EFFECTS OF SYSTEMATIC SUPPRESSION ON THE ARTS
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The previous power structure and its official cultural and art policy was geared toward indigenous authors and it was hostile to the avantgarde artists of Europe and America.

The early socialist leaders banned, later suppressed certain artistic works they considered offensive to the new ideology. In the later years, the authority was merely resigned to the foreign arts, still the effect on the people was a perpetual misconception that there were still controls on what could and could not be read or seen.

Most artists during the 80’s worked and created freely with no outside political control. They were looking at real values of the society and were untouched by what some called “compulsory taste”.

During this era, I had the opportunity to analyze the reception of two of our well known artists, Béla Bartók and István Örkény. The power structure had been intolerant of both of them for decades, but by the mid-70’s, international pressure and the voice of the national opposition forces became too strong to control their works any longer. I do not attempt to discuss the relative merits of their artistic work, but focus on the consequences of their unfair repression to Hungarian people.

In the 70’s, music teaching in the schools was in a defensive posture, which affected the students significantly. Moreover, this denial of some of our great historical artists had an effect on mass culture. The sociological cause and effect was analyzed extensively by Hungarian intellectuals such as Elemér Hankiss, Ágnes Losonczi, Zsuzsa Ferge, László Cseh-Szombathy, Tamás Szecskő, György Csepeli, and Zsolt Papp. There were also quite a few theoretical and critical analyses done (Éva Ancsel, Ágnes Heller, Iván Vitányi), however they did not follow through with direct surveys or observations of their theories.

Some considered the results of the Kodály method of musical instruction to be defective in instilling an appreciation of music and in developing musical taste. One of the studies in this era analysed the “Hits” of the time and the factors that made them popular in many cultures throughout the world.
The musical structure of a “hit” is based on elementary reproduction. Such songs can be understood with little effort and their variations are already known from everyday life. In fact, a hit, because of its elementary level and basic harmonies, is within the capacity of many people who are mere consumers.

Of course, that time the music preferred by the cultural policy and the musical instruction method in the schools was vastly different from those forms of music with mass appeal. It would seem from the research that the more severe and restrictive the musical instruction was in the schools, the more appealing the mass market became and the easier its negative aspects was accepted.

The reception and acceptance of Bartók is not only a matter of sociological factors, but of the very basics of musical theory and composition. Bartók’s creation method was analyzed in the 50’s and 60’s by scientists and critics (Theodor W. Adorno, Hermann Pfrogner, Walter Wiora, János Kárpáti, József Ujfalussy, László Somfai, Ernő Lendvai, and Iván Vitányi). Their main theme was the evaluation of the “12 degree consonance” and the tonal and atonal system. In accordance with the research the 12 tones in Bartók’s system have not only the same value, but each has its own specific function. The basic elements and the joining elements are present at the same time, and so in his music Bartók creates a synthesis, not an antithesis as explained most often. Ernő Lendvai, a well known Bartók scholar said: “The world of Bartók is polar. It is neither dark nor light, but it is both dark and light. These two are always together. They form an inseparable unity and oneness as if the polar would be the only frame in which the ideal and dramatic can be expressed.”

Iván Vitányi compared the methods of Bartók, Stravinsky and Schönberg and showed why the Bartók method could be called a synthesis. “The rules of dialectics do not always necessitate a synthesis as an independent third element existing outside the system. It can be the system itself. What is the synthesis of the day and the night? It is the day itself that contains both. What is the synthesis of the two sides of Bartók’s music? It is the work itself. Bartók does not present the two extremities, the subjective and the objective world as rigid opposites (like Schönberg and Stravinsky) but as penetrating each other.”¹

The starting point of our study was that young people became more familiar with Bartók’s works in the 80’s. Mária Sági underlines that it is more important to note the number of people studied the essence of Bartók’s works, than the number of who rejected it outright. In our opinion the reception of Bartók was easier for our youth in this era because of their growing independence and the changes in musical education. There were, however, two impediments to understand Bartók: one was the language, or system of tones, another was the unknown logic of his works. My study dealt with the treatment of Bartók’s works by the students, and with the world of the music as well as the world of the students. A systematic methodology was therefore necessary.

Our study ought to analyze the works both horizontally and vertically, and the unity of his different methods in order to allow a deeper understanding. Other studies dealt only with the acceptance or non-acceptance of the works, or examined only one piece of work.

There were five different methods on the horizontal axis of the experiment, while three levels of reception and understanding on the vertical one. In order to compare the methods and the various levels, each phase of the experiment consisted of one composition and its 2 to 4 variations. Also, another composition was used with a great number of complicated variations. The unity of the compositions and variations were hard to perceive, furthermore the differences here are more important than the similarities. This method of horizontal and vertical reception gave us the opportunity to distinguish the different types of listeners.

Prior studies used 1 to 1.5 minutes of selected passages to measure attitudes. We presented the entire composition with variations played both before and after the primary piece. The substance of classical music is, of course, complicated, and there were different levels of understanding. We tried to use simple methods, divided into three levels. We were interested in other factors beside the qualitative ones (whether they liked the piece or not).

