

# Performative Interactions with the Past:

## Re-conceptualizing Archives and Forgetting in Post-socialist Context<sup>1</sup>

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*Reinterpretation and recontextualization... play an important part in the work of the Hungarian artist group Little Warsaw. In the fall of 2005, they invited Tamás Szentjóby to repeat his action entitled Exclusion exercise. Autotherapy to prevent punishment in their studio as a public event. The original action was realized in 1972 in the context of the "chapel shows" in the lake-side resort of Balatonboglár, a series of underground art exhibitions that was monitored by the secret police and forbidden the following year. Of particular interest here are Little Warsaw's motives for asking Szentjóby to repeat this action and his reasons for agreeing to do so. As he had done thirty-three years previously, he sat on a chair, placed a bucket over his head, hung a piece of cardboard round his neck bearing the words "Exclusion exercise. Autotherapy to prevent punishment" and subjected himself to questions from the audience for two hours. The action included a piece of paper nailed to the wall with suggestions for possible questions. They included the following: "Is it really the task of art to raise awareness, is our destiny identical with history?"<sup>2</sup>*

Dóra Hegyi finishes her essay, "Art and the Amnesiac Society: The Neo-Avant-Garde Revisited" (2006), with an open question that concerns the inscription of the past into the artwork. In this particular case of a repeated action history, archive and the memory of things are "imprinted" on the body of the artist (Tamás Szentjóby) itself.<sup>3</sup> As Zdenka Badovinac has observed in the case of Eastern European alternative art, "the performer's body emphasizes the necessity for the 'museification' and 'archivization' of the local tradition. ... fighting against the amnesia of the great historical and art utopias."<sup>4</sup> The ways in which these particular artists archived their own performative activity is equal to an archive being understood as a medium of dynamism and self-reflection.<sup>5</sup> At the core of Badovinac's argument stands the necessity of the body as a creative repeater of actions dated back in time, keeping them

constantly alive.<sup>6</sup> According to the “original” definition of body art, the most raw material for an artist is his/her work with his/her own body.<sup>7</sup> François Pluchart defined *art corporel* in 1974 as follows: “The body is the fundamental given. Pleasure, suffering, disease and death are inscribed in it and, in the course of biological evolution, they shape the socialized individual, i.e. condition... that might satisfy all the requirements and constraints of the powers that be.”<sup>8</sup>

Pluchart’s concept describes the body not only as an extremely material and physical source of inspiration, but also as a corporeality attached to chains generated by social, economic, cultural, and political order. Trapped in the absurd system of socialist rules of (mis-)realized utopia, this was especially true for performances, action, and body art pieces produced in Kádár’s Hungary. As the case study taking center stage in this essay will prove, the conditions of the body placed in a socialist context are reappearing and rethought in an action reenacted by the same person that “distill(s) meaning from past events, store(s) them, and find(s) embodied modalities to express them in the here-and-now.”<sup>9</sup>

Some nonconformist artists from this region during the late socialist period used every possible strategy to find their own way of producing, respectively documenting art on/of the margins: this happened, for example, either through establishing unconventional modes of archiving already in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, or through reflecting on their own experiences through art, but only after the fall of the communist model. For the latter, the most effective way was to reach back to the reconceptualization of previous performative works. The *deconstruction and criticism of the disciplined body* in performative “flashbacks” was one of the most effective ways to detach from the rules and memory politics of actually existing communism. This moment of detachment is, as I will argue later, the “pointing finger” of the artist at a place in performance and action art history that is being *forgotten* in a canonized view on late socialism’s art scenes. Avant-gardists tended to take up statements like “the ‘unwritten’ is often unremarked”<sup>10</sup> in order to approach it with an increasing aesthetic interest. Deconstruction and criticism of the *rules* within which the artists were allowed to act are best observed in the breaking of formal and aesthetical regulations, as well as turning to elusive practices like body art, where the disciplining of bodies was getting complicated, if not impossible. By recalling, or at least trying to recall, the intention of a performance, event, action, or a piece of body art in a post-socialist condition within reenactments denotes an interesting attempt and attitude towards the history of how to preserve unofficial art and how to relate it to existing narratives on socialist realist or global art history. Arguing with Péter György, who is convinced that the understanding of the (official) culture of the Kádár era is only possible through a diversity and large number of theoretical and methodological frameworks, one of these could be a reconceptualization of archives and forgetting in a post-socialist context.<sup>11</sup> The lens through which to look at the interconnectedness of archives and forgetting are reenactments in the “unconscious” condition following the fall of the Wall.

Talking about re-enactments raises the question of how the performing arts and history are related to one another. In the Benjaminian sense, history is transitory and elusive, and its authentic moment can only be captured in the passing flow of time.<sup>12</sup> It is already common knowledge (but at the same time debated) in performance and theatre studies that the performing arts represents one of the fields in aesthetics that is most closely linked to Benjamin's understanding of historiography, because the nature of performance is determined by fluidity and disappearance.<sup>13</sup> Amelia Jones underlines this argument when she states that "history is performative re-enactment,"<sup>14</sup> and "there is no singular, authentic 'original' event we can refer to..."<sup>15</sup> Although other performance theoreticians like Rebecca Schneider question the complete disappearance of performative pieces,<sup>16</sup> the elusive link between event-based art and history/historiography stands at the core of a clandestine art that tried to escape the order of socialist cultural norms. Therefore, I insist on this particular relationship, which relativizes the micro-narratives introduced in the present paper. Referring again to Jones, and also to Adrian Heathfield, embodying history in process-based art should have a conscious criticism and (self-)reflexive approach towards historicization and the (exclusionary narratives of) historiography in general.<sup>17</sup> This particular access is present in a number of re-enactments reaching back to the era of East-Central European neo-avant-gardes.

