1. Rudolf Sikora, *Foundations of a New Building of the Slovenská Národná Galéria* (Slovak National Gallery), 1971, flyer, 27 × 11.7 cm

Liberty Controlled

Institutional Settings of the East European Neo-avant-garde

A black-and-white flyer containing precise geographic coordinates about a building that was to be constructed at the intersection of 17°06'37.2" longitude and 48°08'26.3" latitude, rising to 133.75 metres (439 ft) above the level of the Baltic Sea, was printed and disseminated in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, in February 1971. The accompanying photograph on which the exact location was marked also revealed that only the groundwork had begun, with accurate geodetic measurements supplied giving the size of foundations, which were 74 metres long, 14 meters wide and 4.5 metres deep (245 × 46 × 15 ft) (fig. 1). The flyer was the work of artist Rudolf Sikora who, in collaboration with his colleague Viliam Jakubík, decided to make a public announcement about the building of a new wing of the Slovenská Národná Galéria (Slovak National Gallery), which was to host the expanding collection of the country's preeminent artworks.[1] Although it was inaugurated in spring 1977, its doors would remain firmly closed to Sikora and his neo-avant-garde circle until after the fall of communism. In fact, the artist had only one solo exhibition, held at the Galéria Mladých (Gallery of Youth) in Bratislava in 1970 before the repressive 'normalization' period kicked in following the crushing of the Prague Spring of 1968, as a consequence of which the institutional landscape was drastically reconfigured.[2] The factuality and concreteness on which the artists insisted in their document revealed that all they had at their disposal was the stoic, rational and accurate observation of the given situation.

A poster exhibited in the Galerija Studentskog Centra (Student Centre Gallery) in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, in November 1971 illustrated a rather different cultural climate. It was a single work that constituted the entire solo exhibition of Goran Trbuljak, showing a photographic portrait of the artist and a written statement underneath that read, 'I do not want to show anything new nor original', while the data giving the opening hours, dates of the exhibition and the gallery address included on it pointed to the fact that the work itself was also intended as an advertising poster (fig. 2).

This fittingly dematerialized intervention and conceptual confrontation with the institutional system was so successful that a year and a half later Trbuljak was offered a solo show in Zagreb's Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti (Gallery of Contemporary Art). For this, he developed further his stance towards institutional art structures and produced a single statement claiming that 'The fact that someone was given an opportunity to make an exhibition is more important than what will actually be shown there.'[3] This episode from Croatian art history indicates the situation in which artists and art historians operated, since due to the more liberal socialist path Yugoslavia had taken, they were free to organize events of this type and accommodate critical approaches towards their own practices. At the same time, however, there was no encroachment into the political realm outside the institutional system. Both Sikora and Trbuljak addressed the existing gallery

structures in unadorned ways and both were also, as will be shown later, engaged in experimenting with alternative exhibition spaces in the early 1970s.

The formulation of a critical attitude towards the institutional system of the Hungarian art world, that both revealed the ways in which its functioning circumscribed the activities of artists and proposed an effective counter strategy, could be found in the *Pseudo* series by Gyula Pauer. The Hungarian artist also chose the ephemeral form of a printed flyer in order to circulate his *First Pseudo Manifesto* during a two-day exhibition in October 1970 that flew under the radar of art censorship by being framed as scenery for a film shot at the Attila József Culture House in Budapest (fig. 3).[4] Pauer outlined the agenda of *Pseudo* as an exploration of the 'false, deceptive, unreal, and seemingly real', referring to the 'circumstances' of artistic production in socialist Hungary and the deceptions perpetrated by the ruling ideology.[5] More explicit expression of his critical outlook appeared in his *Second Pseudo Manifesto* of 1972, which alerted his audience to the fact that 'what is sold to you as art is only a tool in the economic and ideological manipulations of the prevailing authority', and provocatively suggested that 'if you are manipulated, manipulate back!'[6]

Critics recognized the '180-degree turn' away from the artist's previous practice as a sculptor of abstract and organic forms and towards the new approaches entailed by *Pseudo*, while his exposure of the fake veneer of authenticity of the art scene alienated the artist from the structures of the official art system.[7] Indicatively, until *Pseudo* Pauer had functioned within the economy of the socialist art world, taking part in official symposia and exhibitions, while entertaining hopes of commissions for public sculpture; subsequently, however, he was obliged to seek new outlets for his work in off-site venues as well as in less tightly controlled state-funded spaces, such as houses of culture and theatres (see also Klara Kemp-Welch, 'Soft-spoken Encounters', pp. 273–89, for further discussion of the *Pseudo* project).

Across Eastern Europe the neo-avant-garde was characterized by a desire to experiment with innovative artistic forms and test the boundaries of the established institutional structures, mirroring the revolutionary mood of 1968. At the same time, the neo-avant-garde was obliged to negotiate its position within the complex systems of control and containment devised by the socialist state. This essay examines the sites of dissemination of nonconformist artistic practices within institutional settings, which were developed through a process of arbitration between the divergent interests of artists and the state authorities. While considering the modus operandi of particular spaces, it assesses the balance between confrontation and accommodation, attempts of appropriation from both sides, the avoidance of issues of open conflict and the seeking of a 'happy medium' through mutual concessions. Examples of the diverse sites that saw the emergence of conceptual artistic practices in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in the early 1970s provide a comparison for the situation in Hungary. The essay examines the wide range of exhibition strategies in relation to specific social, political and cultural conditions, while also inspecting the ways in which the given institutional landscape was critically addressed. Finally, focusing on the metamorphosis of the gallery system in response to neo-avant-garde strivings, it investigates the degree of autonomy found in their programming, the limits posed by socialist institutional frameworks, and attempts to evade the system.

