

# Morals of Precarity: Artistic Trajectories under the Orbán Regime of Hungary<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACTS

Der Aufsatz analysiert den Karriereweg junger Kulturschaffender in Ungarn. Er zeigt, wie sie im Ungarn Orbáns durch das Alltagsleben navigieren. Die soziale und politische Formation, die nach 2010 in Ungarn entstand, definieren wir als semiperiphere Hegemonie. Sie unterstützt bestimmte Strukturen des internationalen Kapitalismus sowie die mit dem Regime verbündeten lokalen bürgerlichen Schichten. Wir untersuchen Kultur nicht nur als ideologische Grundlage des von Orbán regierten Ungarns, sondern auch als Wirtschaftsgut, das Teil der neuen wirtschaftlichen Mechanismen ist.

Ausgehend von quantitativen Daten sowie qualitativen Methoden wie Interviews und Politikanalyse nehmen wir in den Blick, wie die hegemoniale Politik des Orbán-Regimes versucht, eine Politik der Einbeziehung mit einer der Ausgrenzung zu verbinden. Tatsächlich besitzt die Kulturpolitik des Regimes ein Janusgesicht, weil sie einerseits die populärkulturelle Produktion (den heteronomen Pol der Kulturproduktion) nach Kriterien der Wirtschaftlichkeit steuert, andererseits im Bereich der Hochkultur (dem autonomen Pol der Kulturproduktion) auf direkte ideologische Kontrolle zurückgreift. Diese Praktiken haben im vergangenen Jahrzehnt zu einer Prekarisierung des Kulturschaffens geführt, sodass aktuelle künstlerische Karrieren in hohem Maße entweder vom Einkommen aus der Kreativwirtschaft abhängen oder auf soziale Reproduktion angewiesen sind. Die daraus resultierende, zunehmend unsichere soziale Lage der jungen Künstlerinnen und Künstler kann im Rahmen der COVID-19-Krise den Weg zu einer weiteren Vertiefung der autoritären Kulturpolitik öffnen.

1 An earlier version of this research was published in the 2020/2 issue of the Austrian journal *Kurswechsel* under the title "Moral und Prekarität: Strategien junger KulturarbeiterInnen im Post-2010-Ungarn". We are grateful for our doctoral supervisor Alexandra Kowalski (Central European University) for her unceasing support and for her advice on the formation of the manuscript.

This article analyses the career path of young cultural producers in Hungary. We show how they navigate in the everyday life of the Orbán regime. We define the social and political formation emerging after 2010 as a form of semi-peripheral hegemony that supports certain factors of international capital and strengthens its allied local bourgeoisie. We investigate culture not merely as an ideological underpinning of this regime but also as a commodity that is integrated into its new economic mechanisms.

By utilizing primary and secondary quantitative data as well as qualitative methods of interview and policy-analysis, we focus on how the hegemonic process of the Orbán regime mingles incorporation and exclusion. We outline Janus-faced cultural politics and a policy that rules the heteronomous pole of cultural production by an “economic rationality”, while more direct forms of “ideological control” are employed on the autonomous pole. By showing how the previous decade was characterized by a precarization of cultural work, we argue that current artistic careers are highly reliant either on incomes from the creative industry or on the sphere of social reproduction. As we conclude, this vulnerability can open a path for a certain authoritarian deepening under the COVID-19 crisis.

## 1. Introduction: Cultural Policy and the Orbán Regime in a *Longue Durée*

In 2011, when the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA) was elevated to the position of a public institution and its status was enshrined in the constitution, it became clear that the Hungarian post-socialist institutional system of cultural production would change significantly. Domestic and international commentators tend to approach these changes as problems with democratic institutions, claiming that the Orbán regime does not have a cultural policy but only builds up a clientelistic system. In the present analysis, we offer an alternative view based on an approach that embeds the changes in the cultural field in the socio-economic processes and the social policies implemented by the Orbán regime after 2010.

We consider the Orbán regime as a form of semi-peripheral hegemony that supports the capital accumulation of the domestic bourgeoisie<sup>2</sup> while fulfilling the need of international industrial capital.<sup>3</sup> This means that, on the discursive level, the Hungarian government wages a fight for freedom against the EU and, furthermore, it competes with other actors in the region for foreign investments as becomes visible in legislations, like tax-exempts for the instalment of productive capacities of German and other foreign firms, and in the flexibilization of labour laws and the weakening of local unions.

2 M. Éber et al., 1989: Szempontok a rendszerváltás globális politikai gazdaságtanához [1989: The global political economy of the regime change], in: *Fordulat* 21 (2014), pp. 10–63; M. Éber et al., 2008–2018: Válság és hegemonia Magyarországon [2008–2018: Crisis and Hegemony in Hungary], in: *Fordulat* 26 (2019), pp. 28–75.

