in two ways. The first was the actual economic backwardness of the region; that is, the absence of the necessary modern structures—political institutions, adequate infrastructures, low living standards, etc. The second was cultural underdevelopment, understood in the sense that a well-developed civil society—based on the foundations of an up-to-date, democratically based, market society—was lacking. According to Fricz, if a country wishes to change this dual (structural and cultural) sense of lack—and accompanying frustration, feelings of backwardness, inferiority, resentment, etc.—then what is involved is the problem of reconstructing national identity, one that could feel equal in relation to the more developed world.

The problem takes on a political cast in these countries when the issue becomes how this can be best achieved. The nationalist/populists advocate that the foundation of development should begin from values rooted within the nation’s own traditions; whereas the internationalist/urbanists’ position is to accept the Western model as being universal in that it has already proven successful, and they take it for granted that it can be applied to the needs of their own country. Implicit in this analysis is that the consequences of the goal of development involve not just the requirements of modernization per se but are also closely interwoven with the appearance and desire to project a new, modern national identity and self-consciousness. After all, an underdeveloped nation can only get over its sense of inferiority if it can raise its sense of national pride to a higher level. Needless to say, this can easily lead to a crisis of national identity, one either of over or under estimating one’s national self-consciousness.

This then points to the whole problem of nationalism and the often resulting bloody conflicts in the region. In the major Western nations, due to their larger size and more or less ethnically homogenous populations, nationalism was a positive force in the process of nation-building and modernization. In comparison, nationalism in the small countries of Eastern Europe turned out to be counterproductive. Their size and multi-ethnic make-up prevented the formation of strong independent states. Rather, nationalism led, more often than not, to bloody wars, defeats and further confusion about national identity. "Nationalism...is essentially a compensatory reaction of the periphery. The elevation of its ideals is a compensation for the lack of adequate material conditions (...) The ideology of nationalism to this extent became the motor for breaking out of backwardness and dependency. Of course this also reverberated back to the center and lead to big power chauvinism in the countries of the center."⁹ Concerning the reappearance of nationalism after the collapse of state socialism, Friz, again quotes Bayer: "If leading nationalist movements first arose as a response to the challenges presented by modernization and nation-building, so today the failure, collapse and change of course from the dead-end of an ambiguous state socialist modernization again brought out new tides of nationalism."¹⁰

The specific case of Hungary

The above analysis of Central-East Europe is even more applicable to Hungary. This is so because up to the 15th–early 16th centuries Hungary had been more or less developmentally on par with the major European powers of the time. After 1526 (Battle of Mohács) and the subsequent dismemberment of the country,¹¹ Hungary not only lost its long-standing independence, but simultaneously rapidly receded developmentally into a peripheral status.

When Hungary had sufficiently regained its national self-consciousness by the early 19th century, it is not surprising that the task of modernization presented itself as a means to regain what had been lost—as opposed to other peoples in the region who were for the first time taking on the task of nation-building. For this reason the slogan, "Homeland and Progress," which first appeared in the early 19th century, has up to the present day presented particular internal conflicts regarding what the means of modernization should be. The dilemmas concerning the question "what kind of modernization?" has been an underlying point of contention ever since the reform period of the first half of the 19th century. The issue concerns how much of a part should the preservation and acceptance of the nation's past historical legacy, uniqueness and identity play within the process of modernization.

It is from such a perspective that the populist/urbanist debate can and should be approached. Its outbreak in

the 1920s–30s, as an ever stronger point of contention in the cultural sphere, was an expression of the specific choices presented in confronting the problem of backwardness and the alternatives available for achieving modernization. Even though this conflict in the '20s–'30s was particularly emotional, sharp, extremist and filled with prejudice, it still was the embodiment of the particular problems facing Hungarian modernization. And this is so because in Hungary's rapid industrialization and formation of civil society during the latter half of the 19th century and the early 20th, the Jewish population played a significant role. This was so not only in the economy but also in cultural life; as such, Jews made a strong imprint on the character of the development of a civil society. For such reasons, after the trauma of WWI and the loss of two-thirds of the country's territory (Treaty of Trianon, 1920), the debates of the '20s–'30s about modernization were further exasperated by ethnic conflicts. This was so for a number of interconnecting reasons: about a third of the Hungarian population now lived outside of the county's shrunken borders; there was the persistence of the old feudal order and the increased impoverishment of the peasantry; at the same time a bourgeois society had come into being within which Jews played a particularly important role. And that role advocated the "urbanist" road to modernization which the "nationalists" regarded as antithetical to the Hungarian people's traditions. This then fed into the atmosphere of rising anti-Semitism.¹²