This paper is an attempt to provide an adequate reading of history's "processing" in performative works as a reflection on clandestine art activity under communism. The investigation should not help to fulfil requirements of "Western" categories,<sup>18</sup> or build a counter-canon, but it should rather serve to support understanding the complexity of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde's return in post-socialist re-enactments.

As mentioned briefly earlier, further questions I would like to address in this essay are attached to the aspects of visibility and invisibility in the field of Eastern European art history from the socialist era in which ideology had disappeared. Related to the phenomena of the archive and documentation is the matter of what is remembered and included, and which moments of history under dictatorship were (or are still) excluded—*forgotten*. Referring again to György makes clear that the Kádár era in its entirety is a ghost-like figure: dead in social, political, and ideological terms.<sup>19</sup> Szentjóbý's and Little Warsaw's re-enactment tries to build a discursive bridge to an alternative art culture that is now non-existent, and whose sign systems, or symbolic metaphorical language, cannot be decoded by current generations. Forgetting is also a form of vanishing from the consciousness. This description is partly in line with what Hegyi called "amnesiac society" in the title of her paper cited at the beginning of this essay. She claims that the silence of the Kádár era continues to exist, because the writing of the (art) history of that period is still happening in something like an isolated "second public sphere."<sup>20</sup> Her proposition is only partly correct, because scholars have begun a systematic analysis of Hungarian neo-avant-garde tendencies in the last few years,<sup>21</sup> although the international introduction, for example, and relatedness of (especially) the Hungarian

alternative art scenes is still much more “backward” than that of other regions in the former Eastern Bloc. Again, it is the question of which information and memory has a place in the historiography of twentieth-century art and which does not. A way to deal with these issues is to look into performances and actions covering the phenomena of forgetting and archives. Sven Spieker comes to the point: “Archives do not record experience so much as its absence; they mark the point where an experience is missing from its proper place, and what is returned to us in an archive may well be something we never possessed in the first place.”<sup>22</sup>

Here, I am not interested in the detailed description of mechanisms how an “amnesiac society”<sup>23</sup> was created under socialist rule, but in the *attitude of artists* creatively marking—in the sense of Spieker—fractures on the shield of the communist period’s extensive archive, drawing our attention to *the distracted body as a different source of coming to terms with the past*. By adding another piece of the puzzle to the missing coherent, comprehensive, and critical analysis of East-Central European event-based art,<sup>24</sup> the task of the present investigation is, on the one hand, to reflect upon a special form of alternative historicization through performance in the work of Tamás Szentjóby and in the approach of the artist duo Little Warsaw, and, on the other, to keep looking for fragments; markers of forgetting in constructing the history of art and performing art in the region.

In July 1972, at the chapel studio of Balatonboglár, a remarkable clandestine art venue of the Kádár era, Szentjóby conceptualized and performed the action *Kizárás gyakorlat: Bünténésmegelőző autoterápia* (*Exclusion exercise: Autotherapy to prevent punishment*), in the manner described earlier by Hegyi. The “production” was part of a series of events under the title *DIREKT HÉT* (*DIRECT WEEK*), which approached and encouraged audiences to become active participants in the creation of the artwork.<sup>25</sup> As a result of Szentjóby’s radical intellectual and artistic development that began in the early sixties, in most of his initiations, including the conceptualization of the *DIREKT HÉT*, he was keen to smash the social and cultural consensus of Kádárist Hungary.<sup>26</sup> As Emese Kürti articulated in her recent essay on the history of the first Hungarian happening, improvisation and experimentalism were central to the oeuvre of Szentjóby.<sup>27</sup> Because late-socialist bureaucratism at the beginning of the seventies was still paranoid and obsessed with control, plus intuitive, destructive, and activating,<sup>28</sup> non-representative art belonged to a sphere of exclusion. The art produced by Szentjóby explicitly *denied* the existence of the regime. One of the main purposes of the event series was to challenge the boundaries of spectatorship. With this undertaking, the organizers of *DIREKT HÉT* violated the “unwritten” social agreement of the passive consumption of art. The biggest danger of an art like this was that the activation of the spectator could have unpredictable consequences.

