Innovative Forms of the Hungarian Samizdat. An Analysis of Oral Practices

by
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For those who are well-voiced in samizdat research there's nothing new about the thesis that innovative practices of samizdat like *Szétfolyóirat* (Melting Magazine) offer alternatives both in production and representation compared to the visual language of official controlled culture.[1] Creative illegal publishing did belong to the sphere of a second culture and tried to contrast, ironize and distort the sign systems used by the cultural and art policy of the governing regime. Samizdat created an unregulated and multi-layered framework of expression that was the counterpart of the socialist party's propaganda. The forms of expression were textual, visual, embodied, and oral, all of which strongly differ from official information transmission. 'Self-publishing' is an umbrella term for a phenomenon that is not only written; samizdat production, consumption and distribution were, for example, on the one hand oral and on the other hand performative. Although performance in general is not necessarily attached to sound, oral communication cannot be detached from the body. Excluding the use of modern recording/broadcasting media, the oral practice of samizdat was often immediately performative because the bodily presence and activity of the speaker was indispensable. Despite this fact, only a few surveys concentrate on samizdat as an oral or performative appearance. As declared more recently in the volume *Samizdat, Tamizdat & Beyond,* the editors briefly mention that there 'can be a performative element involved in the transmission of samizdat/tamizdat texts we usually consider to be written'.[2] Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov see in performativity also a possible strategy to escape the observation of communist dictatorship and describe 'how event-based forms were able to serve as a means of communication despite leaving no material trace of dissemination'.[3] Unfortunately, there are no further elaborations attached to these statements, although the volume lines up a number of innovative approaches to re-think traditional understandings of clandestine publishing.

In order to challenge the media history of Eastern European samizdat we have to consider self-publishing as a multimedia practice attached to writ-

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1 Cf. JÓZSEF HAVASRÉTI: Alternatív regiszterek. A kulturális ellenállás formái a magyar neoavantgárdban [Alternative Registers. Forms of Cultural Rebellion in the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde], Budapest 2006, p. 284.

2 FRIEDERIKE KIND-KOVÁCS, JESSIE LABOV: Introduction. Samizdat and Tamizdat. Entangled Phenomena?, in: IDEM (eds.): Samizdat, Tamizdat & Beyond. Transnational Media During and After Socialism, New York—Oxford 2013, pp. 1-23, here p. 8.

3 Ibidem.

ten/printed material and to diverse communication forms. Transmission not only happened through the medium of paper, but also through playing recordings of the voice and/or the performing body of the speaker. One leading personality of the 'living/live journal' *Lélegzet* (Breath, 1980-1985), Ádám Tábor came to the conclusion that in order to prevent monotonous presentations of the magazine, he and his fellow editors should enrich the 'show' with attractive audio and visual effects.[4] This could be seen as proof of how the interlocking of written, oral and performative expressions determined self-publishing.

In this essay I will approach samizdat mainly as an oral phenomenon of East-Central-European parallel culture in late socialism. Orality as a form of self-articulation typical to activities in the second public sphere is an ideal macro-discourse to zoom in on when considering underground publication processes—it was a way out of an observed society and a way out of control. The second public sphere which stood in the background of underground activities such as samizdat publishing was

> 'a (pseudo-)autonomous arena of communication, opinion-sharing, a network and cultural production of individuals and groups, which existed in addition to and interconnected with a dominant public sphere. It needs to be stressed that the second public sphere is often based on conflict and has an extremely fluid structure which eludes institutionalization or the static integration into a dogmatic system.'[5]

Alternative communication and the flexibility of the samizdat phenomenon are essential to understanding its very nature. The aim of the present paper is to develop and summarize central theses on oral practices in illegal self-publishing that could lead to new insights into the perspective of the media and performance studies on our object of investigation. The tools of these academic disciplines might enrich our traditionally narrow understanding of self-publishing as an exclusively written communication format. As the examples to be discussed below will demonstrate, the ability of samizdat to open up a new forum of an autonomous public sphere was manifold and was reaching out for innovation in its medial formats.

At the beginning of the paper I will raise questions as to whether samizdat could be positioned as a real revolt of artistic and underground subcultures as a form of piracy and how its precarious status determines the need for using oral practices. After analysing the collision of the sign system of a second public sphere with that of the communist regime, I will proceed to the three Hungarian case studies that include the above-named samizdat *Lélegzet*, László Rajk's samizdat boutique and a magnitizdat issue devoted to an anni-

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4 Cf. ÁDÁM TÁBOR: A beszélő folyóirat. Bevezető manifesztum [The Speaking Journal. Introductory Manifest], in: IDEM: A váratlan kultúra. Esszék a magyar neoavantgárd irodalomról és művészetről, Budapest 1997, pp. 153-154.

5 KATALIN CSEH-VARGA, ÁDÁM CZIRÁK: Introduction, in: IDEM (eds.): Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere. Reflections on Event-Based Art in East, Central and Southeast Europe, publication manuscript in progress.

versary of the 1956 revolution. Although the written, visual, oral and performative expression forms of the samizdat phenomenon are often difficult to separate from each other, I have defined 'categories' of orality within which I will analyse the chosen examples. The three categories are: oral performance (the embodied representation of clandestine content), oral tradition or exchange (oral transmission of written information) and oral media (re-mediated form of samizdat).

Totalitarian and Post-Totalitarian Conditions in Hungary

In Hungary, 'hard core' socialism ended with Stalin's death in 1953. The passing of totalitarianism led to a slow and hardly visible liberalization of repressive politics and culminated in the October events of 1956 which were a serious attempt to democratize communism respectively to adapt it to national characteristics. The proposed Hungarian *Sonderweg* could not be accepted at that time by the Soviet authorities and was struck down after a few weeks of the prevailing enthusiastic mood. After a couple of years of restrictions following the revolution, the Kádár-regime wanted to demonstrate that they were more open than, and simply different from, the previous Stalinist system[6] and created the rules[7] for an order which made history under the stereotypical notion of 'Goulash Communism'. The framework of these rules was for about three and a half decades subject to a number of minor transformations, fluctuations and paradoxes, although in general it still belonged to a condition with subtle strategic-systematic restrictions and limited (rather tolerated) freedoms. The latter tendency was more dominant until the containment of the Prague Spring in 1968 (as the end of all reform illusions) and it again became prevalent in the 1970s, the 'Golden Age'[8] of existing communism in Hungary.