Under such circumstances it is not that hard to understand why the populist/urbanist debates about modernization would take on such a heated form concerning the creation of a new national identity. In any case, the primary issue at stake in the debate about the modes of modernization is what the nature of the model that would serve as a means for social integration should be: one that looks to the historically evolved Western European civil institutions and values or one of an integrative form which preserves or resurrects the nation's own historical traditions and values. All the positions by the various political and cultural elements revolve around this issue, in the past as well as today. In any case, the issue was not resolved during the years prior to WWII but were merely suspended by the traumatic events of the next half-century.¹³

So after state socialism collapsed in 1989, the question of what kind of national identity would best address the unfinished task of modernization came up again—however, under very different conditions than existed 60–70 years ago. The suddenly attained independence presented enormous new challenges. Not only was it necessary to build a new economic system, but new self-sustaining political institutions (parliamentary democracy) and a necessarily accompanying democratic civil society as well. At the same time, it was necessary to create a new sense of national identity. This was even more the case considering the fact that Hungary had been under the

shadow of a great power for over four decades and constrained within a power bloc in which the country had minimal opportunity for national self-expression (economically, politically or culturally). On top of all that, the changed geo-political situation meant that the “integration with western values” in the 1990’s was not, as it had been in the past, an accommodation to the classic 19th century forms of western European nation-building and modernization but to the neo-liberal agenda of institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Union—or, more broadly, to the new situation of globalization. Yet, the essential problem to be solved remained the same as in the past: to resurrect and preserve the national culture which had been repressed during the Soviet hegemony, or to modernize by becoming integrated as fast as possible according to the requirements of the new, neo-liberal, global world order.

The concrete political form that emerged shortly after 1989 was an alliance between the former communists (renamed as the Hungarian Socialist Party) and a faction of former dissidents, the Free Democratic Alliance (whose leadership came primarily, though not exclusively, from the urban Jewish intelligentsia of Budapest), who, in general, advocate a neo-liberal free market system and the formation of a civil society along western lines. This coalition formed the second government of 1994–98. On the nationalist side, a coalition was eventually formed between the remnants of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (who had formed the first post-communist government), the Young Democrats (who had originally been part of the dissident movement and close to the Free Democrats but turned toward a more nationalist position after 1995 and renamed themselves as the Hungarian National Civic Party. They now advocate the formation of a strong civil society based on national traditions), the Small Holder’s Party (a more agrarian based movement) and various Christian Democratic groups. The most uncompromising nationalist group, the Hungarian Truth and Life Party, led by István Csurka, developed into a separate political force that thinks of itself as being “true Hungarian” and takes a strong anti-western, anti-big capital and anti-Semitic line, though it has the allegiance of only about five percent of the electorate.

Fricz believes that, barring some major external catastrophe, the process of modernization in Hungary will eventually result in the formation of a two-party—a “conservative” and a “liberal”—system, similar to those of Western Europe and the U.S. The foundation for this has already been laid by the alignment of the two differing government coalitions mentioned above, and also finds expression in the populist/urbanist debate. The completion of such a development, in which a civil political discourse would replace the often acrimonious and prejudicial mutual attacks, would be an indication of

Hungary’s final maturation as a “modern nation state.”

The question that needs to be raised at this juncture, however, is how applicable this “two party system” will be in the new world order of globalization, with the rise of regionalism and the accompanying transformation of the classic 19th century form of the nation-state. Not to mention that the western political system has become much more beholden to the interests of large corporate interests than so-called “civil society.” Though the exposure to the raw realities of the “free market” in the last decade has cracked and dulled the glow of the rose-colored glasses through which the “Free World” had been viewed by many people in Hungary during the Soviet period, many illusions concerning the “open, free, democratic and mature nature” of the supposed more “civilized” western world still remain. However, if we scratch the surface, such illusions are fed more by the substantial material discrepancies (particularly as filtered through TV and Hollywood) that remain between the First World and the former “Second” World, rather than the presumed “higher” civilized level of the West’s political or cultural life.

The above is an admittedly cursory historical sketch of this complex issue. Finally, I’d like now to turn my thoughts to some of the cultural and artistic issues that were raised for me while working on this project.

Some Cultural, Artistic and Philosophical Implications

As can be inferred from the above concerning the historical/political background, the populist/urbanist debate has a strong cultural and artistic component. In fact, its modern appearance first took place within literary circles and became politicized only with the growing climate of animosities just before the outbreak of WWII. The debate in the ’20s and ’30s revolved around what should be the most appropriate form for Hungarian art and literature, modernist or traditionalist. That is, should Hungarian art and literature draw its creative energy from the historical experience of the Hungarian people (and for the populists this meant primarily the folk traditions of the peasantry), giving it form and shape that relates to contemporary life (the “nationalist” view); or should the task be to bring the level of Hungarian culture up to the standards of Western European culture (by which the “urbanists” meant the literate high culture of western civil society)? In a sense, it was not all that different from the conflict between regionalists and modernists in the U.S. during the same period, though, interestingly, in the U.S., the “modernists” looked to Western Europe for guidance in the pre-WWII years.