3 T. Gerócs/A. Pinkasz, Relocation, Standardization and Vertical Specialization: Core-Periphery Relations in the European Automotive Value Chain, in: *Society and Economy* 41 (2019) 2, pp. 171–192; T. Gerócs/A. Pinkasz, Debt-Ridden Development on Europe’s Eastern Periphery, in: M. Boatcă/A. Komlosy/H.-H. Nolte (eds.), *Global Inequalities in World-Systems Perspective: Theoretical Debates and Methodological Innovations*, New York 2018, pp. 131–153.

In the meantime, it favours its allies and tries to build up a strong stratum of domestic capitalists in less technology-intensive industries like construction. In terms of managing discontent, it targets its social policies at the local middle class with welfare programmes that are accessible only for people with a considerable amount of capital. At the same time, the poor can access workfare programmes that make them dependent on the local political elites and, instead of unconditional social benefits, municipalities employ jobseekers and long-term unemployed for a wage below the minimum wage.<sup>4</sup> In that process, the deepening of authoritarian control in culture gains importance to manage the social contradictions the pro-capital policies produce. However, culture is not only important from the perspective of the ideological stabilization of the prevailing regime, but it constitutes also an integral part of the economic policies that favour foreign direct investment simultaneously with building up an allied domestic bourgeoisie.

In the field of culture this appears in two complementary but analytically distinguishable processes. Using the insights of Pierre Bourdieu we consider the community of professionals engaged with making cultural goods and discourses on them part of the field of cultural production. We define “field” as a conflict-based social space in which actors compete for resources through symbolic utterances that are also forms of position-taking. Bourdieu suggested that value in fields of cultural production is produced according to a double logic: one is the logic of the restricted public of specialists assessing the value of works; the other is the commercial or political logic of the broad public of non-specialists who appreciate cultural goods for their own, not necessarily specialist reasons. Bourdieu horizontally divides the field of cultural production into two poles. The first logic or set of criteria is called the “autonomous pole” because it seemingly denies the external political, economic, and social influences on cultural production. The second set of criteria is identified as the “heteronomous pole”, i.e., the one where the conversion of culture to economic and political forms of capital plays a more significant role.<sup>5</sup>

In Hungary one can observe a clear political agenda in support of intellectuals advocating for ethnonationalist aesthetics and contents in fields such as visual arts and literature, which are more important from the perspective of the production of ideology. In the more profit-oriented fields such as popular music, film, and design, ideological control is looser. This latter, “heteronomous pole”, which provides a livelihood for many artists, is ruled by a managerial, “economically rational” governance often combined with economic incentives for global cultural industries (such as the film industry) to produce in Hungary.<sup>6</sup>

While the takeover of institutions and a clearer, more aggressive ideological control was typical for the emerging regime, we see a turn after the second term of the Orbán gov-

4 A. Szőke, A “Road to Work”? The Reworking of Deservedness, Social Citizenship and Public Work Programmes in Rural Hungary, in: *Citizenship Studies* 19 (2015), pp. 1–17; N. Lendvai/P. Stubbs, Europeanization, Welfare and Variegated Austerity Capitalisms – Hungary and Croatia, in: *Social Policy and Administration* 49 (2015), pp. 445–465.

5 P. Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Redwood City, CA, 1996, pp. 129–133.

6 K. Nagy/M. Szarvas, Die Transformation der kulturellen Produktion in Ungarn nach 2010, in: *ig kultur* 2017, pp. 29–31.

ernment, which is based more on the incorporation of non-aligned intellectuals into the loyal institutions. The conceptual framework of hegemony provides an opportunity to look at the processes occurring in the field of policy-making with regard to cultural production in a dialectical relation with the structural changes of the political economy of the Orbán regime. Florencia R. Mallon<sup>7</sup> added, using Antonio Gramsci, that hegemony as a static social order is never realized. Thus, it should be understood as a historical process during which the interests of the main social actors can be identified but the actual realization of their intent is a result of temporary conflicts and negotiations. Following her interpretation, we use the term hegemonic process to refer to the situation that different factions struggle to determine the right form of cultural governance. To capture the ways the unequal distribution of power manifests and is renegotiated among state institutions managing cultural production, we take a processual approach.