In Eastern Europe at the end of the 1960s, the art-world structures that artists were obliged to confront and negotiate in their professional life still carried the strong imprint of the far-reaching changes enacted during the period of Stalinization. Moreover, although the domination of the Soviet-imported style of socialist realism was strongly felt in artistic production only during the early 1950s, the legacy of the remaking of the whole system of museums and galleries, journals, art education, artist organizations and arts funding was to be a lasting factor in the history of East European art. Even in Yugoslavia, which after the Tito–Stalin split of 1948 distanced itself from the Soviet model, favouring instead a depoliticized high modernism, the art

2. Goran Trbuljak, *'I do not want to show anything new nor original'*, 1971, paper, print, 59.6 × 42 cm, Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb

3. Gyula Pauer's exhibition in the József Attila Művelődési Ház (Attila József Culture House), 1970, installation, Budapest

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institutions developed in the late 1940s were enduring elements of the art world during the whole socialist period. As art historian Leonida Kovač has insisted, the Soviet artistic model should be considered as a 'specific form of the totalitarian organisation of the world of art that was gradually implemented in all the socialist countries'.[8] Her enumeration of the components of the top-down reorganization of the institutional field of art included a 'unified, monopolistic association of artists', the centralization of the organization of artistic life, control of the media, establishment of a hierarchy of exhibitions, the design of a system of state prizes, a return to 'traditional teaching methods' in the academy with the introduction of 'master workshops', and the creation of a 'central "scientific" institution charged with the theoretical explanation of the problems of artistic creativity'.[9]

The period of the 1960s, in addition to fluctuations in official policy towards particular artistic movements, saw some diversification of the institutional structure of the art world, although overall the authorities maintained their tight grip on the mechanisms of artistic production and display. In Hungary, despite a number of institutional reconfigurations in the wake of the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and new leader János Kádár's compromise-seeking maxim that 'who is not against us is with us', the official art system of the post-Stalinist era was characterized more by continuity than change. Although professionalized and established as a separate institution in 1963, the Képző- és Iparművészeti Lektorátus (Supervisory Body for Arts and Crafts) continued the gate-keeping role in deciding on the permissibility of exhibitions. The Magyar Képző- és Iparművészek Szövetsége (Association of Hungarian Artists), purged and reorganized after the 1956 revolution, was also joined on the institutional horizon in 1958 by the Fiatal Képzőművészek Stúdiója (Young Artists' Studio), which under a liberal-minded leadership from 1964 to 1967 pushed for a series of reforms in the art world; their most notable success being to organize an exhibition at the Ernst Múzeum without pre-submitting the works to an official jury for approval.[10] Another sign of the slight easing of relations between the Party and the art world was the introduction of the practice of 'self-financed exhibitions' in the early 1960s, which offered a conciliatory alternative to the outright banning of exhibitions that did not fully meet these criteria.[11] Nevertheless, for the new generation of neo-avant-garde artists that emerged in the middle of the decade, the restrictions embedded in the system were a spur to critically address its limitations.

Military intervention by Warsaw Pact troops to end the Czechoslovak Spring in August 1968 extinguished the hopes of leftist intellectuals and artists that state socialism in Eastern Europe could be reformed into a more humane system that was truer to the original Marxist ideal. In Czechoslovakia itself, the era of 'normalization' geared up after the adoption by the Komunistická strana Československa (KSČ, Czechoslovak Communist Party) of the policy document 'A Lesson from the Crisis Development in the Party and Society' in December 1970. This set off a series of purges and repressive measures from which the artistic sphere was not immune. Specifically these measures included the expelling of artists associated with the experimental attitude of the 1960s from the artist's union, the exclusion of their work from acquisition for public collections, the refusal of permission to take part in exhibitions at home and abroad, and also the banning of articles that dealt with their work.[12] Remarkably, neo-avant-garde artists faced in the 1970s a situation not unlike that described by art theorist Jindřich Chalupecký in his 1949 text, 'The Intellectual under Socialism', where 'people who previously had not been taken seriously by anyone – suddenly gained key positions in various official functions and public positions', while those with 'integrity became speechless'.[13]

The systemic change of the Czechoslovak art world was a gradual process that took several years and lasted until society was, as dissident theorist Milan Šimečka put it, 'returned to order' under firm Communist Party control.[14] It was accompanied by the endorsement of 'private citizenship' that involved staying away from potentially hazardous public affairs and focusing instead on everyday life within the family, work and small circles of friends.[15] It was in this atmosphere, in which the public sphere was inaccessible and the private domain still

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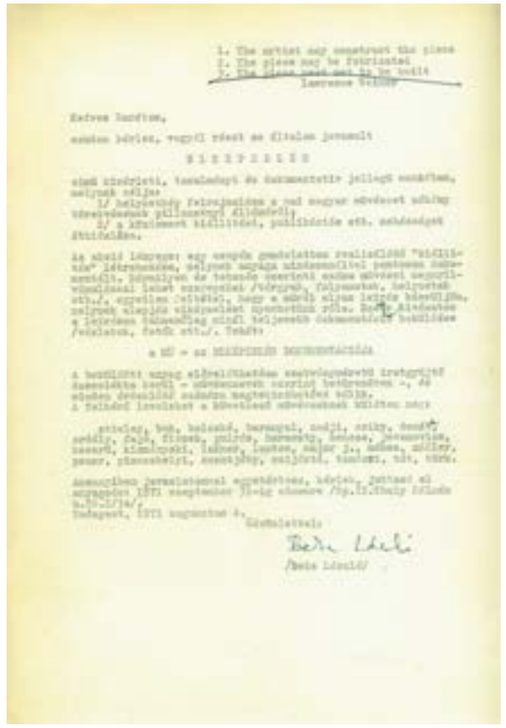
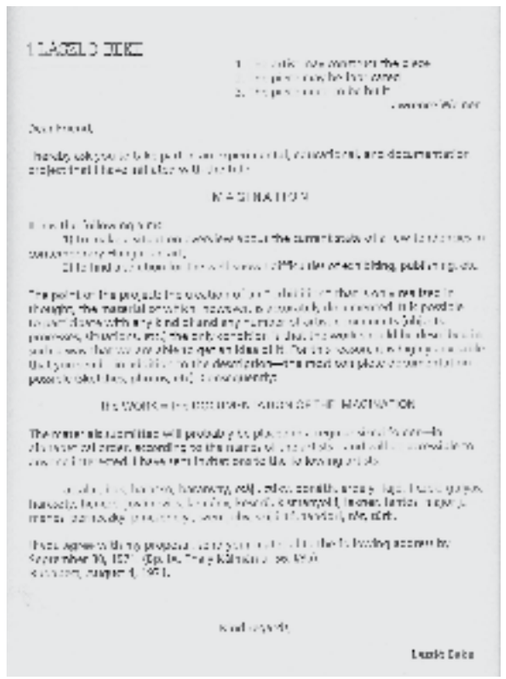
4. Floorplan of Rudolf Sikora's house in Tehelná Street, Bratislava, where the 'First Open Studio' was held, 1970, typed text, pen, paper, 29.7 × 20.9 cm, Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb

5. Šempas Commune, 1977, Marinko Sudac Collection, Zagreb

unrestrained, that Rudolf Sikora organized the 'First Open Studio' (fig. 4), a group exhibition which opened on 19 November 1970 at the artist's house in Bratislava.[16] The eighteen artists who participated in the event were demonstrating their defiance towards the institutional banning of art festivals, exhibitions and symposia by resorting to private space. A lecture was given by Chalupecký, whose influential position within the Czechoslovak neo-avant-garde art scene derived both from his writings and his role as head of the Galerie Václava Špály (Václav Špála Gallery) in Prague from 1965 until 1970, before it was taken over by the official Svaz československých výtvarných umělců (Union of Czechoslovak Fine Artists). The exhibition in Sikora's house marked the beginning of the unofficial art scene in Slovakia and was such a success that it remained the first and only edition of the 'open studio', as it came to the attention of the authorities who forbade further similar events.[17]

The neo-avant-garde tendencies that appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s in a Yugoslav context are referred to as 'New Art Practice', which art historian Ljiljana Kolešnik has summarized as the 'giving up materialization of the artwork, redefinition of social function of art and social construction of the authorial subject', as well as a 'critical approach to social reality'.[18] Significantly, one more characteristic was 'resistance towards institutionalized models of artistic activity', the deliberateness of which clearly sets it apart from the necessity to use non-institutional settings, to which artists in normalization-era Czechoslovakia had to resort. Among numerous examples as to how far the artists were prepared to take their challenge to institutional frameworks in the context of Yugoslav art is the Haustor gallery, set up in the entrance hall of a residential building in Frankopanska Street in the centre of Zagreb by the small circle around Goran Trbuljak and Braco Dimitrijević, who organized several exhibitions there during 1970 and 1971. The reasons for this enterprise were the artists' wish to 'democratize art by leaving the circle of specialized, socially and educationally defined gallery spectators' and make it available to passers-by, while at the same time they wanted to 'emancipate themselves





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from the gallery system in order to be able to show their works without depending on the annual programme and exhibition policies of galleries'.[19] This was the venue for the international conceptual art exhibition 'At the Moment', organized by Nena and Braco Dimitrijević on 23 April 1971, which, although it lasted only three hours, was considered one of the most important displays of this innovative trend.[20] This ad hoc exhibition became more 'institutionalized' when it was taken to the Belgrade Studentski Kulturni Centar (Students Cultural Centre) a few months later and presented under the title 'In Another Moment'.[21]

The appearance of home-grown Yugoslav conceptual art is regularly linked to the activities of OHO Group in Slovenia, who in the later part of the 1960s engaged in practices that ranged from *arte povera*, land art and performative practices, heading towards more dematerialized expressions in the early 1970s characterized by a countercultural and new-age spirit. Their remarkable acceptance by Yugoslav art critics and presentations in the leading art venues across the federal state, which culminated in participation in the seminal conceptual art exhibition 'Information' at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1970,[22] did not deter them from expressing their critical attitude not only towards the institutional art system, but society in general.[23] Namely, in April 1971 the artists from the OHO Group decided to abandon their urban life and establish a rural commune in which they could practise their preferred way of life in harmony with the cosmic laws, which could be regarded as an ultimate form of critique (fig. 5).[24]

The form that the debut of conceptual art took in Hungary was indicative of the type of cultural policy implemented in that particular socialist state. Initiated by art historian László Beke, who in August 1971 invited twenty-eight artists to respond to his proposal that 'the WORK = the DOCUMENTATION OF IMAGINATION', using the notion of *elképzelés* that in English corresponds to both 'imagination' and 'idea', while the suggested medium was a sheet of paper (fig. 6).[25] The original plan was to hold the exhibition in the regional István Király Múzeum in Székesfehérvár, which held an 'exceptional' status as at that time 'hardly any exhibition space could develop a progressive

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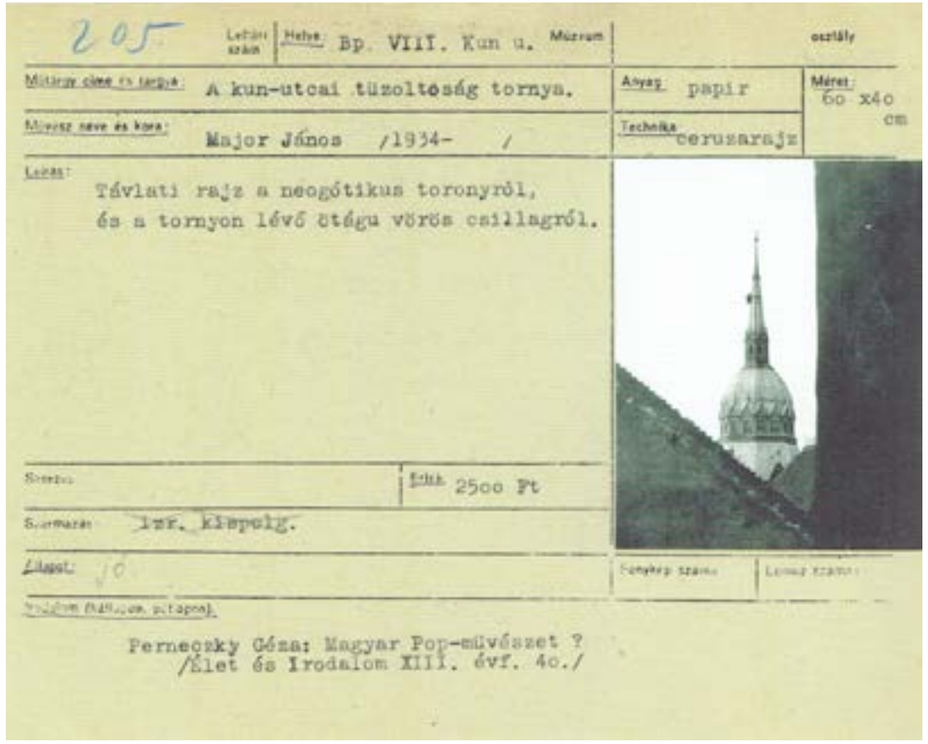