In *Kizárás gyakorlat*, the situation of sitting on a chair with certain isolation from the outside world was, in the words of Szentjóby, borrowed from the Christian tradition of confession.<sup>29</sup> The piece was not only implicitly referring to a



Fig. 1 *Expulsion-Exercise, Punishment-preventive Autotherapy* by Tamás Szentjóby, Date: 1972. Location: Chapel Studio, Balatonboglár. Photos by: György Galántai. Courtesy of Artpool Art Research Center.

form of habitualized Eurocentric religionism, but also to a Chinese habit of punishment. As these global references already indicate, the meanings of *Kizárás gyakorlat* are exceedingly complex; therefore, I will concentrate only on a few possible interpretations related to the main questions. Visitors of the chapel could approach Szentjóby with about twenty questions listed on a sheet of paper that was attached to the wall. The questions could only be answered by the artist with “yes” or “no.” The “audience” was encouraged to make up additional questions, but Szentjóby could not change his answers. He describes the experience of being committed and sitting for about eight hours on a chair with a bucket on his head as extremely strenuous.<sup>30</sup> The artist himself emphasized that the message of the performance was more general than only a critique of state socialism; it was directed against the hierarchies of state and church, with the intention to debate the relationship between the individual and these institutions.<sup>31</sup> Szentjóby clearly demonstrated what is happening to the body if it is exposed to the forces of any kind of hierarchical order. The freedom of autonomous action disappears, which is the most elementary right of a social being. With *Kizárás gyakorlat*, the artist intends to debate brute force against the individual. This particular violation does not necessarily have to be physical, although Szentjóby is explicitly displaying the effects of rule with a static, paralyzed pose of his corpus. His senses were nonfunctional (the bucket on his head isolated him from the outside world), and in this way he subversively created an almost completely mute subject, one that is the ideal element of a repressed and controllable society. For Szentjóby, it was important to avoid violence from the authorities, so the performer himself conducted punishment demonstratively. Those who took part in the performance by asking Szentjóby questions also participated in the act of punishment—at the same time being paradoxically collaborators of religious and state systems, as well as the performer. Through the vehemence of questions addressed to Szentjóby, he was not able or willing to interrupt the process of penalty. It is an interesting and not inconsiderable remark that *Kizárás gyakorlat* took place in the circle of members of a parallel culture, where a symbolic, deconstructive language used by Szentjóby was more likely to be understood.

Reducing the intention of Szentjóby’s action to an equation with a reaction towards repressive politics in late-socialist Hungary, Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski offers the following reading of the original *Kizárás gyakorlat*:

*The psycho-masochistic character of the performance had two opposing impulses: on the one hand, it afforded an opportunity for the purification and expression of internalized anxieties, on the other it presumed the need for responsibility and punishment inscribed within this traumatic experience, a type of politico-psychoanalytic session. According to psychoanalytic theory, re-experiencing a trauma activates the mechanism that eventually leads to healing. The potential and the actual police interventions into the artists’ lives were a constant source of such trauma. Szentjóby’s performance could be seen in this context as a form of therapy, an*



Fig. 2 *Expulsion-Exercise, Punishment-preventive Autotherapy* by Tamás Szentjóby, Date: 1972. Location: Chapel Studio, Balatonboglár. Photos by: György Galántai. Courtesy of Artpool Art Research Center.

*attempt to reprocess and desensitize the traumatic contact with the political police.*<sup>32</sup>

Piotrowski's appreciation of this conceptual performance<sup>33</sup> suggests that the Hungarian neo-avant-garde has one essential characteristic in relation to politics: it was always (directly or indirectly) affected by political repression and brute force, as well as shocks and traumas caused by the distorted hierarchies of state socialism. Relating to my brief analysis of *Kizárás gyakorlat*, Piotrowski's assumption is not entirely true. Szentjóby's attitude is a *general anarchism* whose origin is only partly to be associated with communist dictatorship. Artists had a chance to decide if and/or how to deal with this condition of being (mostly) on the margins of this particular political situation.<sup>34</sup> Some members of the Hungarian subcultures at the time just shut their eyes and lived as if no secret observation and control existed,<sup>35</sup> or demonstrated the vanguard convergence of art and life. Artists like Szentjóby debated and openly provoked diverse forms of control (not only that of the Hungarian socialist order) with the help of a complex symbolic language of aesthetics and deconstruction. Szentjóby, like a number of his fellow artists, was against the exaggerated "institutionalism" in which the utopia of communism had ended up. At this point, one could raise the question about why Little Warsaw chose this particular performance to re-enact in an apparently different historical, social, and cultural context. Maybe the circumstances have changed, but the message was still valid. The critique of dominant institutions, order, and ideological and sign systems is also an issue in the practice of documentation, archiving, historiography, and the performing arts, which was and still is an important way of looking at a problem—both in the 1970s and in the 2000s. As the title of Szentjóby's original and re-enacted action suggests, "exclusion" was and remains present, independent of our historical awareness. Exclusion mechanisms were more visible and obvious during the existence of the socialist regime, but even in democratic societies traces of expulsion remain—especially in the market-oriented art world and in the canonized production of art history. Forms of aesthetic deconstruction and forgetting are remarkable moments of *exposed exclusion* in the way Szentjóby, and later on Little Warsaw, realized it.