On the level of everyday life and socialist consumption, the working mechanisms of 'rules and exceptions'[9] were more distinct than in contemporary arts and dissident culture. From the second half of the 1960s onwards most experimental artists were aiming at a limited public sphere to present

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6 Cf. PÉTER KOVÁCS: Lenin auf dem Dach. Die Kunst der 50er Jahre, in: HANS KNOLL (ed.): Die zweite Öffentlichkeit. Kunst in Ungarn im 20. Jahrhundert, Dresden 1999, pp. 138-151, here pp. 149-150.

7 Cf. EVA IRMANOVÁ: Az 1968-as prágai tavasz magyar szemmel [The 1968 Prague Spring Seen from a Hungarian Perspective], in: MÁRIA SCHMIDT (ed.): Dimenziók éve—1968. 2008. május 22-23-án Budapesten rendezett nemzetközi konferencia előadásai [The Year of Dimensions—1968. Presentations of the International Conference Held in Budapest from May 22 to 23, 2008], [Budapest] 2008, pp. 71-88, here p. 71.

8 Cf. TAMÁS STARK: A szocializmus 'aranykora'. A hatvanas-hetvenes évek [The 'Golden Age' of Socialism. The Sixties and Seventies], ibidem, pp. 210-214, here p. 212.

9 GYÖRGY DALOS: Ungarn—Vom Roten Stern zur Stephanskrone, Frankfurt a.M. 1991, p. 113.

their works and discuss them with others. As far as the clandestine existence of intellectuals was concerned, they had to realize not later than 1968 that the only thing to be expected from the Kádár-regime was a moderate form of dictatorship.[10] Intellectuals created their own publicity (like the representatives of avant-garde art) and were interested in confronting alternative political, social and cultural theories/models with the reality of the socialism that actually existed. The contrast and (paradoxically) the passage between these different worlds of thought and creation became more adequate during the 1980s.

Changes in the political and cultural attitude of marginal individuals and communities can be, for example, described through the transition from the phase of neo-avant-garde to trans-avant-garde in late socialist Hungary. In 1982 Ákos Birkás was formulating paradigmatic ideas about the end of neo-avant-garde art: the radicalism of its visual language, as a result of constant suppression, flushed and it suffered because of its inaccessibility as well as its indirect approach.[11] The way of thinking at the beginning of the 1980s, especially in the field of culture, required an even more subtle form of system criticism or irony and the organic intersection of the first and the second public sphere. Based on his own experiences in the Soviet Union of the 1980s Alexei Yurchak discusses

> 'two different languages: the stagnant and repetitive "authoritative discourse" of the party-state, and the experimental and inventive language of other registers of discourse. [In his] account they are directly linked and even depend on each other.'[12]

The commitment of language in creating new spheres of publicity, access and communication are also major issues of the oral practices of Hungarian samizdat discussed in this particular paper. Besides the economic and political dynamics of programs such as Perestroika and Glasnost, another reason for the approaching system change, also in Hungary, was the ideological and practical erosion of the Communist project from within the system through a language that was only marginally attached to the original ideas of socialism.[13]

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[10] Cf. ANDRÁS KOVACS: Volt-e magyar '68? [Was There a Hungarian '68?], in: SCHMIDT (as in footnote 7), pp. 198-207, here p. 204.

[11] Cf. JÓZSEF HAVASRÉTI: Széteső dichotómiák. Színterek és diskurzusok a magyar neo-avantgárdban [Dichotomies Falling Apart. Venues and Discourses in the Hungarian Neo-Avant-Garde], Budapest—Pécs 2009, pp. 54-56.

[12] ANDRES KRUG: Interview with Alexei Yurchak, in: ARTMargins online from 05.06.2014, URL: http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/5-interviews/736-interview-with-alexei-yurchak- (10.08.2015).

[13] Cf. INGRID RUUDI: Visions of Anarchic Space in 1980s Estonian Architecture and Performance Art, in: ALFA 2 (2013), pp. 48-55, here p. 48.

A Media History of Samizdat

The charm of samizdat lies partially in the diverse medial stratification of self-publishing. The specific aesthetics[14], unstable textuality[15] and unlimited possibility of reproduction are factors that seemed to project early digital thinking and opened up alternative mobile networks in the era of active samizdat publishing. As I pointed out earlier, in the case of Soviet literature, samizdat debated the official, ideological symbolic and textual universe by using the uncommon combination of text and pictures.[16] The visual language of samizdat publications was nonconformist and fragmentary—the opposite that was expected from the cultural products of the ruling regime. Therefore the effect of samizdat on its audience was also completely different from perception models in the 'first public sphere'. Samizdat enforces not only dialogue—in contrast to one-sided communication—but represents a driving force to encourage the reader to write his/her own 'text'[17] and to become active. Immediacy also causes another, more intense perception. In this sense, production and consumption can hardly be separated from each other.[18] At the core of samizdat networking lies a complex communication that incorporates both initiators and perceivers. This approximation is very similar to what Erhard Schüttpelz und Sebastian Gießmann call the 'media of cooperation'. The concept reaches out for an adequate terminology that can gather all aspects and intersections of the medium's range: elementary production, prereception, and delegation, as well as distribution.[19] Any kind of medium at any historical moment of its development is the result of collaboration, interaction and integration. As we will see through the examples discussed below, distribution is also part of the communication network. It contains the production of texts, hand-to-hand circulation, re-formulation, copying, different perceptions and presentations of content, discussion in the country of origin and abroad and investigation by the authorities.[20] Personal contacts and relations of trust were not only formal attributes of samizdat but basic require-

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14 Cf. OLGA ZASLAVSKAYA: From Dispersed to Distributed Archives. The Past and the Present of Samizdat Material, in: Poetics Today 29 (2008), pp. 669-712, here p. 683.

15 Cf. ANN KOMAROMI: Samizdat as Extra-Gutenberg Phenomenon, ibidem, pp. 629-667, here pp. 638-640.

16 Cf. SABINE HÄNSGEN: Noch einmal im Samizdat. Aneignungsstrategien von Bildern, Texten und Büchern im Moskauer Konzeptualismus, in: ANNETTE GILBERT (ed.): Wiederaufgelegt. Zur Appropriation von Texten und Büchern in Büchern, Bielefeld 2012, pp. 265-280; ANNETTE GILBERT: Zur Einführung, ibidem., pp. 9-24, here p. 14.