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6. László Beke, *Imagination/Idea*, 1970, paper, pen, typed text, 29.7 × 21 cm, Courtesy the artist

7. János Major, *The Tower of the Kun Street Fire Station* (Gyula Pauer's 'art collection' in László Beke's *Imagination/Idea* project), 1971, paper, index card, photo, 15.5 × 19.6 cm, Courtesy László Beke

8. Włodzimierz Borowski, *Dialogue*, Wroclaw '70 Symposium, 1970, installation

profile'.[26] However the Képző- és Iparművészeti Lektorátus had classified the proposal as belonging to the category of 'self-financed', so this format was abandoned. Instead, Beke organized the works in several folders that could be viewed in his flat in Budapest, the opportunity for which was taken by about eighty visitors. Further dissemination of the project came from his essay published in samizdat edition, in which he analysed the received materials.[27] There was a wait of almost four decades until it was made more publicly available with the publication of a book that also appeared in English in 2014. The smooth operational logic of the supervisory body, which did not forbid the exhibition but just made it more difficult to realize, had in effect the result that this type of art stayed within a very narrow group of art professionals.

Gyula Pauer introduced an additional twist to the curatorial strategy of this project. He was invited to participate, but turned his contribution into another call for proposals addressed to sixteen artists from the same circle. Pauer asked them to fill out truthfully museum index cards with data relating to what they regarded as their 'best work of art', explaining that the 'museum card is the only document that reliably proves the existence and the identity of an art object' (fig. 7).[28] Aiming to use the contributions as a 'pseudo exhibition', Pauer commented on the innovative practices of conceptual artistic production while at the same time directing attention to the preeminent role of art institutions in validating artistic achievements. In comparison with Yugoslav artists who intervened directly in the infrastructure of art institutions, in this case the conceptual context of the interactions remained an activity that existed only on paper.

The appearance of conceptual art in Poland also crystallized the limits of compromise between the most experimental wing of the neo-avant-garde and the Party-approved art authorities. Over a series of encounters in 1970, the potential for existing structures to foster the realization of the most ambitious goals of conceptual art and accommodate radical artistic ideas within the cultural landscape of actually existing socialism was severely tested. The first site of contestation was the Wrocław '70 Symposium, notable for revealing for the 'first time the existence of significant conceptual tendencies in Polish art'.[29] The ideologically tinged occasion marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of regaining the formerly German-ruled territories of Poland. Its stated aim to create 'prominent artworks within the organism of Wrocław', through a collaboration between artists and industrial plants, initially attracted much support from official bodies, Party committees and city authorities. Organized by curator and theorist Jerzy Ludwiński, in practice the project became a platform for conceptual art practices that were unacceptable to its sponsors and commissioners, with the result that of the forty finalists whose proposals were selected by the organizational board, only one was actually realized as planned in a city space for the Victory Day celebrations on 9 May 1970.[30]

One of the most interesting proposals generated by the project was Włodzimierz Borowski's *Dialogue*, the concept of which was to connect Wrocław and Elbląg by aligning two 'maximally enlarged' chairs in the public space of the two cities, objects that were to be produced by an industrial plant in Elbąg that also sponsored the town's Biennial of Spatial Forms (fig. 8). The ironic comment the work made about the over-enthusiastic encouragement of collaborations between artists and industry in modernizing Poland, and the artist's conceptual approach that opted for 'the exchange of ideas rather than their monumental scale materialisation', highlighted the barriers to a meaningful 'dialogue' with the socialist state.[31] Gatherings such as the symposium also had an international dimension, and Hungarian artists were present either as visitors or participants in biennials and artist meetings across Poland during the period.[32]

Jerzy Ludwiński was also the leader of the Galeria Pod Mona Lisa, which from 1967 to 1971 operated under the auspices of Wrocław's International Press and Book Club. One of a number of institutions in the city catering to the needs of the cultural intelligentsia, this 35m^2 (377 sq. ft) entrance hall in front of the club's reading room provided a niche for the curator to explore the potential of a 'micro-institution', 'a mentally flexible gallery' that

9. 'Concept Art', exhibition view, Pod Mona Lisa Gallery, Wrocław, 1970

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challenged audiences while criticizing the 'official rituals' of the art world.[33] After a series of increasingly radical exhibitions, culminating in 'Concept Art' in December 1970 – which was dematerialized to the degree that instead of artworks, the pages of the exhibition catalogue were exhibited and also distributed as loose sheets in an envelope – pressure was put on the director of the Book Club, Maria Berny, to curtail Ludwiński's activities, which offended the sensibilities of both Marxist and modernist critics (fig. 9). Ludwiński's refusal to accede to the demand that the gallery's programme be divided fifty-fifty with the local artists' union resulted in the termination of their collaboration, while the denouement also demonstrates the importance of the support of political powerbrokers for the survival of neo-avant-garde activities.

A similarly precarious situation was faced by the Galeria Foksal in Warsaw, which was founded in 1966 on the initiative of three art critics and conceived as an 'autonomous and isolated place' dedicated to 'the creation and production of "living" art'.[34] In institutional terms, however, the gallery was dependent on the Pracownie Sztuk Plastycznych (PSP, Fine Arts Studios), a state-run organization responsible for commissioning propaganda art from artists. As a consequence, while the gallery was allowed to make use of the umbrella organization's substantial material resources, it also had to submit its exhibition programme to the PSP director for approval.[35] The contradictions between the gallery's artistic programme and the institutional context were a recurrent topic of debate, exposing the ethical pitfalls of the unwritten social contract between the Party and the art world in Poland, which offered material support in exchange for an avoidance of politics and self-confinement to high modernist aesthetics. This culminated in 1970 with a rancorous split between the founders of the Galeria Foksal over the failure to implement the 'New Foksal Gallery Regulations' that had been drawn up by theorist Anka Ptaszkowska in 1969. These were designed to update the gallery's mission in the spirit of an institutional critique that pointed beyond the safety of the 'defined borders' of the exhibition space towards the more risky, conceptual intent to

become an informational office for the 'free transmission of meaning'.[36] (For more on the Galeria Foksal, see Klara Kemp-Welch, 'Soft-spoken Encounters', pp. 273–89.)