As in the political field, the cultural populist/urbanist debate was “suspended” by the outbreak of WWII and the following four decades of socialism and Soviet hegemony. To be more accurate, it became buried under

veneers of code phrases and subterfuge, though in a sense its content—"what is Hungarian culture and what is not?"—was always present under the surface. I'm not going to try to give a survey of Hungarian culture from the mid-'40s to the end of the '80s here, simply because I'm not really sufficiently familiar with it to give an adequate treatment. Some of this history can be gleaned from the various articles in this collection (such as the interviews with György Szomjas, Béla Halmos, János Sugár, György Pozler and the article by Bálint Szombat-hy published in this issue). All I would like to say in passing is that the state-socialist attempt to create a "new" art and culture that was to have "replaced" the earlier dichotomy, in the form of "socialist realism," came to an unsung practical dead-end much earlier (at least since the mid-'60s, if not before) than did its political and economic form.

What I would like to do instead, is to first say a few words about the different "social being" in Hungary today in relation to the U.S. and then speculate on some of the artistic and philosophical issues that are implicit in the new post-communist atmosphere that came up in the process of working through this project.

As I mentioned above, one of the basic differences that I became aware of in Hungary was the absence of what I would term the "postmodern non-subject." This I found to be true on all levels of society, from petty hustlers to well-established academics. When you meet someone, there is invariably more of a sense that you have come into contact with a "whole" person, rather than a projected "image," as so often is the case in the U.S. Admittedly that is a purely subjective impression on my part, though I do believe it has an objective basis in the nature of the social dynamics of the country. However, it is also true that western mass culture (particularly U.S. TV and Hollywood) has had a significant impact on the general population, particularly the young. At the same time, much of the population has become fairly apathetic politically, more concerned with daily survival than what the direction of the country should be. A fairly large gulf exists between the average member of society and the intelligentsia and politicians, and this is so across the political spectrum. All the changes that have occurred since the fall of socialism have been, by and large, from the "top down," with most of the population being fairly passive and bewildered about what was going on. This is also the case with the debate that we have been addressing here, as it has been pretty much confined to the intelligentsia and professional politicians. This is so with "urbanists" as well as "nationalists," though perhaps more true of the former than the latter. Nevertheless, I am not one for looking at a society in a purely empirical way. In other words, even if the issues of contention between the "urbanists" and "nationalists" do not have immediate mass reverberations, they still embody the dynamic of choices that confronts a changing social and cultural landscape.

Tradition and Modernity

Turning now to specific artistic issues, the populist/urbanist debate in art can be fruitfully approached by placing it within the over-all historical dialectic between "tradition" and "modernity." In what follows here, I'm going to start from general principles (Weberian ideal-types, if you will) rather than from examples of specific embodiments in which such principles may take form. In other words, particular artists or writers can have various elements of such principles within their work and it is rare to find a concrete example that would coincide entirely with the abstract ideal-type—the latter being a theoretical construction distilled from empirical phenomena, which only "exists" as a concept.

The use of the word "tradition" in the context of the history of culture usually has two separate but interconnected meanings. According to Webster's: "the delivery of opinion, doctrines, practices, rites and customs from generation to generation by oral communication," (This usage is most applicable to what is usually called "folk culture") and "a long established practice or custom that has the effect of an unwritten law; specifically, any of the usages of a school of art or literature handed down through the generations and generally observed." (This would apply to the literate tradition of Western "high culture," roughly from the Renaissance up to mid-20th century modernism).

There is, however, another use of "tradition" that makes a sharp distinction between all pre-modern, pre-industrial, "traditional or archaic" cultures and those of modern, industrial, historical civilizations. This view is summed up by Mircea Eliade: "The chief difference between the man of the archaic and traditional societies and the man of the modern societies... lies in the fact that the former feels himself indissolubly connected with the Cosmos and the cosmic rhythms, whereas the latter insists that he is connected only with History."¹⁴ Concretely, "The premodern or 'traditional' societies include both the world usually known as 'primitive' and the ancient cultures of Asia, Europe and America."¹⁵ Interestingly, the original meaning of the Latin word, *traditio*, is "to surrender." That is, in the most archaic sense "tradition" means to give oneself to the Cosmos, to the reality that is given and precedes human history.