17 Cf. KOMAROMI (as in footnote 15), p. 660.

18 Cf. ZASLAVSKAYA (as in footnote 14), p. 678.

19 Cf. ERHARD SCHÜTTPELZ, SEBASTIAN GIESSMANN: Medien der Kooperation. Überlegungen zum Forschungsstand, in: Navigationen. Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturwissenschaften 1 (2015), pp. 7-55, here pp. 23-24.

20 Cf. ZASLAVSKAYA (as in footnote 14), p. 678.

ments of its existence.[21] Relating to this 'intimate atmosphere' the choice of oral communication formats becomes self-evident.

Samizdat publishing was an underground medium and network. Some theoreticians[22] tend to use the notion of 'piracy' to describe self-publishing as a rebellious attitude towards the socio-cultural regime of existing socialism. Piracy as an underground activity can assist us in locating the position of samizdat practices in the media universe of late socialism. The focus lies on piracy because it represents a mode of undermining censorship of the authoritarian order. Piracy and self-publishing share several features: the publication of banned, censored and filtered contents and accordingly the development of new reading circles.[23] In the guidelines of piracy[24] we recognize the basic criteria of illegal publishing: the marginalized socio-cultural setting, creation of a parallel cultural sphere, uncensored flow of information and (intentional/unintentional) politicization.

As the phenomenon of piracy also shows, samizdat was an animated forum of institutional de(con)struction or sabotage. Sabotage means here a form of counteraction or counteropinion that was situated between the climes of allowed and forbidden. It unfolded its activity in the niches of official culture and (indirectly or directly) articulated criticism as well as the right to be accepted as an autonomous medium of subcultural communication. Alternative media such as samizdat were opposed to restrictive mechanisms but did not inevitably aim to completely annihilate Goulash Communism.[25] The certain

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21 Cf. KOMAROMI (as in footnote 15), p. 643.

22 Cf. BALÁZS BODÓ: The Common Paths of Piracy and Samizdat: From the Encyclopedia to the Pirate Bay, Lecture at Open Society Archive, Budapest, 22.04.2013; 'Johns [...] devoted considerable attention to the phenomenon of piracy, by which he meant any violation of copy ownership or propriety. Piracy threatened the reliability of printed texts in a way echoed in samizdat culture by the possibility of KGB infiltration.' Cf. KOMAROMI (as in footnote 15), pp. 638-639.

23 Cf. BALÁZS BODÓ: Coda. A Short History of Book Piracy, in: JOE KARAGANIS (ed.): Media Piracy in Emerging Economies, n.p. 2011, URL: http://piracy.americanassembly.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/MPEE-PDF-1.0.4.pdf (31.08.2015), pp. 399-413, here p. 399.

24 'Conversely, pirate producers tend to operate at the edge of the sphere of influence of incumbents, where differences in law and difficulties of enforcements create spaces of ambiguous or conflicted legality. [...] Piracy, at these economic and political peripheries, has a well-established role as a development strategy that facilitates the circulation of knowledge goods. [...] In many of these contexts, piracy also plays a clear political role as a counterweight to the centralized control of information'. Ibidem, p. 400.

25 Cf. JAN C. BEHRENDS: Repräsentation und Mobilisierung. Eine Skizze zur Geschichte der Öffentlichkeit in der Sowjetunion und in Osteuropa (1917-1991), in: UTE DANIEL, AXEL SCHILDT (eds.): Massenmedien im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts, Köln et al. 2010, pp. 229-254, here p. 230; NORBERT IZSÁK: Hankiss Elemér egy autonóm polgárság kialakulásáról. 'Mit kezdhetünk magunkkal?' [Elemér Hankiss on the Emergence of Autonomous Citizenship. 'What to do with Ourselves?'], in: HVG Extra (2012), pp. 20-21, here p. 21; GYÖRGY KONRÁD: Az autonómia kísértése. Kelet-nyugati utigondolatok

autonomous sphere brought into being by clandestine media was, as György Konrád stated once, not limited to resistance; it was rather a creative force which is in charge of extending the given order.[26]

Samizdat and the Orality of the Second Culture

One cannot deny that the subcultures of nonconformist art require the unfolding of particular instances. Although this unfolding comes about within certain limitations we can come up with a double-edged hypothesis: the aura of underground venues was the precondition for the existence of the experimental art scene in socialist Hungary, but at the same time it was exactly this art (or intellectual) scene that generated a specific context. Expressed in terms of polarisation, the by-product of the second public sphere, both in intellectual and in art circles, was oral practice. József Havasréti argues that orality is the articulation and self-(re)presentation of these circles.[27]

Under cultural-political repression, oral production and communication is attractive for several reasons. Oral mediatisation is unstable, elusive, active and attached to the body.[28] In his media-evolutionary analysis Walter J. Ong states that oral practices are community-based and are hardly separable from their aura.[29] The aura mentioned here is similar to Walter Benjamin's unique here-and-now of artwork which cannot be captured through reproductive technology[30]—it is a 'multi-dimensional, context-dependent experience'.[31] Precisely because oral practices can barely be captured and disappear in the moment they occur they can easily escape control mechanisms. Compared to literary culture, orality goes without the hierarchisation of communicative channels, it is structured vertically and with the diversity of communication technology.[32] Maurice Bloch also defends the idea that the written word stabilises existing power relations[33]—but oral exchange finds a way to stay underground.

1977-1979 [The Temptation of Autonomy. Journey Thought from East-West 1977-1979], Paris 1980, pp. 185-186.

26 Ibidem, p. 185.

27 Cf. HAVASRÉTI, Alternatív regiszterek (as in footnote 1), p. 269.

28 Cf. WALTER J. ONG: Oralität und Literarität. Die Technologisierung des Wortes, Opladen 1987, pp. 81 ff.

29 Cf. ibidem, pp. 83-85.

30 Cf. WALTER BENJAMIN: Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. Drei Studien zur Kunstsoziologie, Frankfurt a.M. 1963, pp. 13-15.