In a recent interview about his role as head of the Student Centre Gallery in Zagreb at the turn of the decade, Želimir Koščević emphasized the importance of the 'openness of the programme and the freedom to act'.[37] Indeed, the exhibitions held in the gallery in the late 1960s and early 1970s testify to this, as they were instrumental in the inauguration of the new generation of artists that would became associated with the New Art Practice.[38] What is more, the notion of 'freedom' was especially expressed in curatorial undertakings, for instance in his 'Exhibition of Men and Women' held in 1969, where the only exhibits were the visitors to the opening, while the introductory text stated: 'In this exhibition you are the work, you are the figuration, you are the socialist realism' (fig. 10).[39] A similar attitude was expressed in 'Postal Delivery', consisting of the mail-art section of the Paris Biennale of Youth in 1971, which Koščević decided to present unpacked. This could be taken as another marker of difference when compared to neighbouring countries, where mail art served as a main 'form of communication' with the international scene.[40] Significantly, one of the main reasons the Student Centre Gallery could maintain such activity was thanks to the sympathy it enjoyed from Božo Bek, an official socialist cadre who was the director of the Zagreb Gallery of Contemporary Art and 'held an extremely important ideological influence within the city of Zagreb', while at the same time being 'supportive' of progressive artistic practices.[41]

Student cultural institutions in Zagreb, Novi Sad and Belgrade acted as seminal sites for experimentation and the presentation of innovative artistic trends. In Novi Sad, an active role was played by the Tribina Mladih (Youth Forum), which in the period 1968–74 was characterized by 'multicultural, experimental, new leftist and international' practices that 'challenged the dominant discourse of moderate modernism' in Yugoslavia.[42] As a platform through which the 'left critique of socialism'[43] was tested from perspectives ranging from Maoist to Situationist, and where aesthetics and ethics overlapped, the Tribina Mladih gradually attracted attention from Party hardliners. As art historian Nebojša Milenković observed, the 'sophisticated guardians of social and public morality' wanted to discipline the Tribina and bring it 'under strict social control and oversight', but the job of doing this fell to other 'artists, writers – cultural apparatchiks who actually defended their own undeservedly obtained privileges and earnings'.[44]

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10. The 'Exhibition of Men and Women' at the Studentski Centar u Zagrebu (Student Centre of the University of Zagreb), 1969

11. The exhibition 'R', Budapesti Műszaki Egyetem (Budapest University of Technology), 1970

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The gallery of the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade was another locality where neo-avant-garde art was practised, and it continued its experimental programme for longer than similar centres in other Yugoslav republics, whose activities were gradually neutralized. The myth of artistic freedom in such centres was addressed by art theorist Miško Šuvaković, who referred to an episode from the Belgrade centre's 'April Meetings' festival in 1974, which the organizers considered a huge success, boasting that in a 'socialist country a completely open international festival' could take place, since it was attended by Joseph Beuys, Barbara Rose and Achille Bonito Oliva; the latter, however, remarked that the setting was essentially a 'reservation, which is completely closed and isolated from the culture in which it takes place'.[45] According to Šuvaković, 'delicate, careful, bureaucratically well performed centring, enclosing and isolating' strategies were employed to control the activities of student cultural centres, while across the republics their 'critical subversive practices' were to be 'neutralized, without banning them, by transferring them' to another social environment.[46] In other words, although the student cultural organizations were state-funded and generally had autonomy over their programmes, their position was marked by a policy of 'ghettoisation of critical art practices and thinking, limiting their effects on a narrow segment of urban student youth'.[47]

The chronology of Hungarian 'concept art' can also be read as a record of the spaces that were sought out by neo-avant-garde artists to show their work, and of the cat-and-mouse game they played with the authorities.[48] A group show entitled 'New Endeavours' at the Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség Club (KISZ Club, Communist Youth Organization Club), located at the offices of the Hungarian airline Malév, was, for example, banned by the Képző- és Iparművészeti Lektorátus in 1966, although exhibitions by Endre Tót and Gyula Pauer in the KISZ Club of the Központi Fizikai Kutató Intézet (KFKI, Central Physics Research Centre) in 1968 went ahead as planned; two landmark exhibitions were held in the unlikely venue of the Culture Hall of the Iparterv (Industrial Planning Office; see also Gábor Dobó and Merse Pál Szeredi, 'Hungarian Culture +/- Europe', pp. 39–57) in 1968 and 1969, while a Fluxus concert planned by László Beke and Tamás St Auby (Szentjóby) for the Egyetemi Színpad (University Stage) in May 1973 was forbidden.

Along with private flats, cellars, the halls of houses of culture, communist youth clubs and offices of the Patriotic Popular Front, artists also made ad hoc use of the semi-public and less systematically supervised spaces of student clubs and theatres, student dormitories and cafés (see also Júlia Perczel, 'The Art Sphere as a Grey Zone', pp. 59–75, and Flóra Barkóczi, 'Creative (Dis)Courses', pp. 95–109). In that sense, a typical fate befell the 'R' exhibition of December 1970, which despite bringing together one of the earliest and broadest surveys of Hungarian neo-avant-garde art, was held in the student club of the R Building of the Budapesti Műszaki Egyetem (Budapest University of Technology) and lasted only three days (fig. 11). After the crackdown on neo-avant-garde activities culminating in the closure of the neo-avant-garde retreat of the Balatonboglári Kápolnaműterem (Balatonboglár Chapel Studio) at the end of August 1973, experimental art events increasingly took place within the less anarchic context of professional artist clubs

that were equipped with a members-only bar, performance and exhibition spaces, and which fulfilled the dual role of functioning as a 'safety valve' while making it easy to 'keep the avant-garde art world under surveillance'.[49]

Nevertheless, as László Beke has put it, despite the fact that it 'was actually closed to the public', from 1973 to 1976 the Fiatal Művészek Klubja (FMK, Young Artists' Club) was still the most important example of an '"alternative" institution' in the Budapest art scene (see also Klara Kemp-Welch, 'Soft-spoken Encounters', pp. 273–89).[50] Opened in 1960 in the basement and ground floor of a villa on Andrássy Avenue under the aegis of the district office of the KISZ that occupied the upper storeys and also had a say in its management, the FMK was in practice self-run and from the 1970s it became a meeting place for the second public sphere, or parallel artistic culture of the unofficial art circuit. The attitude of the FMK to the cultural politics of the mid-1970s can be glimpsed in a police informer's report on the club members' reactions to the visit of György Aczél, the leading ideologue of the Party in the Kádár era. His participation in a four-hour-long question-and-answer session on Marxism in February 1976 before an audience of a hundred artists and intellectuals provoked numerous frank exchanges that were duly noted, including a challenging question from György Galántai asking why it was that 'committed artists' are supported 'even if they are completely talentless', and 'state commissions' only go to those that draw 'Lenin or the five-pointed star on their works'.[51] The Party's control of finances in the socialist art world was an additional instrument that complemented the use of administrative and directly repressive measures.