Modern culture, or modernity in general, refers to the culture that has evolved since the beginning of industrialization and modernization, roughly since the 15th century in Europe. Modernity has a linear view of history, or the general Enlightenment principle of progress (economic, scientific, technological, political and cultural). Culturally it involved the separation between "high" and "low" culture, the former becoming institutionalized through the development of a professional intellectual class of artists (the Academy), whose creative efforts were elevated as being the carriers of the tradition of modern art. "Low" culture became defined as "folk culture" and

was doomed to eventual extinction—a process which, by and large, became complete in the western world by the 20th century. In this process “folk culture,” through the industrialization of agriculture and the subsequent development of the consumer society, was eventually replaced by “mass or pop culture” (Adorno’s “cultural industry”). The complete elimination of organic folk culture heralded the emergence of

Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle* by the 1960s: “The entire life of societies in which modern production conditions prevail heralds itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.”¹⁶ At the same time, however, it also

meant the end of the tradition of modernism¹⁷ and its subsequent conflation into the eclecticism of postmodernism by the late 1970s in the U.S. and Western Europe. Culturally, western postmodernism has seriously questioned if not all together abandoned the idea of “progress,” whereas among the “internationalist/urbanist” trends in Eastern Europe in many ways it is still operative. In this sense, the postmodern concern with “identity politics,” for example, can (not with a certain amount of irony) be said to be more in line with the Eastern European “nationalist” trend in culture.

The period of the last half-century, which saw the full emergence of the “Society of the Spectacle” in the West, was paralleled in the Soviet Bloc by the attempt to impose a “new socialist society” that was to presumably replace the “decadent” capitalist West with a higher stage of civilization. As is well known, this involved forced collectivization and mechanization of industry and agriculture and the accompanying attempt to eradicate the remnants of the “backwardness” of peasant culture—which was to be replaced by an urbanized “proletarian art” of “socialist realism.” Of course, that attempt failed completely for a myriad of reasons, but the philosophical base of its failure can be located in the fact that “socialist culture” was a purely abstract construct that was artificially created by decree rather than having issued “organically” from actual life experience.

This points to one of the underlying differences between the Eastern European “internationalist” trend and that of the West. In the West, where the inner components of the “pure art” modernist trajectory have been exhausted, much of institutionalized contemporary (post-

modern) art addresses “political” issues such as minority, gender-based, multicultural and post-colonial art. In the East, the current “internationalist/urbanist” art, having developed as a dissident art movement in opposition to the restrictive “politicization” of culture during the Soviet system, has a deep-rooted antipathy to “political art.”¹⁸



Illustrations from, *Kalotaszegi Népzene - Transylvanian Folk Music CD*, edited by László Kelemen. Recorded at Fonó Music Hall Studios, Budapest, 1999. Graphic design by Laura Szabo, photo of the musicians, Aladár Kicsi (L) and Neti Lanyi (R) by Béla Kása.

I would like to conclude this “epilogue” now by giving some examples of the cultural forms that the “populist/nationalist vs. urbanist/internationalist” divide has taken in Hungary since the late 1980s and addressing some of the aesthetic differences between the two tendencies.

Populist/Nationalist Art

Examples of populist/nationalist art would include the folk music and dance revival of the *Tánc Ház* movement (see the interviews with György Szomjas, Béla Halmos and Sándor Csoóri, Jr. elsewhere in this collection) and the numerous folk music groups that have come into being, such as those that perform regularly in the Fonó Club in Budapest. Both these movements are in turn a part of the whole “world music” phenomenon that has developed throughout the world in the recent past. Much of this movement can be seen as a positive consequence of globalization. The increased opportunity for travel and the electronic media revolution (everything from inexpensive audio and video tape recorders, cheaper telephone rates and availability of email and internet communication), have made possible wide ranging contact and exchange of information among people interested in this area throughout the world. The folk revival movement has also spawned responses in visual art, from graphic art derived from traditional folk art, some of which are used to illustrate the folk music CD covers, to documentary photography, such as the work of Béla Kása.¹⁹

A common principle that underlies such cultural work is the intention of returning to the sources of what has survived from peasant folk culture, collecting and preserving it and then using the music and dances in ongoing performances, festivals and dance hall events. In the post-communist social climate of encroaching globalization, this work is seen by many of its participants as an essential antidote to the serious threat to national cul-

tural uniqueness posed by the numbing stupefaction and leveling effects of commercialized pop culture. The movement, however, is anything but “nationalistic” or chauvinist. It has a healthy multicultural attitude that values and respects all forms of traditional culture throughout the world.

There is also another nationalist trend in culture that tries to recreate what its practitioners believe to be the most unique aspects of specifically Hungarian culture. A good example is the work of the sculptor Tibor Szervátiusz. His work frequently draws sustenance from what he conceives of as being the most ancient visual forms of Hungarian culture, whose origins he traces to the nomadic Turkic culture of the pagan Hungarian past.



Makovecz Imre, Evangelical Church, Siófok, Hungary, 1990.