The hegemonic process of the Orbán regime mingles incorporation and exclusion. In the negotiations about the right way of establishing cultural policy and new aesthetic forms, we can identify two understandings. One tries to establish new institutions and is focused on the formation of an alternative, distinctly conservative stratum of intellectuals and cultural producers with the intent to create a new canon. The other one tries to incorporate and pacify actors of the former liberal and non-aligned elite who are not openly oppositional. The former understanding argues for the distribution of resources in an ideologically more coherent way and urges conservative intellectuals to put more emphasis on the establishment of a pool of loyal intellectuals, excluding the non-aligned ones. In contrast the latter understanding advocates for embracing the pre-2010 liberal cultural producers. These two strategies do not contradict but rather complement each other. In the field of literature and, to a certain extent, in the fine arts the strategy of exclusion is more dominant, while in the film industry or in design the incorporation of those actors is more typical who embrace the managerial understanding of cultural governance.

Based on a survey conducted in the fields of literature and visual arts, we discuss how artists navigate in the post-2010 rules of cultural production by arguing that they are simultaneously situated in the autonomous and heteronomous poles of the field of cultural production. It is widely discussed in the literature on the precarisation of cultural workers in Western-European countries<sup>8</sup> that austerity, flexibilization, privatization, and liberalization of institutions of cultural production restricted this already exclusive field further and elevated the cultural producers' dependence on the market. In countries such as Hungary, state practices of political incorporation and the exposed nature of the creative industries produce financial vulnerability and unstable employment opportunities. Because of the lack of a stable middle class or bourgeoisie that could sustain

7 F. E. Mallon, *Reflections on the Ruins: Everyday Forms of State Formation in Nineteenth-Century Mexico*, in: G. M. Joseph/D. Nugent (eds.), *Everyday Forms of State. Formation Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, Durham 1994, p. 70.

8 G. de Peuter, *Creative Economy and Labor Precarity: A Contested Convergence*, in: *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 35 (2011) 4, pp. 417–425.

cultural production in line with their taste preferences, historically, political factions have realized their aesthetic ambitions through state institutions<sup>9</sup>. Hungarian cultural policy is not more statist than in France or Great-Britain but it is more likely to be used by dominant social groups for the redistribution of symbolic and material resources than in core countries of the EU; hence the act of accepting funding from state institutions is more politicized.

Therefore, the acceptance of state-subsidies also affects the actors' recognition within the field, since the acceptance of subsidies, especially in the post-2010 period, would degrade their position at the autonomous pole of the field. At the same time, actors must also constantly adapt to the shifting norms in the autonomous sector. The drive to maintain autonomy from the state has pushed them towards the heteronomous pole of the field since 2010. But the heteronomous cultural industries are not independent of the politics of the Orbán regime either, since their relations of production are also the results of the government's policies embedded in the semi-peripheral dependent development. In this context people engaged with cultural production do precarious, semi-skilled intellectual work (e.g., selecting stock photographs, being employed as a dresser in shootings) besides their artistic career.

## 2. Methodology

This paper draws on an online survey carried out among cultural producers from the fields of literature and visual arts between 10 and 30 March 2020. This is supplemented by our previous research on the *longue durée* transformations and political-economical determinations of the Hungarian cultural policy,<sup>10</sup> by the results of another survey with 300 respondents from the same months,<sup>11</sup> and by background interviews conducted in the autumn of 2020. The thirty-eight respondents of our survey are members of the three following associations of young cultural workers. The Studio of Young Artists' Association (FKSE) organizes visual artists since 1958; the József Attila Circle (JAK) and the Alliance of Young Writers (FISZ) have a similar function within the field of literature. The JAK was established in 1981 and disbanded in 2019 due to the year-by-year shrinking of state-subsidies; the FISZ was formed in 1998 and is still active. These associations serve as entry points for creative workers by providing social capital to access the field of cultural production with assistance in exhibiting, publishing, and organizing writing seminars and international residencies. These institutions try to equalize their members' social capital with open recruitments; through joining them young artists can work with people who are already established within the respective fields. We circulated the survey

9 A. C. Janos, *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary, 1825–1945*, Princeton, NJ, 1982.

10 E. Barna et al., *Dinamikus hatalom. Kulturális termelés és politika Magyarországon 2010 után* [Dynamic Power. Cultural Production and Policy in Hungary after 2010], in: *Fordulat* 26 (2019), pp. 225–251.

11 A. Bárdics/L. Bérczi/A. Olajos (eds.), *Kortárs helyzet – milyen ma képzőművésznek lenni?* [Contemporary Condition. How Does it Deal to be an Artist Today?], Budapest 2020.

among the members of these organizations because their status as important entries into the cultural fields and as connection to professional networks is known in the art professions. They tend to attract young professionals below thirty-five, a population that we found particularly interesting to focus on. The reason is that they started their career already under the Orbán regime; nevertheless, their socialization took place before 2010, i.e., in the institutional system that was mostly dominated by a liberal understanding of culture and art.