The passing of the moment of conceptual art, with its ambition to challenge the restrictive structures of art and society, can also be deduced from the more self-referential topics of a number of the FMK exhibitions in the period, such as 'Image/Poem' in 1974, which set out to examine the 'the role of writing in art, as well as the role of the (visual) image in poetry'.[52] Material for this conceptual exhibition was sourced from both Hungarian and international artists, and also presented through a samizdat publication put together by Beke and artist Dora Maurer. The FMK also provided the venue for the parting shot of unreconstructed avant-gardist Tamás St Auby before his enforced emigration in 1975: a self-curated retrospective exhibition he conceived to 'tie up loose ends in my life here' and consisting of 150 items including 'picture poetry, photos, objects, [and] environments' (fig. 12).[52] This exhibition could be taken as indicative of the transition to a phase of the (self)-historicization of that stream of art, while the fact that, unlike the original events, it was officially allowed to take place demonstrates that the authorities had realized that, as the artist put it, 'a banned exhibition would have a greater influence on the general atmosphere than the exhibition itself'.[54]

As a result of the multifaceted limitations that were imposed on the institutional terrain of the neo-avant-garde – and in the spirit of experimentation that was so characteristic of such practices – many art events took place in the countryside, either within organized frameworks or as more individual excursions and undertakings. This phenomenon is observable across the Eastern bloc; however, in Yugoslavia, where certain institutions were available to the artists, open-air activities were least typical, with OHO Group's founding of a rural commune representing an exception. Since art events in the countryside required the mobilization of artists typically coming from capitals or large cities, they often had a collective character. In her analysis of participatory practices under socialism, art historian Claire Bishop repeatedly emphasized

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12. Tamás Szentjóby, *Make a Chair! – Homage to George Brecht* (lecture), Young Artists' Club, Budapest, 1975, Photo: Éva Körner, © IPUTNPU-Archives

13. Balatonboglár Chapel Studio (depicted: Kálmán Szijártó and Sándor Pinczehelyi), 1973

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that the reason for organizing events in the countryside in Eastern Europe was 'to avoid surveillance'.[55] Ending her substantial chapter on Czech neo-avant-garde action art that took place in nature with a question, 'how many of these actions would have been created if the artists had had the chance to openly exhibit in galleries?', art historian Pavlína Morganová also confirmed the need for an exodus to the countryside during the 'normalization' period, and also connected it also to the Czech tradition of hiking and nature excursions as 'part of the alternative lifestyle during the totalitarian years'.[56] Collective artistic actions were even more present in the Slovak context during the normalization years, and in addition to being a 'reaction to political situation', they took many different approaches and forms.[57] Significantly, these manifestations, although collective, were individually organized and typically one-off events without state support.

In contrast, the artistic activities in the countryside in Poland were organized within an official framework, as the interests of the authorities and the neo-avant-garde coalesced to a certain extent around establishing of a series of '*plenar*' (*plein-air*) meetings in the 1960s and 1970s. These were a specific form of outdoor art event that was more ambitious than a traditional artist colony and addressed particular themes through a wide variety of interventions and happenings, symposia and exhibitions. For the Party, the *plenar* was a means to use culture to cement the 'regained territories' within the new borders of socialist Poland: the majority of them were organized in lands that were appended to the country in 1945. For artists and curators, it offered a less-controlled setting and the material conditions in which to realize experimental artworks.

Disputes over conceptual art came into the open at the Osieki *plenar* of 1970, the invitation list for which was unusually not subject to censorship and included most of the artists from the Wrocław '70 Symposium, with the leitmotif provided by Ludwiński in his lecture on 'Art in the Post-Artistic Period'.[58] The vociferousness of the official reaction, reflected in aggressive press reports and a refusal to finance the next *plenar*, demonstrated that conceptual art practices,

in their rejection of the 'traditional model of an artist and artistic output' in favour of the notions of 'process and idea', were a 'type of poetics which both deterred and disturbed' the authorities.[59]

In Hungary, many significant neo-avant-garde conceptual works were realized in the non-urban context of the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, which in the summer months from 1970 until its closure in 1973 provided an unparalleled platform for experimental artistic approaches. It was not just the distance from the capital that accounted for the freer conditions, but also the institutional specificities of the space: a disused chapel rented as a studio by the artist György Galántai, which became a venue for ever more ambitious collective programmes (figs 13 and 14). As the critical position of artists became more pronounced, with the transfer of several banned neo-avant-garde art projects from Budapest to the Chapel Studio and the activating of unofficial neo-avant-garde networks across the Eastern bloc, the authorities used bureaucratic measures to harass Galántai, such as by imposing substantial fines for not keeping to safety regulations, before closing it for infringing rules on the display of 'propaganda materials' in August 1973.[60] Despite this dramatic denouement, until then the activities of the Chapel Studio had been more or less tolerated, and Galántai himself had essayed a rapprochement with the authorities, on one occasion submitting an exhibition programme to be juried and even attempting 'to evade the administrative method used against us by providing an ideological illusion of Marxist truth'.[61] When the authorities decided to move against the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio, they brought to bear the whole weight of propaganda machinery: their insinuations that the summer gatherings were depraved and that 'nobody was painting, drawing or sculpting' informed a vitriolic condemnation in the official press.[62]

The institutional landscape *c.* 1970 varied significantly across the Central European states of the Eastern bloc, but two points were constant. On the one hand, the communist parties had a clear set of official rules that were not to be broken, while, on the other, a young generation of artists took it upon themselves to test the boundaries and experiment with the potential that dematerialized art practice had to offer by turning a material disadvantage into a conceptual advantage. The meeting of the two sides seemed to function with least conflict in the socio-political environments of Poland and Yugoslavia, where state support for artistic infrastructures was contingent on a reciprocal disengagement from direct political topics on the part of artists. Nevertheless, the nonconformist attitude displayed by conceptual artists proved too experimental for the liking of the authorities there as well, so many neo-avant-garde centres were neutralized within a short lifespan. The crude normalization era in Czechoslovakia had the strongest impact on the institutional setting of the neo-avant-garde, which responded by moving either into the private sphere or out into the countryside, marking a dramatic turn from the freer atmosphere of the 1960s. In Hungary, the inconsistent reaction of the authorities, which wavered between banning and tolerating experimental art practices, made it possible for temporary outlets to emerge for the expression of the neo-avant-garde agenda. Ultimately, the search for alternative spaces, the evasion of both direct and more subtle control mechanisms, and attempts to carve out islands of relative autonomy within the institutional terrain of socialist art worlds had political, aesthetic and existential implications for all art practitioners.