A similar concern with a non-western cultural past is evident in the most notable and internationally recognized national art form that has emerged in post-communist Hungary: the remarkable Organic Architecture School, whose foremost representative is Imre Makovecz. Makovecz is also a very outspoken advocate of a uniquely Hungarian culture, which he views as belonging to a non-Western, “Scythian” tradition. For example, in an interview a couple of years ago he says, “Most journalism today does everything to have people believe that the world of the white man is in crises. And they are on to something, the virtual world hangs on a single strand of hair...” The interviewer then asks, “By the white man’s culture do you mean Atlantic culture?” Makovecz replies,

“Yes.” “And what kind of world do you live in?” asks the interviewer. “My world is not of this world. As Gyula Illyés [Hungarian poet, 1902–83] says, ‘The homeland is up on high,’ and this brings to the surface the knowledge of several millennia: Hungarians were a part of the Scythian world, they were a part of the kingdom of the sky.”²⁰

The above is a necessarily incomplete and cursory look at “nationalist” cultural tendencies and I do not presume to have come close to an adequate treatment of it. My purpose here is to point to underlying principles that distinguish it from “internationalist/urbanist” art. And a primary distinction concerns the view of “tradition.”

Common to all manifestations of cultural nationalism is the aim of grounding cultural work within what are seen as the inherited remnants of organic traditions of Hungarian folk culture. This approach ranges from utilizing that tradition as a starting point and then constructing the contemporary forms (such as the art of Imre Butka), the revival of folk culture for practical use in a contemporary setting (the *Táncbúz* movement), and the utilization of what are assumed to be the most ancient sources of a uniquely Hungarian culture (as the sculpture of Tibor Szervátiusz and the architecture of Imre Makovecz).

Internationalist/Urbanist trends

In contrast to the nationalist view of tradition as being rooted in folk culture or a distinctly Hungarian past that reaches back to pre-Christian forms, the internationalist trend views Hungarian tradition in relation to the general literate European tradition of “high culture,” (which is implicitly presumed to be “universal” and the most advanced level of human culture). For example, in the György Pozler article in this collection, no mention is made of folk tradition, only that of the institutionalized literate national tradition. As such, the problem of preserving the national cultural tradition in the face of globalization relates mainly to the survival of the Hungarian literate tradition of historically canonized work.

Folk art or the existence of a unique Hungarian art form derived from the distant past, by implication, is either assumed to have been superseded by the literate national cultural tradition, or it is simply considered as an anachronism in the modern world. In this sense the two trends are talking past each other, the object of their discourses are fundamentally different, and this no doubt leads to a lot of misunderstanding and mistrust. The nationalists see such a position as an outright dismissal of their world view, a betrayal of what is uniquely “Hungarian,” whereas the internationalists see their opponents as provincial romantics who wish to exclude them from the definition of national culture.

The “Jewish issue” further complicates this distinction, since most Jewish intellectuals are in the “urbanist/internationalist” camp and they suspect anti-Semitism as

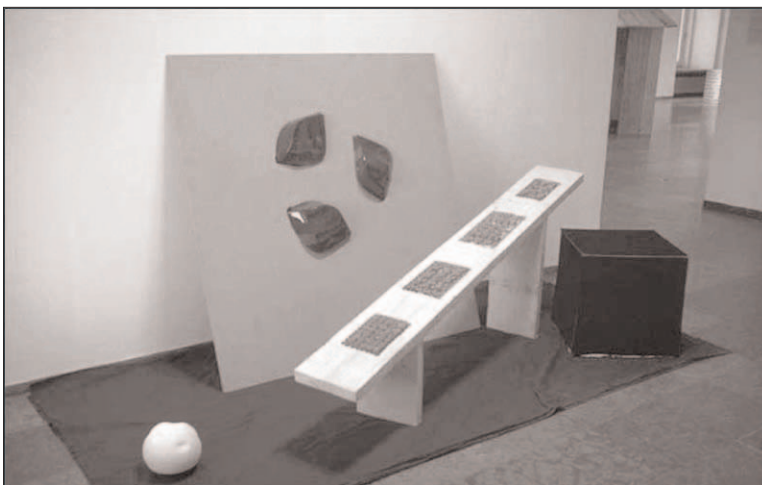
being the underlying motivation of the nationalists in promoting a distinctly “Hungarian” culture, since it would exclude Jewish contributions from the meaning of national culture. Concerning this emotion-laden issue, it is interesting to mention that one of the people whom I met while I was in Hungary working on this project was an American expatriate, Bob Cohen, who is Jewish and had moved to Hungary in the mid-80s. Bob has been working on the revival of old Eastern European Jewish folk music and belongs to a folk music group that plays such music. In discussing this project with him, he mentioned that the Budapest Jewish population completely dismisses efforts like his as

being “backward” and have no interest in it. His work instead is more at home within the over-all folk music revival and *Tánc Ház* movement, rather than the Jewish community. As this example illustrates, the issue of contention really doesn’t have anything to do with Jewish presence or absence in what is considered to be “national culture.” Rather, the real issue involves the sources and content of the culture; that is, whether it is to function within the over-all western tradition of “high culture” or whether its content should also include indigenous elements from traditional folk traditions.