The tested persons had had to concentrate on the different elements of the piece as well as the whole, and then had to classify what they had heard. They decided what could be accepted and what was distasteful according to their everyday values. They also had to give reasons for their decisions rather than a simple response. Our methodology followed that of Péter Józsa in using two criteria to describe quality – good and mediocre.

We also tried to follow the methods of Sági in asking the listeners what reservations on the pieces they had, what role their education could have, etc.

Some skills, like solmization and melody writing, are well developed in our systematic music teaching, while improvisation is encouraged only to a small extent. There have been important successes of this system in the fields of professional music, however we can see a lack of initiative or personal, independent creativeness.

As a result, only the minority of students have excellent skills and knowledge, and the majority have virtually no experience or attitude toward the musical heritage. We can see this from our Bartók study, though one would expect Bartók’s works to be an important part of Hungarian youth’s knowledge.

Classical music attracts a wider circle nowadays, but still does not belong to everybody. For the majority, serious music is in the background. The music teaching institutions have an important role in determining our tastes, but we cannot discount the predominant place radio and TV have in moulding a heterogeneous musical culture.

There is difference between small town or village and the city, which cannot be solved immediately, thus there are only a limited number in the population
able to attend concerts, listen to URH broadcasts, and collect music records. Only few has an autonomous musical culture, to the majority it is unknown.

Our observations are similar to those done in Péter Józsa’s study. The musical taste of the majority is based on everyday experiences, not on any conscious understanding imparted by the academic institutions. Also some uncertainty can be observed in the evaluation of mediocre works.

Age and education influenced the tastes of the listeners, which could be expected. The older and less educated, the less flexible listeners were in their preferences, which was not a positive factor if it meant preserving traditions without criticism. This was also noted by Józsa, Sági, and Feuer, when they conducted similar surveys with concertgoers. Education seemed to result in a superficial knowledge of music only, not a deeper appreciation. That was why the surveys showed such a contradictory response to the same works.

For instance, most listeners did not like Bartók’s folk songs. Ironically, these are considered some of the most important work of the composer and have made him world-famous.

We know, to begin with, that music or any natural sounds appeal to listeners. There are people, however, who hear the music but don’t know what to do with it. They can not decode the meaning and, therefore, reject it.

Two-thirds of the tested people listened to light music. Those, on a higher level, preferred the classics and jazz, followed by pop and newer trends.

It often happened that stereotypical answers were given to certain questions, where the participant wished to give a good impression of himself, whether they knew the subject or not.

Our survey was based on the Hungarian folksong, its synthesis, and some of Bartók’s compositions. We endeavoured to choose well known melodies, or compositions whit popular theme. The results were as we expected: the students recognized the classical compositions because they had recently studied them, but rejected the folk songs of Bartók. Only a small number listened to folksongs in their everyday life and only 2 of the 262 surveyed said they enjoyed Hungarian folk music.

Only a few of the tested students had any experience with singing or analyzing music at home or at school. At the beginning of our meetings, they declined music listening in small groups, but did accept it later for the sake of the test. They also admitted that they would like to know more about music, and could be more critical and conscious of it if they were helped in understanding the language, the different expressions and styles of music. Our survey, in fact, revealed a non-expected dearth of musical education. Statistical evidence and cultural reports did not indicate the fact that hardly anyone of those surveyed knewed their classical music heritage or today’s popular musical styles.

I will now analyze the world concept as presented by the Hungarian dramatist, István Örkény in his dramas. His last work, ”Forgatóköny” (“Scenario”) dealt
with both his own and his contemporaries’ problems of consciousness. This was the age when the son of an upper class family could become communist and could enjoy personal success or failure by the strength or weakness of the movement. I would have had difficulties in understanding this piece without living through that era and without a great deal of self-analysis as well as an evaluation of our history. We focused on its reception instead of its aesthetic virtues.

In the script, good and bad cannot be differentiated, because everyone has so many different roles, changes of personality, and changes in values. Barabás’ transformation is concurrent with the transformation of the infrastructure and the political landscape. Finding his way through this maze is his goal, while others fight for their survival. The myriad alterations of roles, values, time, and other dimensions, as well as the “Master’s” hypnotizing abilities all are causes for our insecurity. We simply do not know our identity in the end of the play.

The differentiation is easier to comprehend on the community level since it is determined by party affiliation. In Örkény’s opinion orthodox party allegiance sacrifices the individual (like Fascism), but nevertheless it leads to a “better” direction. The Earth-Heaven-Hell construction is, because of the above, complicated, divided, and disintegrated. No one makes a decision not only on Earth, but in the other two spheres as well.

Örkény describes the earthly version of a theoretical model (socialism, communism) and underscores the more static thinking of the system to that of everyday life. He does not present any ultimate realization of the “system”, but shows how its functions are changing and cease, and return again.

There are also conflicts in the relation between the microcosm and the macrocosm. The macrocosm penetrates and determines the microcosm. People cannot live their wishes and desires, because “the age will not allow it”. Örkény shows the problems from the microcosmic point of view.