The link between the original and re-enacted versions of *Kizárás gyakorlat* is the *act of performing and marking exclusion*. This kind of performing is considered here as the *document* which is subject to archiving, forgetting, and deconstruction. There is a specific reason why the fragile document of performing has become so interesting for the artist duo Little Warsaw. Against the background of Hungary's communist past, documents have lost their authenticity: the manipulation and falsification of data in those times radically changed the notion of "trusted information." The question arises whether the individual can still trust institutionalized knowledge and data. A sensible and critical handling of information is required, not just if one is screening files of the secret police. The question concerns both historians and artists from the neo-avant-garde scene, with direct and indirect forms of criticism against diverse kinds of information, data, and documents—and even their own art having its origin in socialism—which had and still

have significance in producing art outside of a system with historical awareness. In the context of the performing arts, the traditional understanding of *archives* as “containers” of information that mediate documents loses its classical meaning completely.<sup>36</sup> This is also true for the installation works of Little Warsaw, which recall central questions of writing history. Regarding these characteristics of event-based art and art with an intended historical attitude, interesting dimensions of both archives and documents appear. These dimensions can easily be applied to methods of analysis in the way Piotrowski imagined writing the history of Eastern Europe: considering local, often excluded and marginalized traditions, and thinking in heterogeneity<sup>37</sup>—a methodology based on integration, working with nuances. In a certain sense, Little Warsaw entered the same path, because “they focused on the possibilities of local art-making practices within ... new conditions.”<sup>38</sup>

György Galántai, the Hungarian artist and founder of the Artpool Art Research Center, one of the most important archives on the alternative art scene of the communist period in East-Central Europe, formulated the concept of the “active archive,” which is, similarly to innovative concepts of post-custodial archiving, an open-ended *project*. As Galántai argues, “The archive expands through calls for projects, cooperation and exchange as well as circulating information and enlarging the network ... it works with an exact aim and direction sensitively detecting changes and adjusting accordingly.”<sup>39</sup> The first passage of the manifesto neglects the collecting task of the archive and sees one of its main functions in the process of *co-creation*, where human and material factors enrich and cooperate with one another.<sup>40</sup> For a number of artists, including Galántai himself, creating their own creative archives and own kinds of archiving was crucial during the time of state socialism: “Artist’s archives are a testimony to [their] permanent process of demystifying the socialist institution of art in which [some of them] publicly participated in [their] own way and which [they] could not escape ... the aspect of mediating and sharing information flanks and prevails to document and preserve ephemeral forms of artistic communication.”<sup>41</sup> Those who were engaged with “deviant,” unofficial means of documentation with respect to historicization developed an own *discursive field of aesthetics* that contained philosophy, art production, and diverse forms of communication. This kind of understanding of the archive is in line with Michel Foucault’s notion, which is “the general system of the formation and transformation of statements,” a structure that incorporates “tradition and oblivion,” and that “reveals the rules of a practice that enables statements both to survive and to undergo regular modifications.”<sup>42</sup> Again, in this sense, the archive is not a simple storage of data but a system of relating information to each other. Without having other opportunities to step aside from the norms of socialist rule, archiving artists found *another way to arrange information* on a micro-level of their own history.

As already articulated in relation to the socialist condition, the factor of “power” also plays a crucial role in constituting the archive, because the selection and arrangement

procedure in itself, within the Foucauldian system of the archive, mirrors hierarchical relations.<sup>43</sup> As soon as the issue of power relations comes up, one should touch upon the question of archive and its institutionalization. Jacques Derrida states that the (hi)story of institutionalization is an intrinsic part of the archive's theory.<sup>44</sup> This institutionalization is in favor of easing control and observation, as we have seen in the case of dictatorships that not only wanted to command the present, but wanted to dominate the past, too. There is definitely a significant difference between a monitored format of institution (state socialist bureaucracy) and a dynamic system proposed by Foucault (artist archives in East-Central Europe). This difference is also broached as an issue in the two performative versions of *Kizárás gyakorlat*: stasis versus flexibility, rigid construction versus playful/provocative deconstruction.

Derrida, like Spieker, also discusses how to understand forgetting as an integrated part of the archive, relating it to repression: "There would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness which does not limit itself to repression. Above all... beyond or within this simple limit called finiteness or finitude, there is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and deconstruction drive."<sup>45</sup>

Following the logic of Foucault's archive definition, we keep returning to the "outside" of the archive, which is just as much a part of it as its specific contents.<sup>46</sup> As outlined above, the archive is *incomplete, unfinished*, and tends towards forgetfulness. Creators, acting as repositories, just like actions, which take place within and around the archive, co-determine the phenomenon: "The archive produces as much as it records the event."<sup>47</sup> Archiving has a strong potential for *critical creation* and this is the particular condition in which this investigation is mostly interested, from the point of view of deconstruction and forgetting. The idea of the active archive is the moment when the *passive observer* is successfully turned into an *active participant* engaging with the contents of the discursive spectrum of history.

The intention "to archive," in the case of the performance, is to "turn and return to all those tracks and steps and bodies and gestures and sweat and images and words and sounds performed by past [performers]."<sup>48</sup> André Lepecki sees the body as a "living archive": through the production process of re-enactments the *creative* potential of the body as an archive and the original performance as a document will be *activated*.<sup>49</sup> Re-enacting is never a one-to-one translation of the source material; it is a matter of critical, self-reflexive interpretation. Lepecki articulates a basic and significant statement: "an archive does not store: it acts."<sup>50</sup>

*Re-enactments, as "will to archive", invest in creative returns precisely in order to find, foreground, and produce... difference ... singular modes of politicizing time and economies of authorship via the choreographic activation of the [performer's] body as an endlessly creative, transformational archive. In re-enacting we find in past [performances] a will to keep inventing.*<sup>51</sup>