### 3. Precarisation: Creative Industries in Dependent Development

In Hungary today cultural work is precarious, but it would be a mistake to identify the transformations under the Orbán regime as a single cause of it. Even if the current vulnerability has been shaped by the post-2010 political-economic complex, historically, cultural work has been dependent on the market or on different patrons, like feudal lords or urban bourgeoisie.

In studies on the cultural governance of Western countries, it is widely discussed how the neoliberal transformation imagining the funding of cultural production<sup>12</sup> as the responsibility of the cultural industry brought flexibilization and precarisation of cultural labour.<sup>13</sup> Some would argue that employment in the cultural industry served as a model for the general transformation of the labour market, in terms of utilizing short term contracts, project-based funding, and making the employees responsible for providing means for their social reproduction.<sup>14</sup> However, from the 1970s onwards, a similar process was played out in socialist Eastern Europe through a moderate liberalization of cultural production and the commodification of artistic products.

#### 3.1 Precarity Under State Socialism

Post-WWII welfare states offered the arts both generous funding and professional autonomy. Such a *belle époque* though only lasted for a few decades<sup>15</sup> and produced an extensive cultural infrastructure in Western countries. The public funding system and its professionalizing effects were not fundamentally different in semi-peripheral, state-socialist countries. In Eastern Europe, following the Soviet model, cultural funds and artists' unions allowed predictable career paths for professional artists, therefore masses of cultural producers were not only incorporated into it through constraints but also through benefits.<sup>16</sup>

12 C.-T. Wu Chin-Tao, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980s*, London 2002.

13 J. McGuigan, Neo-Liberalism, Culture and Policy, in: *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 11 (2005) 3, pp. 229–241.

14 A. McRobbie, "Everyone is Creative". Artists as Pioneers of the New Economy?, in: *k3000* (2001), [http://www.k3000.ch/becreative/texts/text\\_5.html](http://www.k3000.ch/becreative/texts/text_5.html) (accessed 24 November 2020); G. Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, London 2011.

15 G. Arrighi/B. Silver, Polanyi's "Double Movement": The Belle Époques of British and U.S. Hegemony Compared, in: *Politics & Society* 31(2003) 2, pp. 325–355.

16 M. Haraszti, *The Velvet Prison: Artists under State Socialism*, London 1988.

The literature on the post-socialist transition of the relation between movie distribution and cinemas argues<sup>17</sup> that, as the sociologist Katja Praznik also elaborates in her work on cultural policy, state-socialist regimes undergo reforms of austerity and marketization that took place from the 1970s onwards.<sup>18</sup> In Hungary, the liberalization had its own roots, since austerity following the more and more significant indebtedness of the country resulted in the decentralization of cultural governance, whereas we could see a more conscious flexibilization of cultural employment in the Yugoslavian case. The reintegration of the Hungarian cultural industry into the global value chains started in the 1970s. In this decade, the state-owned Hungarian film industry produced a significant proportion of its incomes by hosting Western runaway productions.<sup>19</sup> With the provision of a cheap infrastructure and skilled labour for US film productions, such as for the Woody Allen comedy *Love and Death* in 1974, the Hungarian creative industries gradually reintegrated into the global capitalist economy.

The debates on the marketization of culture started around 1968, with the introduction of the New Economic Mechanism.<sup>20</sup> Profitability indicators were strengthened in measurements of the success of industrial production,<sup>21</sup> lessened the burden on central planning, and made a shift from extensive development to an intensive one. In the field of culture, consumer goods, such as electronic musical instruments and popular music, started being taxed by a so-called “kitsch tax”. The relative liberalization of the cultural market launched debates on the commodification of culture<sup>22</sup> that went on throughout the 1970s.<sup>23</sup> The focus of these debates was that culture can be perceived not only as a means to reproduce local communities, inequalities, and political orders but as a good, too, that can be sold and bought on a market. Many of the participants advocating marketization claimed that culture is not appreciated by the audience as it is not forced to make value-driven choices when visiting cultural institutions. According to them, the introduction of tickets and higher prices can lead the audience to become more conscious consumers of cultural products. Culture began to be perceived less as a tool that strengthens the regime ideologically and more as a part of national economic development.<sup>24</sup>

17 J. Bodnár, *Fin de Millénaire Budapest: Metamorphoses of Urban Life*, Minneapolis 2010.

18 K. Praznik, *Autonomy or Disavowal of Socioeconomic Context: The Case of Law for Independent Cultural Workers in Slovenia*, in: *Historical Materialism* 26 (2018) 1, pp. 103–135.

19 B. Varga, *Filmrendszerváltások [Film Regime Changes]*, Budapest 2016.

20 J. Bockman, *Economists and Social Change: Science, Professional Power, and Politics in Hungary, 1945–1995*. University of California 2000, PhD Dissertation; Á. Gagy, *A Moment of Political Critique by Reform Economists in Late Socialist Hungary: ‘Change and Reform’ and the Financial Research Institute in Context*, in: *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics*, 1 (2015) 2, pp. 59–79.