One can take the risk of placing in the shade the private life of the individual (microcosm) and allow the Party to become the stage of community life (macrocosm, or the universe). Örkény experiences this universe only partly homogeneous and, analyzed differently, in the state of disintegration. The key to the conflicts of both spheres seem to be found only in the imagination, in another-time and transformed Hungarian society.

The structure of the Earth-Heaven-Hell axis and the analysis of macro- and microcosms are all connected with each other. They show many similarities and differences. Individual fate is determined by social position and social role, as well as by external influences and a specific morality. The conflicts of the individual arise from the fact that he remains static, while society is on the move; his old morality is changing slowly, and it is uncertain as to which direction it will move.

There are only vague outlines of the possibility of an alternative life course. In fact, the choice is presented in the play by silence, as with Marosi’s listening to Barabás’ monologue at the end of the play.
Direction of the change cannot be predicted, according to Örkény. He does not accept the unreal image of the future by the Party, but rather he trusts in man, in his thinking, and in his creativity.

The players in the script are all members of the larger community. This community often disintegrates, and Örkény asks: Why does it happen? He finds the answer through examples in History. People are born into the community and commit to it at different levels. The community is on the move and changing, conforming to Party dictates. Those in the resistance movement, participated in establishing the Communist Party, can hardly recognize their old community under the new regime.

This analysis by Örkény is a good example of an East Central European phenomenon which does not appear exactly like this in the rest of the world. His Europe is one of interdependence and a sense of community wider than the parochial concerns. We can almost feel the breath of a neighbor in the crowd – the foolish and the criminal as well as the good and law-abiding all together. “I cannot reach a compromise with myself”, he says, “but I cannot disarm my fatherland. I cannot deny our collective fate.”²

Considerable negative attention has been drawn to our youth’s gap of knowledge in the nation’s history, particularly in the period of the Workers Movement, the Communist role in Hungary, and the first decade of the Peoples’ Democracy. Our interviews corroborated this perception and, in fact, the historical ignorance was even deeper than we expected.

The selective presentation of this era’s events and the interpretation of certain historical relations have not been enough to present a clear perspective of our historical reality to the Hungarian youth. This history has been concealed from them for reasons arising from the family and from the government itself. Family members are reluctant to discuss events with their children. The national media is generally silent or gives only partial answers about this period. Moreover, our survey found that only 3 to 5% had any objective knowledge of the recent past; the rest did not have any interest in it other than what might be required to enter University.

The younger participants were especially uninformed. They were averse from getting to know the truth and were so unfamiliar with their own history, as they might as well be with the South African’s. They are more interested in the commonplace and they lack of problems that goes along with a lack of knowledge.

There were many examples of this attitude. According to a 17 year old girl nobody needs to deal with the dreaded past. It is more important to pursue the pleasure of the moment. A 33 year old engineer is angry that we are even dealing with morals, ethics, or everyday problems and fallacies, situations maybe happening again.

This attitude of denial suggests that we are not ready to face our ethical failings or our current social values. The same characteristics are personified in Örkény’s play too. That was why those interviewed were so quick to react, either positively or negatively, to the issues raised by Örkény. When asked how they would react under similar circumstances, most either said there would be no possibility of reoccurrence, or they hesitated at length before answered. Even those, who answered previous questions confidently, had difficulty with this one. Their uncertainty arised from not knowing what the result might be of their choice.

This is a natural reaction to a negative confrontation; these students want a good life and are looking at their future with optimism, not with what they consider the baggage of the past. This was characterized by the different ways the participants experienced reality and imagination. A general uncertainty characterized their interpretation of their-like people’s behavior in a different historical time.

Those tested were primarily just prior to adulthood, when they concerned with finding their place in the world and stabilizing it, rather than with the moral problems of others. Some events may accelerate their critical capacity and spirit and make them attend to another historical age. Our social fabric is what gives the individual the freedom to confront himself and the past, and to express his opinions freely.

As the result of Hungary’s 25 years’ suppression (whether we speak of cultural policy, mass communication, artistic expression, education, etc.), the our mass consciousness misses some important people and events. Even if they are known, the knowledge is often distorted or out of context.

Values like responsibility, moral principles, keeping commitments, and outspokenness have been deprecated. The earlier silence is slowly being lifted today, but criticism and “good deeds” are not yet respected values. The readers of Örkény in the survey had the opportunity to analyze the moral of his examples. They considered the play to be a concrete example of the 1950’s repression and tried to forget it as a bad dream. The young people have no experience of this time, or only a faint memory, and therefore are not tolerant readers of what they consider a bygone age. They do not have the knowledge, and they do not feel to be able to use all this shaping their future. Two new generations have arisen from the ashes of Örkény’s era with new models and new ideas. Unfortunately, the denial of our history leads not to individual autonomy and creativity, but often to irrationality and superficiality. We can only hope for a change, particularly of our schools, where the process of healing and knowledge begins.