In the visual arts, a major ‘internationalist’ trend is one that relates to the general U.S. and Western European “high art” tradition. In Hungary this still is referred to as “avant-garde” art, a label that has pretty much been abandoned in the western art world. Such art is primarily centered in Budapest and forms the majority of the exhibition program of the Műcsarnok (Palace of Fine Art) under the directorship of László Beke, the associated Ernst Museum, venues like Artpool, Knoll Gallery, and the C³, Center for Culture and Communication. This trend had been a quasi-underground movement during the last two decades of the socialist system and many of its practitioners assumed influential positions in Budapest’s art scene during the waning years of the old regime and after the change in the system. There is rarely any overt political content to this work and as such these artists think of themselves as standing outside of the “urbanist/nationalist” debate.

A good example of this kind of work is the art of János Sugár. Sugár thinks of his art as a radical form of experimentation, utilizing a multimedia approach that includes graphics, sculpture, performance, installation,

film, video as well as theoretical writing and publishing. He considers himself to be a “post-conceptualist” artist and believes that a free, unshackled creative process (both in terms of materials and process of construction) has the potential to anticipate forms of awareness before their actual appearance in social reality.



Sugár János, *Furniture of Physics*, 1997.

Lastly, I’d like to mention the work of Tamás Szentjoby (he also goes by the more westernized name of St. Auby). Szentjoby’s work reaches back to the western conceptual/process art movements of the ’60s, mail-art and other “underground” art tendencies of the period. He was forced to leave Hungary in 1974 and lived mostly in Switzerland until the late 1980’s,

returning to Hungary after the old system began to fall apart. Because of his direct exposure to the western art scene, he harbors no illusions about the western art world. His work can be described as a radical form of iconoclasm; he labels his work as “anti-art art” and refuses to produce work for the commodity system, since he holds that the creative act cannot be bought and sold (see his article on pp.114-23). Though Szentjoby’s work would be classified within the “internationalist” trend, his view of tradition is radical and ahistorical in the sense described by Eliade above. In recent years he has worked primarily through the Internet, which he views as a medium by which the “expelled,” alienated creative principle, *poiesis*, can re-enter our world—precisely through the most advanced technological development of the principle of *techné*; that is, *poiesis*’ return is made possible once the furthest limits of *techné* have been reached. What I find of interest in Szentjoby’s construction is not so much whether his metaphysical system built on the hermetic mystical tradition is “true” or not, but the fact that he can conceive of a such a system within contemporary history at all.

By way of Summary

In closing I would like to briefly summarize the “populist/nationalist and urbanist/internationalist” debate in general terms.

The “populist/nationalist” view is grounded in local traditions indigenous to the region. This ranges from a populist approach based on contemporary life, the remnants of traditional culture that still remain, to the location and distillation of what are assumed to be the most

ancient layers of Hungarian tradition. This assumes that culture arises from the distinctive “being or spirit” of a given people (nation, if you will) and the purpose of art is to preserve that unique being and have it take its place on an equal footing with the expressions of all the other peoples of the world. Nationalists, again speaking very generally, feel that the major problem has been foreign domination, which has repressed the nation’s culture, and the manipulative, dehumanized world of modern mass society, which has desecrated the most important moral and human values and would lead to the eradication of the nation’s uniqueness by assimilating it into the cold, impersonal modern world. Philosophically, such a world view is concerned with questions of “being”: origins, ground and, in the most radical forms, with “eternal ahistorical principles” that exist outside of human history. History is seen as cyclical, its purpose is reconciliation of the human world with the national world, or Cosmos. Modernity, being antithetical to such a view, has led to human hubris and, if it continues in its unchecked march of human domination, will lead to the extinction of life on earth. The task of art is to (re)invent forms that would best embody such “eternal principles” in the contemporary world so that man can once again feel “at home.”

“Internationalists,” on the other hand, advocate a progressive, universal, ultimately global culture which will finally liberate humanity from backwardness, inequality, prejudice, national and class conflicts. In Eastern Europe, the ideals of the Enlightenment are still held to be valid and need to be fulfilled. The main impediment is the backward, narrow-minded prejudices of ethnic and national self-interest which have so often led to bloody conflict. History in this view is linear and, if we are wise enough, can eventually lead to the liberation of humanity from its ancient bondage to uncontrolled natural forces, superstition, national and class conflict and wars. Art is an open, unbounded, free creative force by which an individual can break out from a dead, stultifying group tradition. The process of widening that creativity to the fullest extent possible is an end in itself.