21 M. Lampland, *The Object of Labor: Commodification in Socialist Hungary*, Chicago 1996.

22 M. Kalmár, *An Attempt at Optimization: The Reform Model in Culture, 1965–1973*, in: J. M. Rainer/Gy. Péteri (eds.), *Muddling Through in the Long 1960s: Ideas and Everyday Life in High Politics and the Lower Classes of Communist Hungary*, Trondheim 2005, pp. 53–82; M. Szarvas, *Orfeo’s Maoist Utopia*, Budapest 2016, MA thesis.

23 L. Ballai, *Reformmunk és a művelődés anyagi feltételei [The Material Conditions of our Reform and Culture]*, in: *Társadalmi Szemle* 22 (1967) 8–9, pp. 32–46; Gy. Radnai, *Áru-e a kultúra? [Is Culture a Commodity?]*, Budapest 1986.

24 G. Koncz, *A kultúra mai finanszírozási szisztémája Magyarországon [The Current System of Cultural Subsidy in Hungary]*, in: *Szín* 10 (2005) 6, pp. 38–45; D. Bell/K. Oakley, *Cultural Policy*, New York 2014.

### 3.2 Precarity in the Capitalist Transformation

The Hungarian state started welcoming private actors in the field of cultural production in the 1980s, for instance the Soros and Ludwig Foundations.<sup>25</sup> The political change of 1989 accelerated this trend. The socialist Artists' Unions and Art Funds had provided welfare services such as housing, holidays, purchases, raw materials to cultural producers; they weakened or went bankrupt at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>26</sup> The National Cultural Fund replaced them in 1993 and state subsidies were allocated on a competitive basis. The artists' unions either lost their significance (such as the Association of Fine and Visual Artists) or split apart. Their residues became aligned either with right-wing or with liberal hegemonic blocs that competed in post-socialist times.

In the post-socialist context, cultural producers striving to live for their art are primarily dependent on the state that is a major patron and plays a central role in subsidizing culture. Although the Orbán regime's takeover of cultural institutions produced numerous symbolic boycotts, many cultural producers still depend on the state infrastructure due to the material pressures. The post-socialist state sources are rarely apparent as direct purchases and subsidies<sup>27</sup> but vary from PhD scholarships to positions in state-run institutions.

### 3.3 Precarity under the Orbán Regime

The Orbán regime does not demolish or improve, it rather restructures the state subsidy of culture by relocating it into the new institutions of the regime. As a result, a new artistic career path develops. Starting from the engagement of the MMA in educational issues, it continues with the Academy's lavishly funded three-years scholarship for artists between the age of 18 and 50 and ends with numerous new artistic awards and with a monthly allowance for recognized artists older than 65. While this new career path is boycotted by most of the cultural producers who answered our questionnaire, other cultural institutions of the same Hungarian state are less rejected. Another, much more coercive mode of state-dependency was the so-called *cultural public work scheme* that existed between 2012 and 2018 and provided poorly paid (ca. EUR 200 per month) work for white-collar workers in cultural institutions. In these years after the crisis of 2008, the cultural public work scheme played a role in managing the reserve army of young cultural producers with less cultural, social capital, by producing cheap labour for the state institutions under austerity.<sup>28</sup>

25 K. Nagy, From Fringe Interest to Hegemony: The Emergence of the Soros Network in Eastern Europe, in: B. Hock/A. Allas (eds.), *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*, New York 2018.

26 O. Esanu, What was Contemporary Art?, in: *ArtMargins* 1 (2012) 1, pp. 5–28; Gy. Horváth, *A művészek bevonulása. A képzőművészet politikai irányításának és igazgatásának története 1945–1992* [The March of Artists. The History of the Political Leadership and Administration of Visual Arts 1945–1992], Budapest 2015; C. Preda, *Creating for the State. An Introduction*, in: *Studia Politica* 17 (2017) 3, pp. 243–248.