31 JOHN MILES FOLEY: From Oral Performances to Paper-Text to Cyber-Edition, in: Oral Tradition 20 (2005), pp. 233-263, here p. 233.

32 Cf. INGO W. SCHRÖDER, STÉPHANE VOELL: Einleitung: Moderne Oralität. Kommunikationsverhältnisse an der Jahrtausendwende, in: IDEM (eds.): Moderne Oralität. Ethnologische Perspektiven auf die plurimediale Gegenwart, Marburg 2002, pp. 11-49, here p. 13.

33 Ibidem, p. 19.

I have already mentioned that oral cultures are community-based. This is also the opinion of Ingo W. Schröder and Stéphane Voell, who cannot imagine orality without direct social contact.[34] Bodily presence is (usually) indispensable, because one cannot separate sound from its source. Poetry readings, samizdat presentations, discussions, listening to audiotapes and so forth, requires the presence of a collective. Peter Middleton confirms this when he states a

> 'poetry reading is […] first of all a performance of the actual space and its occupants at a particular moment. […] When a written poem is read aloud, positions for identification and interpretation open up within the semantic space that are available to both individuals and the group.'[35]

The argumentation of Schröder and Voell goes in the same direction. In the understanding of these theoreticians we could separate society into communities that use either predominantly written or predominantly oral sources and practices. Communication in oral cultures is, in their opinion, always performative and body-accentuated. The argument emerges again that in a certain understanding, orality and performativity go hand in hand:

> 'The message is tightly linked to the communicating people and gains its performative dimension from this interaction. Oral communication demands and produces presence; it is pictographic and representative, concretely tied to a situation, direct and local.'[36]

In the Hungarian subcultural art (and partly also in the intellectual) scene, the choice of the adequate medium (like the body) was essential to attract the (active) attention of audiences and to keep them as a community. The combination of the human body and voice was not only the least expensive and most creative medium of expression, but also the least dangerous one. It only became a threat when, for example, an apartment performance of the Kassák Ház Stúdió (Kassák House Studio) was transmitted to the written format of secret police reports. With the communicative situation being grounded e.g. through oral or event-based practices, spheres of second publicity were born. But not every underground activity was attached to the expressive capacity of the body; there were cases where 'only' oral communication lay at the core of semi-official groups. Between 1962 and 1968, members of the Zugló Kör (Zugló Circle)—painters such as Imre Bak, Klára Deák, Pál Deim, Sándor Molnár and István Nádler—had regular meetings in Molnár's Zugló apartment to share and discuss (officially unavailable) information on progressive

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34 Cf. Ibidem.

35 PETER MIDDLETON: How to Read a Reading of a Written Poem, in: Oral Tradition 20 (2005), pp. 7-34, here pp. 14-16.

36 SCHRÖDER/VOELL (as in footnote 32), p. 13.

art.[37] The home of Pál Petrigalla, for example, was a popular meeting place for listening to his impressive music collection.[38]

In Eastern European avant-gardist circles, the connection between orality and performativity was debated both in practice and in theory. Endre Szkárosi—Hungarian poet, writer, translator, critic and literature historian—once published a text on voice/performance. For him this meant 'the extension of voice into space': moving from one dimension of traditional art genres to the dimension of space, where the artist-recipient relationship could unfold.[39] Szkárosi is reflecting here on the artistic challenges connected to so-called sound poetry, which had emerged in Hungary around the 1970s through artists such as Katalin Ladik, Tibor Papp and Ákos Szilágyi.[40] To emphasize the autonomy of sound/voice[41] was a formal experiment to keep up with contemporary art tendencies and not necessarily a political act. A counterexample would be Adam Czirak's[42] analysis of Szkárosi's work. In his performance at the Department of Aesthetics of the Eötvös Lóránd University on 11 December 1987 Szkárosi silently read a satirical poem by Eustache Deschamps.[43] Czirak's interpretation is that in the situation of total suppression, without artistic freedom there is hardly any appropriate form of expression and representation possible.[44] Czirak's finding expresses the dispute regarding the critical position of oral practices in the Hungarian second culture, whether they were political or apolitical.

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37 Cf. GÁBOR ANDRÁSI: A Zuglói kör (1958-1968). Egy művészcsoport a hatvanas évekből [The Zugló Circle (1958-1968). An Artist Collective from the 60s], in: Ars Hungarica 1 (1991), pp. 47-64, here p. 47.

38 Cf. LÓRANT BÓDI: Művészeti és közösségi élet Petrigalla Pál szalonjában 1959-1970 [Artistic and Community Life in the Saloon of Pál Petrigalla 1959-1970], in: UFO 6 (2011), pp. 49-65.

39 Cf. ENDRE SZKÁROSI: HANG/PERFORMANSZ avagy a hang kiterjedése a cselekvés terébe [SOUND/PERFORMANCE or the Extension of Sound into the Space of Action], URL: http://www.artpool.hu/performancehu.html#vissza (25.04.2014).

40 Cf. ENDRE SZKÁROSI: A hang autonómiája a költészetben [The Autonomy of Sound in Poetry], in: IDEM (ed.): Hangköltészet. Szöveggyűjtemény [Voice Poetry. Text Collection], Budapest 1994, pp. 3-9.

41 Like in the title of SZKÁROSI, HANG/PERFORMANSZ (as in footnote 39).

42 Cf. ADAM CZIRAK: Die Melancholie verbotener Kunst. Schreibstrategien und performative Praktiken in der ungarischen Neoavantgarde, in: Berliner Beiträge zur Hungarologie. Schriftenreihe des Fachgebiets für ungarische Literatur und Kultur an der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin 17 (2012), pp. 76-111.

43 Cf. Marcel Duchamp Szimpozion. ELTE Esztétika Tanszék, Budapest, 1987. december 11 [Marcel Duchamp Symposion. ELTE Department of Aesthetics, Budapest, 11 December 1987], URL: http://www.artpool.hu/Duchamp/MDspirit/text/Szkarosi.html (30.04.2014).

44 Cf. ADAM CZIRAK: Von den stummen Diskursen der osteuropäischen Performancekunst. Die Rhetorik des Schweigens in der Zweiten Öffentlichkeit, in: WOLF-DIETER ERNST, ANNO MUNGEN et al. (eds.): Sound und Performance. Positionen—Methoden—Analysen, Würzburg 2015, pp. 241-253.