If we look at the contents of the two positions dispassionately, it’s clear that there is much truth to both. I’m not going to try to presume to come up with any “solutions” to these opposing world views. All that may be possible is to recognize the multifaceted dilemmas that the oscillations between the two contradictory views produce and accept that process as something that may always be (just) beyond our grasp.

Within the particular problems faced by the post-communist region, perhaps it would be most fruitful to look at the conflict as an internal dynamic of the specific forms of these societies as they are forced to confront the full impact of the dominant world system in which commodification and reification rule supreme. In many ways, their half-peripheral status could turn out to be a plus. Regardless of the many social and economic problems

that exist, a sense of hope has not died out, as is so often the case in the countries of the center. Though ominous signs have appeared on the horizon, the creative spirit, by and large, has not entirely sold out to the false gods of fame and fortune. Whether or not this will remain true is an open question. One can only hope that sufficient self-confidence will emerge so that there will no longer be a need to look for affirmation and acceptance by the superficial veneers of the “advanced” world. Rather, as in individual life, affirmation can only come from within, understood in the deepest sense.

Notes:

1. Such as the Turkish occupation, wars and ensuing depopulation (mid-16th to late 17th centuries); the numerous uprisings against the Habsburg Empire through the 17th to 19th centuries and particularly the dismantling of the historical Hungarian state after WWI, wherein a third of the people were severed from what remained of Hungary and suffered persecution as national minorities; the devastation of WWII, the Russian occupation and the 1956 uprising.

2. For example, the Bulgarian artist, Luchezar Boyadjev, comments as follows: “...it occurred to me recently that if I was to use the notion of political correctness in order to lay claim for special treatment at international art shows (or simply quota-based participation), I would have had to legitimize my claims on the very simple and historically proven fact that all Slavic populations (Bulgarians specifically, in the harshest way and for the longest time) within the Ottoman Empire were “awarded” the status of slaves. Consequently, I would have had to be given just as much preferential benefits as, let’s say, Afro-American, Afro-British or just Afro- artists whose ancestors were slaves for far shorter than the 500 years during which Bulgaria was under Ottoman domination. This argument might have served me especially well for documenta X had I been smart enough to use it way back in, let’s say, 1993-4. But, no, I decided to just be myself: the big, for all humans, artist that I think I am. As a result I, like some others, was simply cast out by Cathrine David on the basis of being an Eastern European artist. And, as everybody knows by now, for her Eastern Europe is not nearly as interesting/exotic/ as China, for instance. We, artists from Eastern Europe in general, turned out not to be different/oppressed enough for her concept. By the way, have you noticed that in the editorial text of ‘documenta X, the book’ the authors (...) make a badly disguised attempt to blame the existence and the activities of the Eastern European dissident movement before 1989 for the destruction of the French Left movement. You see, some French leftist intellectuals sided with the Party Line in the Socialist countries while others with the dissidents. That caused a split in the movement and the Right just walked in ‘on a white horse.’ It turns out that according to such an argument and to the twisted minds of this book’s editors, all of us in Eastern Europe should have kept our mouths shut (...) only to keep the French Left intact and happy. Well, I have to ask then, whose life are/were we living anyway?” From the article, “Overlapping Identities,” posted on, <http://www.moneynations.ch/euroland/text/over.htm>

3. Claudia Sadowski-Smith, in “Contesting Globalisms: Transnationalization of U.S. Cultural Studies.” Review of: Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds. *The Cultures of Globalization*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1998. And, Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds. *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997. Posted on October, 1999 issue of Postmodern Culture website at: http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/pmc/issue.999/10.1.r_sadowski-smith.html

4. In Hungary the former communists are in alliance, not with nationalists, but with free-market liberals, who were in coalition in the previous government (1994-1998).