That the archive is not a metaphor of *preservation*, but that of *creation* is also true for the re-enactment of *Kizárás gyakorlat*. We have the case that one and the same person performs the original performance after thirty-three years. The memory of the body and the context of the former event are attached to the same person, but both were displaced through other factors. The countercultural environment of the neo-avant-garde was no longer present, but neither was the institutional critique that manifested itself in the “active not-forgetting” of neo-avant-garde and the post-avant-garde generations.<sup>52</sup> We can retrace this tendency in other contemporary re-enactments where Hungarian artists who were once active during the sixties and seventies reconceptualized their actions and public interventions long after the system changed. Examples could be Endre Tót re-enacting his emblematic demonstration series *ZERODEMO* in 2013, during which a crowd of people were carrying large banners showing zeros through the streets of Budapest,<sup>53</sup> or György Galántai’s *Tükör transzparens (Mirror transparent)* action of 1989, wherein he placed a mirror in public spaces, and which was repeated also in 2013 in front of Budapest’s Műcsarnok (Hall of Arts).<sup>54</sup> Both re-enactments carry the criticism of institutionalism: Tót subversively ironizes the rules of state systems with a seemingly political procession “without” any explicit content,<sup>55</sup> and Galántai uses a subtle form of showing a mirror to a museum that is bowing to bureaucratic as well as political decisions. But re-enactment was not only typical to Hungarian nonconformist artists; its practice was common throughout the former Eastern Bloc. One example would be Polish artist Jerzy Beres’s piece, *Prediction*, first performed in 1968 and re-enacted in 1988. The intention of Beres was to keep the memory of the wave of revolutions in 1968 alive: “An authentic work of art should stay alive in a spite of changing context, for otherwise it becomes only a dead historical document.”<sup>56</sup> This proposition corresponds very much with Lepecki’s reading of re-enactment as an activating force.

The relevance of *Kizárás gyakorlat* could have been located in criticizing socialist institutionalism, on the one hand, or in distinguishing the questions of personal and collective exclusion and respectively forgetting within the framework of institutional order and hierarchy, on the other. Traces of “archival creation” can be detected in two respects. Firstly, the re-enactment of the 1972 piece indirectly addresses the lack of interest in the politically and critically motivated Eastern European performance and live art of communist times.<sup>57</sup> In the *Hordozható Intelligencia Fokozó Múzeum (Portable Intelligence Increase Museum, 2003)* exhibition project, Szentjóby’s intention was just the same: to display and accentuate an exclusion process in art history by constructing a counter-institution.<sup>58</sup> Little Warsaw was, at that time, interested in the destiny and canonized classification of artists and artist groups, like in those belonging to neo-avant-garde circles.<sup>59</sup> They tried to answer questions regarding historiography: “How do we see the same thing after a while?” and “Is it the same?”<sup>60</sup> With these debates, Little Warsaw staged a dispute about reproduction in/through history, which was also integrated into the re-enactment of Szentjóby’s performance. Secondly, as already sketched earlier, the performance contained a list of



Fig. 3 *Rekonstrukció (Reconstruction)* by Little Warsaw and Tamás Szentjóby. Date: February 4, 2005. Location: Bálint Havas’s Studio, Budapest. Photos by: Lenke Szilágyi.

questions (about, for instance, the freedom of the individual, the sociopolitical role of art and culture, the role of punishment, etc.) that visitors could ask Szentjány. The main focus was not necessarily the answers of the artist, but on the *gesture of asking and actively intervening* in the sphere of a body art piece. The interest of the audience and the emphasis of topics had changed with time, as the re-enactment demonstrated. This could be a reason why Hegyi pointed out this specific question: “Is it really the task of art to raise awareness, is our destiny identical with history?”. The first part of the question refers to the circumstances under which *Kizárás gyakorlat* was born and critically reflected upon: should socio- and cultural-political topics *still* be communicated and discussed via art? The second part might concern whether there’s a loop in history that returns to the initial point (e.g., institutional critique). Little Warsaw named the 2005 performance *Rekonstrukció* (*Reconstruction*), but it was formally just an approach of “re-staging”; it should have been given the title *Re-forming*. Maja Fowkes offers the following reading of the re-enactment, referring to the position of the artist duo: “For them, it seemed as if ‘artists who lived and worked in the previous (Communist) era tended to mythologize their own activities,’ while the artists of Little Warsaw sought ‘to demythologize and de-sacralize theirs—in other words, approaching them in a more matter-of-fact way,’ in order to move away from the habits of the older generation of ‘see[ing] their own activities in a heroic light and dramatiz[ing] themselves in a kind of political mythology.’”<sup>61</sup> This leads to the insight that *Rekonstrukció* was both a reconceptualized criticism of institutional restrictions (both socialist and beyond) and a review of exclusionary practices *within* the artist circles of the neo-avant-garde.