We can come to the conclusion that creative forms of oral strategies in the parallel public sphere were direct and indirect reactions to the hegemonic order of late socialism. Through experimenting with oppositional linguistics, visuals and the slight shift from written to oral practice, the Hungarian parallel culture strives to release language. Communism was as extensive as it observed each segment of official and everyday life. This obsession with finding an enemy extended also to content and use of language.

> 'Petr Fidelius, a Czech literary critic, presented an analysis of the language used by the Communist regime and showed that this language reflected not the real world, but rather a specific ideology constructed as a cohesive system. He maintained that in Real Socialism a mechanical relationship is established between words and the reality to which they refer. Ideas are reduced in content: they become void, intermingle and fuse, until finally becoming interchangeable codes for one and the same thing.'[45]

An alternative language of illegal publications and intellectual conversation in apartments opposed the emptied and distorted phrases of socialist ideology. The playful dealing with information that was not supported by official institutions—e.g. in a form of montaged intermedia—is a key to understanding the dynamics and counter-dynamics of acting in a second public sphere.

Oral Performance

The Hungarian literary samizdat *Lélegzet* was a 'living/live journal' with a publishing period between 1980 and 1985. The authors and editors were Ádám Tábor (poet and essay-writer), Eszter Tábor (poet), Péter Rácz (poet and art translator), Balázs Györe (poet and writer) and later Endre Miklóssy (essay-writer). As one could guess, the story began in one of the main centres of the Hungarian underground—in an apartment on Rottenbiller Street, 1 (Budapest), the domicile of the Európai Iskola (European School).[46] The activity of the *Lélegzet*-circle has been well-documented and processed by József Havasréti, who theorised its oral practices under the aspect of discussion, replica and dialogue[47] explicitly.

The notion of a 'living/live journal' is an allusion to the reception of *Lélegzet*: the issues of the publication had not been published in a printed

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[45] DÓRA HEGYI, ZSUZSA LÁSZLÓ: Daniel Grúň: Species of Exhibition Spaces and Artists' Communities in 1970s and '80s Slovakia, in: Parallel Chronologies. An Archive of East European Exhibitions, URL: http://tranzit.org/exhibitionarchive/?s=Koller (24.04.2014).

[46] Cf. HAVASRÉTI, Alternatív regiszterek (as in footnote 1), p. 250.

[47] Cf. IDEM: Mündlichkeit, Gegenöffentlichkeit und Dialog in der Praxis einer 'mündlichen Zeitschrift'. *Lélegzet*, Budapest, 1980-1985, in: DORIS BODEN, UTA SCHORLEMMER (eds.): Kunst am Ende des Realsozialismus. Entwicklungen in den 1980er Jahren, München 2008, pp. 205-219, here p. 212.

form, but were orally presented in the framework of public readings.[48] Although Havasréti does not investigate the performative character of these readings in detail, he discovers that one 'can view oral poetry as a dynamic, multimedial process, which relies on theatrical or ritualistic elements, gesture and body language'.[49] In his book *Alternatív regiszterek* Havasréti also accentuates the complexity and 'bodily-physical presence' of the presenting of *Lélegzet*'s issues.[50]

There are two main reasons why the 'living/live journal' chose the form of oral expression. One reason is the socio-cultural composition of the intellectual underground, the other reason is—similar to what we have read from Endre Szkárosi —the attempt to arrive at an autonomy of oral artistic creation or transmission. Community culture under socialism brought an oral atmosphere into being, which became a birthplace of 'living/live journals'. Just like Jürgen Habermas, Havasréti mentions the relevance of intellectual saloons in this evolution.[51] Although Habermas focuses on the English and French coffee house culture between 1680 and 1730, some of his insights could be interesting in order to understand the social structure of underground groups too. He reflects on the literary—and later, the political—critique developing in these circles, but also on the uncoupling of certain secret societies from the official public sphere.[52] Habermas' reflections describe the emergence of autonomous bourgeois social structures and their discursive arena of publicness which is only marginally linked to circumstances prevailing in late socialist Central Europe. A few decades after publishing 'The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere' Habermas admitted that he had previously neglected the 'coexistence of competing public spheres and [did not take] account of the dynamics of those processes of communication that are excluded from the dominant public sphere.'[53] In the particular essay the quotation originates from, Habermas briefly looks at the links between communist dictatorship and communication flows and comes to the single conclusion that in a culture of regular surveillance no autonomous public sphere can appear.[54] As the case studies discussed in the present paper show, the Habermasian assumption is not correct.[55] Despite these essential contradictions, with a certain carefulness, we might argue that the saloon communities of the eighteenth century are to a limited extent similar to the culturally marginal

48 Ibidem, p. 205.
49 Ibidem, p. 214.
50 Cf. HAVASRÉTI, Alternatív regiszterek (as in footnote 1), pp. 274-275.
51 Cf. ibidem, pp. 265-266.
52 Cf. JÜRGEN HABERMAS: Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft, Neuwied 1962, pp. 45-47.
53 IDEM: Further Reflections on the Public Sphere, in: CRAIG CALHOUN (ed.): Habermas and the Public Sphere, Cambridge 1992, pp. 421-461, here p. 425.
54 Cf. ibidem, p. 454.
55 Cf. CSEH-VARGA/CZIRAK, Introduction (as in footnote 5).

position of *Lélegzet*'s authors, to the venues of 'internal publicity' where the presentation of the journal took place, under circumstances that, compared to print culture, suffered limited control.[56] The context of producing, presenting and consuming within a subcultural (intellectual) environment was based on a physical and mental dialogue. For Havasréti, dialogue represented the 'instrument of self-image and reflection.'[57] The hegemonic order of late socialism in Hungary constrained the development of (artistic) identity—a main reason why the social exchange of knowledge and inspiration was a key moment for building up a reflected self-image.