14. Dóra Maurer, *Spatial Confusion* from the series *'Once We Went To...'* (Miklós Erdély, György Jovánovics, Tamás Szentjóby, Tibor Gáyor), 1972, photo

1 Helena Musilová (ed.), *Rudolf Sikora: Against Myself*. Prague: National Gallery, 2006.
2 See the chapter on Rudolf Sikora in Maja Fowkes, *The Green Bloc: Neo-avant-garde Art and Ecology under Socialism*. Budapest: CEU Press, 2015.
3 Branka Stipančić, *Goran Trbuljak*. Zagreb: Muzej Suvremene Umjetnosti, 1996.
4 The film was made by János Gulyás, a student at the Színház- és Filmművészeti Főiskola (Theatre and Film Academy). See 'Pseudo Exhibition', in Dóra Hegyi, Sándor Hornyik and Zsuzsa László (eds), *Parallel Chronologies: 'Other' Revolutionary Traditions: How Art Becomes Public. An Exhibition in Newspaper Format*. Budapest: Tranzit Hungary Public Benefit Association, 2011, 26–27. http://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/pseudo-exhibition (4 August 2017).
5 English translation in Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler (eds), *Subversive Practices: Art under Conditions of Political Repression: 60s–80s/South America/Europe*. Berlin: HatjeCantz, 2010, 173–74.
6 'Gyula Pauer: *Pseudo* advertisement', in Hegyi, Hornyik and László, *Parallel Chronologies*, 31.
7 Annamária Szőke, '"Évekig tartott, amíg kialakítottam a magam művészi világát"' ['It Took Years for Me to Form My Own Artistic World'], in Annamária Szőke (ed.), *Pauer*. Budapest: MTA Művészettörténeti Kutatóintézet, 2005, 20.
8 Leonida Kovač, 'Are we still Modern?', in Jasmina Bavoljak (ed.), *Reflections of Time 1945–1955*. Zagreb: Galerija Klovićevi Dvor, 2012, 353.
9 *Ibid*.
10 See Edit Sasvári, 'A Moment of Experimental Democracy in the Kádár Era: György Galántai's Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár and the Social Milieu of Counter-Culture in Hungary in the 1960s and 1970s', in Ivana Bago, Antonia Majača and Vesna Vuković (eds), *Removed from the Crowd: Unexpected Encounters I*. Zagreb: Blok, 2015, 88–92.
11 Notably this policy only applied to smaller spaces and specifically excluded the major venues; the Ministry of Culture had the final say as to whether an exhibition qualified or not; and proposals that offended public morals or were deemed politically unacceptable were still not permitted. See Edit Sasvári, 'Resurgence and Rejection: Lajos Kassák's Self-Financed Exhibition in Adolf Fényes Showroom, Budapest', *Acta Historiae Artium*, special issue on 'The Long Sixties' edited by Edit András and Hedvig Turai, Vol. 56, No. 1, 2015, 238–39.
12 Aurel Hrabušický (ed.), *Slovenské vizuálne umenie 1970–1985* [Slovak Visual Arts 1970–1985]. Bratislava: Slovenská Národná Galéria, 2002, 236.
13 Jindřich Chalupecký, 'The Intellectual under Socialism', in Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl (eds), *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002, 30.
14 Milan Šimečka, *Restoration of Order: Normalization of Czechoslovakia*. London: Verso, 1984.
15 See Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010.
16 Marián Mudroch (ed.), *1. Otvorený ateliér* [First Open Studio]. Bratislava: SCCAN, 2000.
17 Interview with Rudolf Sikora, Bratislava, 24 May 2016.
18 Ljiljana Kolešnik, 'Conflicting Visions of Modernity and the Post-war Modern Art', in Ljiljana Kolešnik (ed.), *Socialism and Modernity: Art, Culture, Politics 1950–1974*. Zagreb: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2012, 156.
19 Nena Baljković, 'Braco Dimitrijević – Goran Trbuljak', in Marijan Susovski (ed.), *New Artistic Practice in Yugoslavia: 1966–1978*. Zagreb: Gallery of Contemporary Art, 1978.
20 The participating artists were Giovanni Anselmo, Robert Barry, Stanley Brouwn, Daniel Buren, Victor Burgin, Jan Dibbets, Braco Dimitrijević, ER Group, Barry Flanagan, Douglas Huebler, Alain Kirill, Jannis Kounellis, John Latham, Group Kod, Sol LeWitt, OHO Group, Goran Trbuljak, Lawrence Weiner, Ian Wilson. Ješa Denegri, 'Art in the Past Decade', in Susovski, *New Artistic Practice in Yugoslavia*, 11.
21 Prelom Kolektiv (ed.), *The Case of Belgrade's Students' Cultural Centre in the 1970s*. Belgrade: Prelom Kolektiv, n.d.
22 Kynaston McShine, *Information*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970.
23 Igor Španjol (ed.), *OHO – A Retrospective*. Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2007.
24 See the chapter on the OHO Group in Maja Fowkes, *The Green Bloc*.
25 Dóra Hegyi, Zsuzsa László and Eszter Szakács (eds), *Imagination/Idea: The Beginning of Hungarian Conceptual Art – The László Beke Collection 1971*. Budapest: tranzit.hu, 2014. In fact, over the course of several months while the material was collected, three more artists joined the call, making the final number thirty-one.
26 Hegyi, Hornyik and László, *Parallel Chronologies*, 9. This is regularly put down to the museum curators Márta Kovalovszky and Péter Kovács, as well as to its location outside Budapest, where venues were more firmly controlled.
27 For reprints, see Hegyi, László and Szakács, *Imagination/Idea*.
28 'The Collection of Gyula Pauer', in Hegyi, László and Szakács, *Imagination/Idea*, 183.
29 Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*. London: Reaktion Books, 2009, 294.