History and its representation is a key issue in the work of Little Warsaw. The artist duo concentrates part of its work on performative interactions with the past; on the creative and highly complex “re-cycling” of history.<sup>62</sup> Their art pieces can be positioned in the visual arts, but with a distinct performative and theatrical dimension. The playful exposure of monuments of the socialist era is the focal point of their installations. By provoking and confronting generations with symbols of a past they have never experienced (or that tends to *disappear*) and by building their installations in public spaces, a new attitude towards communism is produced—perhaps a “forced remembrance,” to keep being confronted with conceptions of fading socialist ideology. The moving and acting body of the spectator<sup>63</sup> that is put in between his/her own reality and the artificial reality of a monument that represents (in a repositioned manner) something that is gone could lie at the foundation of Little Warsaw’s concept. As Edit András notes, “the reception of their projects was inevitably part of their expectations.”<sup>64</sup> The body of the spectator is performatively filled with information and questions, and is being transformed into a “living” and critical document. “Little Warsaw’s purpose is to expose the synchrony in historical perspectives and to accentuate that [censorious] reflection [recontextualization] is more important than reconstruction.”<sup>65</sup>

Through the lens of Walter Benjamin’s historical materialism, “authentic” historiography is to leave tradition and



Fig. 4 *Rekonstrukció* (*Reconstruction*) by Little Warsaw and Tamás Szentjány. Date: February 4, 2005. Location: Bálint Havas’s Studio, Budapest. Photos by: Lenke Szilágyi.

conformism behind and to escape a history usually written by the winners.<sup>66</sup> A possible methodology to do so is to “brush towards the line,”<sup>67</sup> to be counter- or a-institutional and to leave a mark on deconstructivism, mechanisms of forgetting, and exclusion. Part of the archival project’s aim of the second public sphere is to emancipate the history of alternative culture as part of history written with capital letters.<sup>68</sup> Performances like *Kizárás gyakorlat* and performative moments in *Nefertiti teste (The Body of Nefertiti, 2003)* or in *Elhagyott emlékmű (Deserted Memorial, 2004)* by Little Warsaw expose and visualize a crack in the flow of “mainstream” history, sometimes even being skeptical about how art/artists are trying to secure their survival in Art History. Piotrowski’s model of a “horizontal art history,” Svetlana Boym’s “de-linearization of history,”<sup>69</sup> Lia Perjovschi’s subjective art history, Vit Havránek’s colonized view on the past,<sup>70</sup> or Zdenka Badovinac’s “interrupted histories”<sup>71</sup> are all indicative of this direction regarding the art scenes of socialist and post-socialist Eastern Europe.

As the examples analyzed above show, parallel culture and some contemporary art installations and objects share experiences, readings, memories and/or forgetting of the communist era. These performances and art pieces could be seen as *lieux de mémoire*, in the understanding of Pierre Nora; a form of ritual to keep private and collective memories alive that are rooted in history.<sup>72</sup> Tamás Szentjóbý’s 1972 and 2005 actions are emblematic examples how personal attitudes, memories, and history collide: on the one hand, the private confrontation with physical and psychical “violence” of dictatorship—being part of an artistic counterculture that is still fighting for its “earned” position in Art History—and on the other, the rule of state socialism and institutional repressions. Nora’s approach, with diverse micro- and macro-levels of memory and history, again underlines the Benjaminian proposition that an objective and linear concept of history does not exist, and that it is a matter of constant invention, (de-)construction, and memory-montage.

History consists not only of visible (*remembered*), but of invisible (*forgotten*) parts as well. All nonlinear movements, turns, and cracks in history, also introduced in versions and interpretations of the *Kizárás gyakorlat*, are perceived to belong to the sphere of forgetting.<sup>73</sup> Because underground culture was placed literally on the margins, it was therefore vulnerable to the process of forgetting. In practices of self-historicization, like that of the co-production of Little Warsaw and Szentjóbý, Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez locates its purpose in “record[ing] the parallel histories that are subjectively preserved and exist as the fragments of memories and semi-forgotten oral traditions.”<sup>74</sup> Strategies like deconstruction, a-institutionalization, and the critical historicizing of counterculture demonstrate that underground art movements and forgetting have a lot in common, just as performance and forgetting share a “destiny.” This could be seen as the *transitory moment* of caducity, which makes the performative event not reproducible. Reuses of past events are not the representation of “how-it-really-was,” but the attempt to *clip* this transitory moment. Performance theoretician Peggy Phelan’s (often criticized) statement

leaves the same impression: “The disappearance of the object is fundamental to performance.”<sup>75</sup> Forgetting makes its items fragile, as are performance and history. And it is, at the same time, part of a creative and self-reflexive process of archiving. Invention, creation, and criticism should mark the path of historiography of art in socialist East-Central Europe while emphasizing the active role of the artist in intervening with, writing, and constructing history.<sup>76</sup>

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1. Special thanks to the *Artpool Art Research Center*, especially Júlia Klaniczay, György Galántai, and Dóra Halasi, who were the main source of inspiration in writing this article, and who provided all the practical framework for a successful research. Without the generous support of the ERSTE Foundation and the University of Vienna, this essay could not have been realized. Last but not least, I am extremely grateful to Bernadett Báll, who reviewed the original version of the paper and provided valuable comments and corrections. This essay is the revised outcome of my participation in the project *Contemporary Central European Theatre: Document/ary VS Postmemory* (2012–2013) carried out by the International Alternative Culture Center. I appreciated the enthusiasm and hard work of the conveners Natalija Jakubova and Olga Zaslavskaya very much. The author also thanks the anonymous reviewers for their comments and criticism.
2. Dóra Hegyi, “Art and the Amnesiac Society: The Neo-Avant-Garde Revisited,” in *Kontakt... aus der Sammlung der Erste Bank-Gruppe/Kontakt... works from the Collection of Erste Bank Group* (Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther König, 2006), 56–60, 59.
3. Here I do not completely agree with Taylor, because the archive and the things remembered are not “invisible imprints”, they have a very specific form of symbolical inscription that are and should be visible in a certain way; cf. Diana Taylor, quoted in Sarah/Abbott/Ross (2009), 167.
4. Sven Spieker and Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, “Creating Context: Zdenka Badovinac on Eastern Europe’s Missing Histories,” *ARTMargins Online* (August 30, 2009), accessed August 31, 2015, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/interviews/497-creating-context-zdenka-badovinac-on-eastern-europes-missing-histories-interview>.
5. Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade, eds., *Performing Archives / Archives of Performance* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013).
6. Sarah Jones, Daisy Abbott, and Seamus Ross, “Redefining the performing arts archive,” *Arch Sci* 9 (2009): 165–171, 169.
7. Jacques Donguy, “Body Art,” in *Art Action 1958-1998*, ed. Richard Martel (Québec: Éditions Interventions, 2001): 126–143, 126.