The second aspect that determined the oral composition of *Lélegzet* was devoted to a *l'art pour l'art* ambition. The interest in artistic experimentation with the spoken word can be derived from the choice of the journal's title: *Lélegzet;* the term originates from Allan Ginsberg's lecture held in Belgrade entitled 'Strength and Weakness of Poetry'.[58] Ginsberg's input as a representative of the modern oral art genre of Spoken Word was outstanding for the development of the 'living/live journal'. The manuscript of Ginsberg's talk became a sort of confirmation for the authors and the editorial board of *Lélegzet* that their aims were part of global (oral) art tendencies: 'the emphasis of the absolute presence of the voice and its spiritual and organic nature, the formulation of the unity of body and voice and the interpretation of the body as a medium.'[59] The confident self-esteem of the poet as prophet and visionary was just as important and was also approved and argued by Ginsberg.

In order to have a clearer picture of why Havasréti says that '[t]he appearance, operation and effect of living/live journals pluralised the monolithic character of the official culture as well as shaded the official differentiation schemes',[60] I will give an example of the multidimensions of *Lélegzet*'s readings.

The presentation of issue number nine took place on 10 January 1984 in the Fiatal Művészek Klubja (Club of Young Artists) with the participation of, amongst others, Miklós Erdély, Endre Kukorelly and Ádám Tábor.[61] The program included a hearing of István Domonkos' work *Kuplé* (Couplet), the study by Miklós Fogarassy written on Dezső Tandori, the poems of Endre Kukorelly, János Marno, Péter Rácz, Csaba Szijártó and Ádám Tábor, and the essays of Endre Miklóssy and Péter Balassa as well as a screening of the animation film by Péter Molnár.[62] The poetry night was clearly a multimedia event that challenged diverse human senses simultaneously—and this was symptomatic for all other events connected to *Lélegzet* as well. This particular

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[56] Cf. HAVASRÉTI, Alternatív regiszterek (as in footnote 1), p. 267.

[57] IDEM, Mündlichkeit, Gegenöffentlichkeit (as in footnote 47), p. 216.

[58] Cf. ibidem, p. 207; Cf. IDEM, Alternatív regiszterek (as in footnote 1), pp. 257 ff.

[59] Cf. IDEM, Mündlichkeit, Gegenöffentlichkeit (as in footnote 47), p. 208.

[60] IDEM, Alternatív regiszterek (as in footnote 1), p. 283.

[61] Cf. ÁDÁM TÁBOR: Tíz tézis a költészetről [Ten Thesis on Poetry], in: Artpool Letter 7 (1984), p. 22, URL: http://www.artpool.hu/Al/al07/Tabor.html (30.04.2014).

[62] Cf. HAVASRÉTI, Alternatív regiszterek (as in footnote 1), p. 255.

case gives us an idea of how oral practice was an integral part of the second public sphere. One just has to zoom in on the message transferred by Ádám Tábor's poem *Tíz tézis a költészetről*, which suggests that 'poetry is the bruise of truth'[63] and the tragicomedy of socialist bureaucracy expressed in Miklós Erdély's action-reading *Ásványgyapot*[64]. The advanced format and the countercultural opinion displayed in the ninth reading of the literary samizdat both prove the need for, and the success of, 'oralization' in subcultural artistic spheres. This history of 'oralization' reaches back to the second half of the 1950s. The restrictions following the abolition of the 1956 revolution were clearly visible and pushed artists and intellectuals into the underground scene. Production, communication and distribution was until ca. 1963 only possible using alternative means. In times of increasing relaxation, the separation of the first (written) and the second (oral) public sphere was not definite anymore. The *readings* and interventions of brute force often overlapped with the intentions of artists. Just as in the case of *Lélegzet,* the authorities often did not understand the coded signs of an art piece and could not decide whether to intervene or not and how to interpret a certain phenomenon. Intersections of unofficial and official culture are indeed exciting fields of investigation.

Oral Tradition/Exchange

Oral practice was not only a phenomenon of artistic circles but turned up also in the communities of politically engaged young intellectuals. This brings me to my second case study of László Rajk's samizdat boutique.

> 'The turning point in samizdat publishing came in 1980 when Gábor Demszky and László Rajk went to Poland on a course of self-instruction to learn about Polish methods of "mass-market" independent publishing […]. Aside from the technical innovation […], Demszky and Rajk were equally ingenious in creating new methods of distribution. Their crowning achievement was the establishment of a samizdat "boutique" set up at Rajk's apartment every Tuesday evening where oppositional shoppers could come and peruse the latest offerings.'[65]

A large underground communication network was attached to the initiative of Rajk—that of producers (typewritten copies made besides official work), distributors (some of the visitors delivered while others bore away a number of issues)[66] and consumers. The communication network extended its efficiency factor with an additional oral radius, because the accessibility and

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63 TÁBOR, Tíz tézis a költészetről (as in footnote 61).

64 Cf. MIKLÓS ERDÉLY: Ásványgyapot [Cotton Wool], in: Artpool Letter 7 (1984), p. 22, URL: http://www.artpool.hu/Erdely/Asvany.html (30.04.2014).

65 BARBARA FALK: The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe. Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings, Budapest—New York 2005, p. 130.

66 Cf. MIKLÓS HARASZTI: Civil kurázsitól civil társadalomig. A magyar szamizdat két évtizede [From Civil Courage to Civil Society. Two Decades of Hungarian Samizdat], URL: http://www.c3.hu/scripta/lettre/lettre38/haraszti.htm (30.04.2014).

functioning of the Rajk-boutique was regularly announced through broadcasts of Radio Free Europe.[67] It is no surprise that Radio Free Europe's interest was to support the ideological warfare against the Soviet Union's sphere of action.[68]

A detailed reflection on the history of the samizdat boutique contains Zsolt Krahulcsán's commented document collection.[69] His study contains a selection of archived materials related to the activity of the samizdat bureau (for the time period between May 1980 and June 1983), which is the result of an official investigation into illegal publishing and media distribution. Krahulcsán published secret reports of the so-called 'Daily Operational Information Reports' (Napi Operatív Információs Jelentések) and strengthens the presentiment that the regular descriptions of secret agents can provide useful information on the activity of the Hungarian democratic opposition. In the shortened version of his survey, Krahulcsán makes the following statement:

> 'In the height of the boutique it was not only a venue for samizdat ordering and selling, but a popular meeting point—even for the organ's agents (!)—where the members of the opposition could meet with each other, with foreign correspondents, this was the place where interviews and reports were made.'[70]

László Rajk's apartment in Galamb Street, 3 (Budapest) was a place where exchange took place—an exchange of information and knowledge with the physical presence of people involved in the oppositional movement. Those were flourishing years of discussion and inquisitiveness because parallel to the illegal media network, the so-called 'flying university' project led by personalities of academia was running too. The latter became more organized and politicized.[71] The generally accepted liberal image of Hungary in the

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67 Cf. ANDRÁS MINK: 'Ne legyünk senki helyett bátrak'. Kerekasztal-beszélgetés a Millenárison Hodosán Rózával, Kasza Lászlóval és Kemény Istvánnal a Szabad Európa Rádió és a magyar szamizdat kapcsolatától ['We Shouldn't Be Brave Instead of Someone Else.' Round Table Discussion on the Millenáris with Róza Hodosán, László Kasza and István Kemény on the Relationship between Radio Free Europe and the Hungarian Samizdat], in: Beszélő 9 (2004), URL: http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/„ne-legyunk-senki-helyett-batrak" (30.04.2014).