27 A. Kácsor, *Patronizing Contemporary Painting in State Socialist Hungary, 1957–1969*. Budapest 2013, MA thesis.

28 Barna et al., *Dinamikus hatalom*.



In addition to public jobs, the state exacerbated the precarious situation of cultural workers through other forms. The most important among them is the Small Taxpayers' Tax (KATA) that is used by cultural workers and has become a widespread form of their employment. It was introduced in 2013 imposing a 0 per cent tax rate on any income for a monthly EUR 150 flat rate. This widespread tax institutionalized the gig economy and fosters hidden, precarious forms of employment. 30 per cent of our respondents mentioned that they have this form of self-employment exempting them from certain tax duties but providing them very limited pension insurance. Given the position of young cultural producers in the global gig economy, KATA taxes their income from autonomous artistic production and, besides, their applied or extra-artistic labour. This is crucial since only 15 per cent of the emerging creative workers obtain at least half of their living from art practice, while another survey shows that only ten per cent of visual artists make their living solely from autonomous artistic production.<sup>29</sup>

These employment policies do not exist for their own sake as they fit into the rising importance of creative industries that are fuelled by this form of flexibilization. Heteronomous cultural industries gained a central position in the Orbán regime policies by emphasizing their economic aspects at least as much as their cultural ones. In this new model, creative industries are approached primarily as engines of economic development.<sup>30</sup> This shows that creative industries are expected to be an alternative or at least a complement of the foreign direct investment (FDI)-led growth of the post-2010 Hungarian economy, by attempting to produce products with high added value. This hope highly matches the phenomena of the Developmentalist Illusion, defined by Giovanni Arrighi, and resembles the phenomena described by Andrew C. János as the politics of backwardness in Eastern Europe.<sup>31</sup> These authors argue that catching up strategies almost always fails in an economic sense, and the countries of the global semi-periphery produce cultural consumption that mimics the taste preferences of the core's middle class. Cultural industries provide a living for numerous early-career artists who keep their art practice besides these jobs. This situation complicates the heteronomous-autonomous partition of the field of cultural production; therefore, it only partly stands as Bourdieu described it. Numerous cultural producers do not even sell their labour force in the more capitalized part of the cultural field (for example as copywriters and wedding photographers) but subsist on extra-cultural sources. Forty-seven per cent of our respondents' incomes are based on savings and family contributions, and 40 per cent of them on non-art-related wage labour. They avoid the marketization of their cultural products not for ideological reasons, but rather because it is simply not a viable path to make a living. According to a survey, in the case of Budapest based visual artists, only 27 per cent of their incomes were related to artistic production. This proportion amounted to only 24 per

29 Bárdics/Bérczi/Olajos (eds.), *Kortárs Helyzet*, p. 96.

30 HÉTFA Elemző Központ, *A kreatívipar mint erőforrás* [Cultural Industry as a Resource], Budapest 2014.

31 János, *Politics of Backwardness*.

cent in the case of those living in the countryside.<sup>32</sup> As an artist in her thirties stated: “My husband is also a visual artist, 53 years old, and achieved everything that can be achieved in the Hungarian scene. But we cannot afford to buy either an apartment or a car.”

Therefore, the cheap, invisible resources of social reproduction are the material precondition of cultural production. As the same artist continued: “only those should choose this career who inherit an apartment, whose partner can support it, or whose family can support him/her.” Statistical data confirms her statement: there is no fundamental difference in the incomes related to artistic production between visual artists coming from more and less educated families but the former group reported a more stable financial situation.<sup>33</sup>

The pressure on emerging artists arises from the heteronomous and autonomous poles of the cultural field at the same time. Thus, the choice for them is either to leave the field of cultural production completely or to figure out a way to cooperate with certain parts of a centralized but still multi-vocal state. In the next section, we will give an overview of the coping mechanisms of the latter choice.

#### 4. Moral and Money: Strategizing about State Infrastructure

In the first years of the government takeover of cultural institutions, different mores and strategies emerged among cultural producers. How should they relate to the institutions ruled by loyal allies of the governing party? Between 2012 and 2014, several demonstrations were held against the MMA that were organized by the “Free Artists” group formed against the ratification of the MMA’s public status. The motto was: “MMA is exclusionary – Culture is free!” The group consisted of young artists and students who demanded that the authorities should ensure the autonomy of cultural institutions from political power. Sit-ins were also organized in the Ludwig Museum when a new director was appointed without publishing her application materials before the decision.

In this early phase, *Tranzit.hu* played a leading role, a cultural organization founded and funded by the *Erste Stiftung* (Erste Foundation). As part of an Eastern European network of institutions that propagate alternative institutional systems, the *Erste Stiftung* funded research, exhibitions, networking, and extra-curricular education. In Hungary, the Budapest based *Tranzit* was established in 2005 and had a significant role in connecting local cultural institutions to global or Eastern European initiatives. After 2010 their function became more and more politicized and while first and foremost they remained an association engaged with artistic research and publication, they became a hub of political thinking within the field. *Tranzit* organized the so-called “Action Days”, where cultural workers and intellectuals assembled to discuss and interpret the political situation of cultural institutions. The *Tranzit* event served as a place of politicization for many