8. Ibid.
9. Diana Taylor, "Performance and/as History," *The Drama Review* 1 (2006): 67–86, 71.
10. Ibid., 72.
11. Péter György, *A hatalom képzelete. Állami kultúra és művészet 1957 és 1980 között* (Budapest: Magvető, 2014).
12. Walter Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," in *Benjamin, Walter. Erzählen. Schriften zur Theorie der Narration und zur literarischen Prosa*, ed. Alexander Honold (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), 129–140, 131.
13. Jones, Abbott, and Ross, "Redefining the performing arts archive," 167.
14. Amelia Jones, "The Now and the Has Been: Paradoxes of Live Art in History," in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, eds. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol/Chicago: intellect, 2012), 11–25, 16.
15. Ibid., 18.
16. Rebecca Schneider, "Performance Remains," in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, eds. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol/Chicago: intellect, 2012), 137–140, 146.
17. Jones, "The Now and the Has Been: Paradoxes of Live Art in History," and Heathfield, "Then Again," in *Perform, Repeat, Record*, 30–33.
18. Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: reaction books, 2012) 32.
19. Péter György, *A hatalom képzelete. Állami kultúra és művészet 1957 és 1980 között* (Budapest: Magvető, 2014), 15.
20. Dóra Hegyi, "Art and the Amnesiac Society: The Neo-Avant-Garde Revisited," 57.
21. See Budapest-based research group *A hatvanas-hetvenes évek magyar művészetének komplex kutatási programja* (2014–2017; project convener Edit Sasvári).
22. Tomáš Pospiszyl, "Július Koller's Anti-Archive," *Archiv Július Kollera: Badatelna. / Július Koller Archive: Studyroom*, 20.
23. Which, following her explanation, cannot be the right expression, because she is talking about the amnesiac attitude of an academic elite, not about that of the entire Hungarian society.
24. This lack of knowledge and presence is rather true for Performance and Theatre Studies, because—referring to Klara Kemp-Welch's statement on the workshop *Live Art jenseits des Eisernen Vorhangs*, July 13–14, 2013, in the Collegium Hungaricum Berlin—art history has already covered many levels of investigation about East-Central European experimental art prior to 1989.
25. "Balatonboglári Kápolnaműterem," accessed August 27, 2015, <http://www.artpool.hu/boglar/1972/720706.html>.
26. Emese Kürti, "A szabadság anti-esztétikája. Az első magyarországi happening," *exindex* (September 2015), accessed October 28, 2015, <http://exindex.hu/index.php?l=hu&page=3&id=967>.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Júlia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári, eds., *Törvénytelen avantgárd. Galántai György balatonboglári kápolna műterme 1970–1973* (Budapest: Artpool-Balassi, 2003), 129.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadows of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945–1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: reaktion books, 2009), 276.
33. I merged the terms of conceptual and performance art, because many of the former works of Szentjóby were influenced by conceptualism (e.g., *Be Forbidden!*, 1973).
34. "Andrzej Turowski, a Polish scholar who lives in France, once stated that the margin is a powerful position from which to create a critical discourse with the center. In other words, some discourses and art produced in the margins could be used to