30 The work in question was Henryk Stażewski's *Infinite Vertical Composition* (1970); see Jolanta Gromadzka, 'The Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium', in Dorota Monkiewicz (ed.), *The Wild West: A History of Wrocław's Avant-Garde*. Warsaw: Zachęta/National Gallery of Art, 2015, 101–103.
31 Sylwia Serafinowicz and Dorota Monkiewicz, 'The Open Wrocław', in Monkiewicz, *The Wild West*, 141.
32 See also Magdalena Radomska, 'PERMAFO's Hungarian "Points of Support"', in Anna Markowska (ed.), *PERMAFO 1970–1981*. Wrocław: Wrocław Contemporary Museum, 2013, 120–25.
33 Jerzy Ludwiński quoted in 'It Begins in Wrocław ... Wanda Gołowska and Jan Chwałczyk in Conversation with Magdalena Ziółkowska', in Magdalena Ziółkowska (ed.), *Notes from the Future of Art: Selected Writings by Jerzy Ludwiński*. Eindhoven: Van Abbe Museum, 2007, 165.
34 Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, 295–96.
35 Luiza Nader, 'Transgressing the Imagination: The Zalesie Ball in 1968', in Claire Bishop and Marta Dziewańska (eds), *1968–1989: Political Upheaval and Artistic Change*. Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, 2009, 103, footnote 24.
36 Nader, 'Transgressing the Imagination', 102.
37 WHW interview with Želimir Koščević, *Galerija Nova Newspaper*, Vol. 18, No. 12, 2008, 14.
38 Želimir Koščević (ed.), *Student Centre Gallery Zagreb: 1961–1973*. Zagreb: Studentski Centar Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1975.
39 *Ibid*., 87.
40 László Beke in interview with Eszter Szakács in Hegyi, László and Szakács, *Imagination/Idea*, vi.
41 WHW interview with Želimir Koščević, *Galerija Nova Newspaper*, 15.
42 Branka Ćurčić, 'The Novi Sad Neo Avant-Garde of the 1960s and 1970s', in Zorana Dojić and Jelena Vesić (eds), *Political Practices of (Post-)Yugoslav Art: Retrospective 01*. Belgrade: Prelom Kolektiv, 2010, 176.
43 Maja and Reuben Fowkes, 'Remains of Utopia: Neo-Marxist Affinities of the East European Neo-avant-garde', *Acta Historiae Artium*, No. 56, 2015, 333–42.
44 Nebojša Milenković, 'Invisible Art', in Nebojša Milenković, Gordana Nikolić and Luka Kulić (eds), *Examples of Invisible Art*. Novi Sad: Museum of Contemporary Art of Vojvodina, 2012, 17.
45 Miško Šuvaković, 'Students' Cultural Centres as Reservations', in Prelom Kolektiv, *The Case of Belgrade's Students' Cultural Centre*, 99.
46 *Ibid*.
47 Kolešnik, 'Conflicting Visions', 157.
48 Miklós Peternák, *concept.hu: The Influence of Conceptual Art in Hungary*. Paks: Paksi Képtár, 2014, 67; and 'Kronológia 1966–81', available at http://www.c3.hu/collection/koncept/frame.html (6 October 2016).
49 See the footnote to György Galántai's biography, available online at http://www.galantai.hu/appendix/eletrajz.html (5 August 2017).
50 László Beke, 'Dulden, verbieten, unterstützen: Kunst zwischen 1970 und 1975', in Hans Knoll (ed.), *Die zweite Öffentlichkeit: Kunst in Ungarnim 20. Jahrhundert* [The Second Public: Art in Hungary in the Twentieth Century]. Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1999, 217.
51 Police informer report, ÁBTL 3. 1. 2. M-39271/2, 239–247, published in *2000 Irodalmi és Társadalmi havi lap*, No. 10, 2006, and available online at http://ketezer.hu/2006/10/az-aczelt-megedzik (6 October 2016).
52 'KÉP/VERS tájékoztató a FMK 1974. febr. 22-i programjához' ['Image/Poem' information about the FMK programme of 22 February 1974], available at http://www.c3.hu/collection/koncept/footnote/f12.html (6 October 2016).
53 Tamás St Auby, 'Make a Chair! (Hommage à George Brecht)', text of a lecture given at the Young Artists' Club, 6 June 1975, reprinted in Hegyi, Hornyik and László, *Parallel Chronologies*, 43.
54 *Ibid*.
55 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso, 2012, 143.
56 Pavlína Morganová, *Czech Action Art: Happenings, Actions, Events, Land Art, Body Art and Performance Art behind the Iron Curtain*. Prague: Charles University/Karolinum Press, 2014, 151.
57 Daniela Čarná, *Out of the City: Land Art*. Bratislava: City Gallery, 2007, 13.
58 Jerzy Ludwiński, 'Art in the Post-Artistic Age', in Ziółkowska, *Notes from the Future of Art*, 17–27.
59 Luiza Nader, 'Towards Criticism of the Visual: the 8th Meeting of Artists and Theoreticians of Art in Osieki', in *Avant-Garde in Plein-Air: Osieki and Łazy 1963–1981*. Koszalin: Museum of Koszalin, 2008, 89.
60 Edit Sasvári, 'A balatonboglári kápolnatárlatok kultúrpolitikai háttere' [The Cultural-political Background of the Balatonboglár Chapel Exhibitions], in Júlia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári (eds), *Törvénytelen avantgárd: Galántai György balatonboglári kápolnaműterme 1970–1973* [Illegal Avant-garde: The Balatonboglár Chapel Studio of György Galántai 1970–1973]. Budapest: Artpool-Balassi, 2003, 35.
61 [György Galántai], 'The Pre-Story of Artpool: Chapel Studio of György Galántai Balatonboglár, 1970–1973', in György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay, *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe*. Budapest: Artpool, 2013, 32.
62 László Szabó, 'Happening a kriptában' [Happening in the Crypt], *Népszabadság*, 16 December 1973. Reprinted in Klaniczay and Sasvári, *Törvénytelen avantgárd*, 185–86, trans. Reuben Fowkes.