32 Bárdics/Bérczi/Olajos (eds.), *Kortárs Helyzet*, p. 41.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

cultural workers and, in addition, provided young professionals a way of integration to the politicized pole of the field. *Tranzit* played a major role in establishing an alternative, political field within the fine arts and managed to sustain itself during its 15 years of operation, in terms of material integration through the small salaries paid to students and authors of its blog and in terms of discourses through inviting international actors. Their trajectory is representative of the internationally embedded and socially engaged part of the field, i.e., establishing alternative discourses and institutions of cultural production in the mid-2000s, which aims to connect Eastern European art histories with the global field of cultural production. They chose open political engagement after 2010, after the takeover of the institutional system by the governing party.<sup>34</sup>

After 2014, many cultural workers turned away from political protest and focused on building more stable institutions. A group of curators, some of them leaving the Ludwig Museum in 2013, launched the OFF Biennial in 2015 to realize an independent cultural event and a platform for cultural workers. Instead of being closely involved in oppositional politics, they highlight their professionalism, the autonomy of art, and the integration of the “progressive” artists into the global circuits of contemporary art. In practice, this means that they do not accept state funding, do not realize projects in state venues, and seek alternative channels through international institutions and networks. They gather donations primarily from international foundations that are supplemented by local entrepreneurs, companies, and the unpaid and underpaid work of staff and participants. In the first years the realization of the Biennial relied on voluntary work and unpaid labour, backed by the motivation of the participants to enter the field. For the sake of sustainability, the proportion of paid work rose during the organization of the 2020 Biennial (postponed due to COVID-19); community building and a stronger selection of projects became a more dominant strategy. The previous projects under the OFF brand did not get funding but were promoted; this year, almost all the projects got funding complemented with pedagogical programmes and regular supervision of the works by the staff on the projects participating in the Biennial<sup>35</sup>. A similar shift from direct politicization to professional self-organization took place within the FKSE. After issuing several statements against the government’s cultural policy and rejecting National Cultural Fund subsidies in 2016, the organization revised its strategy of political confrontation in favour of strengthening their community, securing autonomous income through fundraising campaigns, and reinforcing their relationships with commercial galleries and the civil sector.

Looking for international projects became a major escape route for many cultural producers after 2010. However, participation in international projects and shows does not significantly contribute to the cultural workers’ income. As a young photographer said: “My diploma work was well received by international magazines and exhibition spaces, but since then I have rarely been featured there.” Even if they are internationally inte-

34 D. Hegyi, Interview with Dóra Hegyi by the authors, 3 November 2020.

35 K. Székely, Interview with Katalin Székely by the authors, 3 November 2020.

grated, this does typically not contribute to the artists' livelihood. While 70 per cent of the young artists have been participating in international art projects, only six per cent of them derive a regular income from this market. In principle success in the international market is a decisive factor of national visibility and success; however, individuals considering themselves successful did not report a significantly higher percentage of income as a result. On the one hand, this suggests that galleries, publishers, and other art businesses utilize the employment of artists in creative industries: they skim off the marketable artists by representing only a small section of cultural producers. As research showed, only 22 per cent of Hungarian visual artists are represented by a local for-profit gallery.<sup>36</sup> The art industry gains from the situation that compels artists to provide the necessary means of social reproduction from outside the art market, such as maintaining a studio, which 72 per cent of visual artists do.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, the art market externalizes the costs of artistic production. On the other hand, international presence seems to remain a cognitive remnant of the strategies applied in the field before 2010. It is a form of "misrecognition": while it provides symbolic rewards within the oppositional/autonomous field, it does not convert into significant material stability. This makes the artists more dependent on funding coming from state institutions.

In the survey, we assessed the respondents' acceptance of various state institutions and independent organizations. Institutions that have been taken over or created by the government since 2010, such as the Petőfi Literary Museum and the MMA, are generally held in more contempt than those less affected by the political transition, especially if they were managed by recognized figures. For example, the head of the National Film Fund established post-2010 was Andy Vajna, a Hollywood film producer. Although the early history of demonstrations at the Ludwig Museum of Contemporary Art would imply that it should meet harsher rejection, several facts make it the most accepted institution among young artists: its embeddedness into the Ludwig network, its gatekeeper position as an exhibition space, and, moreover, the superintendent of the Hungarian Pavilion of the Venice Biennale, and its director who does not go against the doxas of the visual art scene (such as the recognition of the neo-avant-garde art of the 1960s and 1970s). Within the field of literature, the Carpathian-Basin Talent Support Program (KMTG) is the most rejected institution. 63,9 per cent of the respondents said that they would not accept its fellowship and 66,7 per cent rejected the possibility to exhibit or show their work in places associated with the institution. The KMTG was consciously established by the government in 2015 to "revitalize Hungarian literary life".<sup>38</sup> In practice this meant the building and the development of a literary field of conservative authors. The Balassi Institute (BI) was incorporated into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and responsible for the cultural diplomacy of Hungary; it has a neutral status among our