- see the center, i.e., European culture, critically.” Piotr Piotrowski, quoted in Susan Snodgrass, “Central and East European Art and Culture, 1945–Present,” *Art Margins Online* (October 15, 2001), accessed October 29, 2015, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/5-interviews/410-central-and-east-european-art-and-culture-1945-present>.
35. Brigitta Iványi-Bitter, *Kovácsnai* (Budapest: Vince, 2010), 86.
  36. Jones, Abbott, and Ross, “Redefining the performing arts archive,” 169.
  37. Piotr Piotrowski, “Towards a Horizontal History of Modern Art,” *Writing Central European Art History. PATTERNS\_Travelling Lecture Set 2008/2009 Reader* (2008): 4.
  38. Edit András, “Dog Eat Dog: Who is in Charge of Controlling Art in The Post-Socialist Condition?,” *Socialist Eastern Europe – Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art & Culture*, ed. Reuben Fowkes, 1 (2009): 65–77, 68.
  39. György Galántai, “ACTIVE ARCHIVE,” trans. Bea Hock, accessed January 7, 2013, [http://artpool.hu/archives\\_active.html](http://artpool.hu/archives_active.html).
  40. *Ibid.*
  41. Daniel Grůň, “Július Kollers Archive of Universal Futurological Organization,” *Archiv Júliuse Kollera: Badatelna. / Júlis Koller Archive: Studyroom*, 14–17, 16.
  42. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 130.
  43. Allan Sekula, “Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capital,” in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 442–451, 444. See also Glen McGillivray, “The performance archive: Detritus or historical record?,” in *Scrapbooks, Snapshots and Memorabilia: Hidden Archives of Performance*, ed. Glen McGillivray (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 11–28, 12–23.
  44. Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” *Diacritics* 2 (1995): 9–63, 10.
  45. *Ibid.*, 19.
  46. *Ibid.*, 14.
  47. *Ibid.*, 17.
  48. André Lepecki, “The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances,” *Dance Research Journal* 2 (2010): 28–48, 29.
  49. *Ibid.*, 32.
  50. *Ibid.*, 38.
  51. *Ibid.*, 46.
  52. Luiza Nader, “Institute of the Avant-Garde,” *Archive As Strategy Lecture Series – Archiving the Past Tense* (lecture, Calvert 22, London, March 3, 2012).
  53. Endre Tót, “Semmi sem semmi,” accessed October 29, 2015, <http://www.artpool.hu/2013/semmi.html>.
  54. *Térmunkák 1979–93*, and *Kívül tágas*, both accessed October 29, 2015, <http://www.galantai.hu/naplo/Termunkak.html>, <http://www.kivultagas.hu/galantai-gyorgy>.
  55. Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics in Central European Art: Reticence as Dissidence under Post-Totalitarian Rule 1956–1989*, (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 172–173.
  56. Lukasz Guzek, “Above Art and Politics – Performance Art and Poland,” *Art Action 1958–1998* (2001): 254–277, 258.
  57. This could have been true by 2005 or 2003, but according to Klara Kemp-Welch the interest in Eastern European subcultural art scenes had increased in the last few years. See also note 8.
  58. Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, “Innovative Forms of Archives, Part Two: IRWIN’s East Art Map and Tamás St.Auby’s Portable Intelligence Increase Museum,” *e-flux* 16 (2010): 1–9, 7.
  59. Károly Tardos, “Tea Kis Varsóval. Gálik Andrással és Havas Bálinttal Tardos Károly beszélget,” accessed April 7, 2013, [http://balkon.c3.hu/2008/2008\\_2/04kisvarso.html](http://balkon.c3.hu/2008/2008_2/04kisvarso.html).
  60. Little Warsaw’s invitation to the event *Előkép (Fore-Picture)*. Email to [jenez@starkingnet.hu](mailto:jenez@starkingnet.hu) with the subject “REKONSTRUKCIÓ” (“Reconstruction”) on February 3, 2005. Source: Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest.

61. Maja Fowkes, "Off the Record: Performative Practices in the Hungarian Neo-avant-garde and Their Resonance in Contemporary Art," *Centropa: A Journal of Central European Architecture and Related Arts* 1 (2014): 57–71, 63–64.
62. Emese Kürti, "Agresszió, férfiaság, pátosz. Kis Varsó: Lélekben tomboló háború," *Magyar Narancs* 50 (2011), accessed May 7, 2013, <http://magyarnarancs.hu/kepzmuveszet/agresszio-ferfiassag-patosz-77926>.
63. Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life* (Berkley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1988), 98–99.
64. András, "Dog Eat Dog: Who is in Charge of Controlling Art in The Post-Socialist Condition?," 68.
65. Maja Fowkes and Reuben Fowkes, "Kis Varsó 2002–2004. Elmozdított emlékművek és dekonstruktív stratégiák," *Balkon* 2 (2005), accessed April 7, 2013, [http://www.balkon.hu/balkon05\\_02/09fowkes.html](http://www.balkon.hu/balkon05_02/09fowkes.html).
66. Understandings like this similarly appear in investigations on the relation of performance studies and historiography; see, for example, Taylor (2006), 69.
67. Walter Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," 132.
68. The relevance of Benjamin's historical-philosophical notions were also recognized by Kelly Presutti; the exhibition *Art History on the Disciplinary Map* "revolves around Walter Benjamin's concept of the 'discontinuum' and of a vision of history whose narrative is based on a rhizomatic syntax, on passageways, arabesques and imbrications, provides an exciting framework for a new type of writing...." Daria Ghiu, "Rewriting Art History in Eastern Europe. *Art History on the Disciplinary Map in East-Central Europe*. Moravian Gallery, Brno. Organized in cooperation with Masaryk University Brno and Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, USA. 18th–19th November 2010," *kunstexte.de* 1 (2011): 1–5.
69. *Ibid.*, 2–3.
70. Petrešin-Bachelez, "Innovative Forms of Archives, Part Two," 1.
71. *Ibid.*, 2.
72. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations – Memory and Counter-Memory* 26 (1989): 7–24, 12.
73. For the positive aspects and different general categories of forgetting, see Paul Connerton, "Seven types of Forgetting," *Memory Studies* 1 (2008): 59–71.
74. Petrešin-Bachelez, "Innovative Forms of Archives, Part Two," 2.
75. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London/New York: Routledge, 1993), 147.
76. Petrešin-Bachelez, "Innovative Forms of Archives, Part Two," 2.