5. Anderson, Perry. *The Origins of Postmodernity*, London, Verso. 1998, p.56.
6. Fricz Tamás: *A népi-urbánus vita tegnap és ma*; Napvilág Publishers, Budapest, 1997. My special thanks to Andrea Szekeres, Director of C3 in Budapest, for sending me this book.
7. Ibid. p. 9.
8. Another important historical factor that should be noted is the struggle against the Ottoman Turks in Central Europe (15th–18th centuries) and the 500 year presence of the Islamic Ottoman Empire in South Eastern Europe (the Balkans) until 1918, which Fricz, perhaps for the sake of brevity, does not mention, though it should be considered, particularly in connection with the repeated turmoil in the Balkans.
9. Bayer József: “Osztlály és nemzet.” (Class and Nation), in *Fordul a világ* (The World Turns), T-Twins Publishers, 1994, p. 295. Quoted in Friz, op. cit., p.13.
10. ibid. p.14.
11. The Ottoman Turks occupied central/southern Hungary, Transylvania became an independent principality, functioning more or less as a Turkish protectorate, while the rest of the original territory of Hungary (more or less the territory of today’s Slovakia plus the region of western Hungary) was ruled as “Royal Hungary” by the Habsburg Dynasty.
12. Though the relationship of the Jewish population in Hungary to the rest of the society has unique features not shared by other countries of the region (such as the fact that by the latter 19th century Jews in Hungary had become almost universally assimilated and strongly identified with the national interests of the country), the following statement is a good general summary of the causes of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe: “Implicitly or explicitly, anti-Semitism has accompanied the political and cultural evolutions of most of these nations during their delayed and often distorted modernization. As a general rule, their encounter with modernity coincided with Jewish emancipation, the struggle for minority rights, and the decline of feudal, agrarian, and communitarian forms of existence. Jews were seen as agents of transformation and innovation. Furthermore, their association with capitalist practices and institutions permitted the blending of anti-industrialism, anti-Westernism, and xenophobia into a resentful conglomerate. The anti-democratic and anti-capitalist nationalism of the inter-war period had anti-Semitism as its core ideological component,” and, “Jews were... essentialized as enemies of the soul, incarnations of demonic efforts to dissolve the organic community rooted in shared bonds of ancestry, mores and destiny. Associated with the Enlightenment and its ideals of tolerance and universal civic rights, Jews were targeted as the main enemies by all those for whom modernity, that is capitalism and liberal democracy, appeared as a social and moral catastrophe: romantic thinkers, Catholic doctrinaires, social demagogues, and racist maniacs.” Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Societies*, Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 90-91.
13. It’s not possible to adequately go into this history now. I would just like to very sketchily list the shock waves of events that followed, one after the other: The country’s foreign policy, driven by the desire to regain the territories lost after WWI, resulted in Hungary becoming aligned with Nazi Germany. The trauma of WWII, the German occupation and installation of the puppet Arrow Cross government in the last year of the war; deportation of some half-million Jews to the death camps by the Germans aided by their Arrow Cross allies; the Russian occupation; mass expulsions and deportations of Hungarians by neighboring countries and the Soviet Union; the communist dictatorship and forced collectivization; the 1956 revolution, the compromise of the Kádár regime’s “goulash communism” and its stagnation and disintegration by the end of the 1980s.
14. Eliade, Mircea. *Cosmos and History, The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1959. p. vii.
15. Ibid. p.3.
16. Debord, Guy, *The Society of the Spectacle*. Practical Paradise Publications, London, 1977. Thesis no. 1, p.1
17. “Where modernism drew its purpose and energies from the persistence of what was not yet modern, the legacy of a still pre-industrial past, postmodernism signifies the closure of that distance, the saturation of every pore in the world in the service of capital.” Anderson, op. cit., p. 57.
18. This position is well-expressed in the following: “As for the central categories in the nineties, that is the ‘message,’ the problems of identity and representation, these notions are also considered with reserve in the [Eastern European] Region. The reason for this reserve is because, according to our notion of art, art is considered an indivisible unity, leaving no space for ethnic, gender or race differences. However, if in a work of art issues of the above differences are raised, that work of art is classified as part of an inferior subculture or ‘propaganda’ art, and it has limited credibility as such. This way of thinking is deeply rooted in the survival strategies of the last forty years. During that time the frontiers lay between the official, state-supported and the unofficial, underground, dissident art, and these basic oppositions subordinated all other differences and identities for the sake of unity. There is an antipathy in the Region, or at least definitely in Hungary, towards the message of recent works of art of the global art scene, which are theoretically strong and well-based. The reason is because official art aimed to be commonly understood, to reflect didactic and unambiguous content, while underground art worked out and passed from generation to generation a language that was complex and sophisticated, strongly encoded and could be understood only by a small, well-informed, ‘initiated’ circle of elite. That is why the works that focus on gender representations, for examples, and build in the latest approaches and analyses of feminist studies and cultural studies, produce a very strong opposition, and are stigmatized by the most discreditable mark, that of ‘Socialist Realism.’” Edit András , “Statement for the final discussion about exclusion and inclusion in the art world.” Posted on: <http://www.moneyations.ch/euroland/text/andras.htm>
19. See an online exhibit of Kása’s work at: <http://www.magyar.org/ahfc/KasaBela/>
20. *Magyar Nemzet*, (Hungarian Nation), January, 24, 1997. “The virtual world hangs on a single strand of hair,” János Csontos, interview with Imre Makovecz.