36 Bárdics/Bérczi/Olajos (eds.), *Kortárs Helyzet*, p. 23.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

38 Governmental Decree 1569/2015. A Kárpát-medencei Tehetséggondozó Nonprofit Korlátolt Felelősségű Társaság megalapításáról [On the Foundation of the Carpathian-Basin Talent Support Programme], <http://www.kozlonyok.hu/nkonline/MKP/PDF/hiteles/mk15123.pdf> (accessed: 11 December 2020).

respondents. The Hungarian Creative Artists' Nonprofit Ltd. (MANK) manages governmental grants and signed a cooperation pact with the MMA in 2016 that does not meet harsh refusal either. The incorporation of these institutions was less exposed and their heads communicated less controversial opinions than in the cases of the MMA and the KMTG. The MMA is the most rejected institution, mainly because it is considered too ideological and thus non-professional. A respondent who applied for their fellowship speaks about it as a last choice, which even she frames as problematic: "I consider their dominance as unhealthy and unprofessional. But I need a stable income to move out of my parents' flat."

During the Orbán government's first term, between 2010 and 2014, the boycott of state institutions was a general strategy coupled with direct actions such as demonstrations and artistic "happenings". In the regime's consolidation phase, the new cultural governance fostered a variegated acceptance of state-funded cultural organizations. On the one hand, institutions with a stronger connection to ethnonationalist ideologies are overtly instrumental in building the government's new hegemony and are forcefully denigrated by practitioners. The ones that maintained a more inclusive or managerial strategy like the NFI or the Ludwig Museum, on the other hand, are more likely to be accepted. Because of the artists' dependence on creative industries and of the difficulty of making a living from producing art that is sold in galleries or auction houses, there is a limited number of activities in the field of cultural production that can provide a stable income. Therefore, symbolic utterances within the oppositional cultural field lose significance. Boycott as a general strategy is much more questioned, while the capability of the oppositional field to integrate young artists is also weakened because of the lack of resources and the lacking possibility to transform the capital gained into political participation.

## 5. The Hardships of Turning Symbolic Capital into Economic One

Classical cultural analysis often argues that only inheritors can acquire high social status.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, having analysed the early careers of Hungarian creative workers, we can conclude that even social inheritance is not enough to make a remunerative career. Even though 80 per cent of the young artists responding to our questionnaire have university graduate parents, they can rarely transform these social capitals into an artistic livelihood. Therefore, social inheritance in Hungary is rather the prerequisite of an artistic career and constant external financial support is needed to maintain it. This external support has three typical forms. The first is the employment in creative industries in the "illusion of independence" from the Orbán regime. Cultural industries, however, are not untouched by the regime. They are precarised by taxational reforms, their ownership is frequently concentrated in the hands of the national bourgeoisie, and the creative industries embedded into global value chains are pushed in a regional race

39 P. Bourdieu/J.-C. Passeron, *The Inheritors. French Students and their Relation to Culture*, Chicago 1980.

to the bottom,<sup>40</sup> fuelled by an “illusion of development”.<sup>41</sup> The second is the non-artistic career path that leads further away from artistic production. The third is the endeavour to maintain autonomous artistic production, but this choice is especially dependent on state infrastructures and puts additional burdens on the sphere of social reproduction. In this constellation, emerging artists can still achieve symbolic successes but they cannot transform them into material stability.

The emerging artists' relations with the Orbán regime are in constant interactions with their own material positions. In the years after 2010 several confrontations took place between the forming conservative cultural hegemony and its opponents, for instance the OFF Biennial. However, they could provide only symbolic, international recognition for young cultural producers but no material resilience. As a result, a significant part of the Orbán regime's cultural establishment became accepted among young cultural producers, while those not willing to make such deals were oriented towards the highly precarious creative industries that provided a livelihood for many in the economic conjuncture of the 2010s.

Under these precarious conditions the COVID-19 crisis, emerging in the spring of 2020, hit the young cultural producers harshly. Consequently, the current crisis can produce a certain authoritarian deepening. In local cultural industries, state-subsidies fuelled the concentration of ownership in the hands of capital allied with the Orbán regime. At the same time, these factions of capital (music and film industry, which is reliant on the inflow of foreign capital) must manage their vulnerability to the global crisis. In this context, young cultural producers will probably be more dependent on state infrastructures that can contribute to the deepening of the hegemonic process of the Orbán regime.

40 Varga, *Filmrendszerváltások*.

41 G. Arrighi, *The Developmentalist Illusion*, in W. Martin (ed.), *Semiperipheral States in the World Economy*, Westport Ct. 1990, pp. 11–44.