68 Cf. MARK KRAMER: Introduction. Book Distribution as Political Warfare, in: ALFRED A. REISCH: Hot Books in the Cold War. The CIA-Funded Secret Western Book Distribution Program Behind the Iron Curtain, Budapest—New York 2013, pp. IX-XXVIII.

69 Cf. ZSOLT KRAHULCSÁN: A hazai szamizdat 'hőskora'. A Galamb utcai butik [The 'Heroic Era' of the Hungarian Samizdat. The Boutique in Galamb Street], in: GYÖRGY GYARMATI (ed.): Trezor 2. A Történeti Hivatal Évkönyve. 2000-2001, Budapest 2002, pp. 303-359.

70 ZSOLT KRAHULCSÁN: 'Ellenséges, ellenzéki csoportosulás'. Dokumentumok a Galamb utcai butikról ['Adverse, Oppositional Groupings'. Documents on the Boutique in Galamb Street], in: Beszélő 6 (2001), pp. 74-85, URL: http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/„ellenseges-ellenzeki-csoportosulas" (30.04.2014).

71 Cf. SÁNDOR SZILÁGYI: A Hétfői Szabadegyetem és a III/III [The Monday Flying University and the III/III], Budapest 1999.

'West Bloc' was (for a while) a clear obstacle for the authorities' intervention in order to avoid criticism from abroad. But the members of the samizdat boutique had to deal with house searches, disturbances, reproof, police appeals and finally eviction.[72] This stressful and uncomfortable situation is one major reason for choosing oral forms of interaction. Restrictive actions produced re-actions. Re-actions are performances adapted to underground circumstances that require new social and political behaviour. Strategic meetings with the aim of attracting attention to the dangers of being a member of an illegal publication network and seminars to re-organise the distribution system[73] belong to the aforementioned creative oral re-actions.

To describe the social and communication sphere of Rajk's samizdat boutique as authentically as possible, Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory is of useful assistance. The core thesis of Latour is to treat each actor, transmission and transformation within a social system equally.[74] In the constellation of a samizdat network, I consider the illegal publication itself as an agent[75] that transforms social, cultural and political relations through its existence as well as reception. The form of communication—its oral peculiarity—is just as important as the medium itself. This is why a closer investigation of the different archives and inquiries surrounding those involved is still needed to discover forgotten dimensions of oral practices.

Oral Media

My final accomplishments on the oral practices of Hungarian samizdat are attached to a tape devoted to the memory of the 1956 revolution as a key reference point of the democratic opposition movements in the 1980s. During my research in the Open Society Archives in Budapest on any written trace that explains the notion of the second public sphere from the contemporary Hungarian point of view, I found an article on the 'sound of revolution'. This particular article was released in the October issue of *Beszélő*[76] in 1983 and discusses the possibilities of replacing or complementing classic samizdat publishing with oral formats. The short paper debates the suggestion that instead of samizdat, audio recordings should be distributed. The author is sceptical because he/she still believes in the capacities of the 'Gutenberg-galaxy', but he/she does not want to lessen the feasibility of oral transmission.[77] It is fascinating to find lanes that problematize something like magnitizdat in the

[72] Cf. KRAHULCSAN (as in footnote 70).

[73] Cf. ibidem.

[74] Cf. BRUNO LATOUR: Eine neue Soziologie für eine neue Gesellschaft. Einführung in die Akteur-Netzwerk-Theorie, Frankfurt a.M. 2010, pp. 375-377.

[75] Cf. ibidem. pp. 69-71.

[76] A popular Hungarian liberal journal with topics in politics and culture. It was first published in 1981 as an illegal samizdat.

[77] Cf. SZEG.: A forradalom hangja [The Voice/Sound of Revolution], in: Beszélő 8 (1983), p. 57.

Hungarian underground communities' awareness. It therefore appears that magnitizdat—'from the words *magnitofon*, or tape recorder, and *samizdat*, Russian for self-publishing'[78]—wasn't unknown for the editors of *Beszélő*. Although besides this article I have not found any other source that deals with the existence of a magnitizdat distribution system in late socialist Hungary, the use of audio recordings in the neo-avant-garde art scene was present for sure. This is true for both the Artpool Art Research Center in Budapest and for the personal archive of Dr. László Végh, for example.[79] In the parallel culture where it seemed so easy to make everything disappear, tape recordings from underground events represented a real value. I assume that (despite their archival character) these tapes were passed on too and served as a source for recycling information within closed groups of people.

Going back once again to the article on that particular 1956-magnitizdat. The reason for publishing this paper was probably the appearance of an audio collection on the occasion of the 26th anniversary of the 1956 revolution. The upheaval for democratic socialism was a recurring topic in most of the oppositional periodicals and volumes both in the 1980s and in the 1990s. According to the article, the tape included the following content:

> 'After the authorized event history we hear Gyula Illyés: he is reading his poem One Sentence on Tyranny that has never been published […]. The narrator says goodbye bad-tempered: the memory of the 1956 revolution fades away, because the youth and intellectual movements of the 1960s and 1970s haven't discovered it as their own heritage. The poem of György Petri entitled On the Twenty-Fourth Anniversary of the Little October Revolution seems to disagree with his depressed voice—the poem was performed on the twenty-fifth anniversary at a memorial organized in a private apartment—and a few songs of the band Illés. And if the listener doubts that these melancholic-nostalgic songs really transfer a political meaning, his/her doubts are denied by the loud applause of the concert's young audience on 26 March 1981 and the fact that the last song on the tape one can't find on the concert recording.'[80]

It is important to mention that the 1956 upheaval represented for the Communist Party a counterrevolution, a taboo topic that could never be discussed in the first public sphere. The tape was possibly a clandestine substitution for real commemorations, which until then only could take place secretly. It is hard to reconstruct the source of the single tracks included in the tape and whether the magnitizdat (or its copy) still exists. The symbolism of the edited audio piece is multi-layered: just like the poem of Gyula Illyés, the whole œuvre of György Petri was under publication prohibition in Hungary; the

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78 BRIAN A. HORN: The Bards of Magnitizdat. An Aesthetic Political History of Russian Underground Recordings, in: KIND-KOVÁCS/LABOV (as in footnote 2), pp. 176-189, here p. 176.

79 Cf. Conversation with Júlia Klaniczay in August 2013, Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest.

80 SZEG (as in footnote 77), p. 57.

reading of Petri's poems serves as a reminder of illegal commemorations and the music of the band Illés is a symbol for the system-critical doubled language used in their lyrics.

The audiotape contained contents that were not accessible through official information channels. Although we do not have any additional data concerning the situation of reception, the description in *Beszélő* assumes that the listeners could easily understand the coded language. 1956 represents a historical event that was a taboo topic in the first public sphere, but at the same time is a code-word for the building of and belonging to 'virtual communities'—communities that were prohibited from being physically present in the same place, they simply shared belief in an idea (e.g. 1956). Regardless of whether the 1956 audiotape produced in 1983 was listened to in sole isolation or with company, it was the simulation of live experience and hearing the voice that expressed what a lot of people did not dare to talk about.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to use the approach of asking questions from the point of view of performance and media studies, and to encourage further investigations into the oral aspects of illegal publishing in the socialist period of East-Central-Europe's history. To conclude, we can summarize that orality is a fundamental part of the creative forces both in art and political opposition. On the one hand, it is mirrored in the avant-garde experience with formal experimentation, and on the other hand, it originates in the specific sociocultural context predominant beyond the Iron Curtain. The embodiment, (re)presentation, communication and transmission in terms of orality is that of exchange, dialogue and discussion, which often includes the consensus of a convoluted sign system's common de-coding. Oral practice is reflected in self-representation and in behavioural characteristics, but the fascination with sound and voice is a recurring factor. The contrast between the first and second public spheres is clearly visible in the immense amount of (type-)written agent reports produced by the hegemonic regime and the transitory, fragmentary, performative and uncontrollable developments via sound and/or voice as an extension of subcultural print culture.

Probably the most important result of the present investigation is the new emphasis on a linguistic turn in unofficial print culture during late socialism. The exploitation of language through the authoritarian regime was a hegemonic ownership over the public sphere in general. Opposed to this, and to the thesis of Habermas that dictatorship hinders the emergence of public spheres, the deconstruction or liberation of language stood at the core of oral and performative samizdat practices. The oral mediality of illegal publishing promised, in contrast to the existing socialist order, immediacy, fleetingness and active interaction, dialogue instead of monologue, and multi-dimensionality instead of one-dimensionality. All of the oral practices discussed within the framework of this paper demonstrated clearly that samizdat is much more than a printed booklet containing clandestine information—it is a complex

media format with the ability to create a second publicness. In historiographical research dealing with samizdat publishing there should be a certain need to unlock new facets of the medium not only with the help of written sources. Going back to the roots of the subject of analysis means working with a different notion of the archive that is no longer limited to the passivity of written words, but focuses on the activity of oral and performative transmission. This active archive could be something similar to the model developed by the Hungarian artist György Galántai: 'The "ACTIVE ARCHIVE" does not collect solely material existing "out there", the way it operates also generates the very material to be archived.'[81]

Zusammenfassung

Innovative Praktiken des ungarischen Samizdat. Eine vergleichende Analyse mündlicher Praktiken

Die meisten theoretischen Reflexionen über den ostmitteleuropäischen Samizdat fokussieren auf Textualität und Materialität, wodurch sie von vornherein darauf verzichten, illegale Veröffentlichungspraktiken auch als mündliches Phänomen zu verstehen. Im Kontext einer „zweiten Öffentlichkeit" erkannte József Havasréti als Erster Oralität als die existenzielle Vorbedingung einer Parallelkultur. Künstlerische und intellektuelle Subkulturen suchten nach kreativen Strategien, um ihr informelles Netzwerk lebendig zu erhalten und autoritärer Kontrolle zu entziehen – die mündliche Produktion und Rezeption von Samizdat-Texten erschien als die ideale Lösung.

Das Ziel dieses Aufsatzes besteht darin, die mündlichen Praktiken des ungarischen Samizdat insbesondere aus Sicht der Medienwissenschaften und Performance Studies zu untersuchen. Vor einem differenziert dargestellten historischen Hintergrund wird die Analyse des Phänomens in drei Kategorien von Oralität eingeteilt: mündliche Ausführung (als die Verkörperlichung von klandestinem Inhalt), mündliche Tradition bzw. mündlicher Austausch (mündliche Übertragung schriftlicher Information) und mündliche Medien (die wiederhergestellte Form von Samizdat). Drei unterschiedliche Fallstudien aus dem Milieu des ungarischen Samizdat, angefügt an die drei erwähnten Kategorien, stehen im Mittelpunkt: die Wortkunst-Zeitschrift *Lélegzet* (Atemholen), das Diskussionsumfeld von László Rajks „Samizdat-Boutique" und ein illegal in Umlauf gebrachtes Tonband (oder Magnitizdat) von der Revolution von 1956 aus dem Jahr 1982.

Neben einem medientheoretischen und methodologischen Zugang beschäftigt sich der Aufsatz intensiv mit der Frage, inwieweit illegale Publikationen dazu in der Lage sind, ein alternatives Forum für öffentliche Meinungsbildung und Diskussionen zu schaffen.

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K e y w o r d s: Hungarian art samizdat, oral performance, oral tradition, oral exchange, oral media

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[81] GYÖRGY GALÁNTAI: ACTIVE ARCHIVE, URL: http://www.artpool.hu/archives_active.html (10.08.2015).