

Paper for Session 27. RC21 Berlin***Fragments of contention in Budapest. The cunning of the neoliberal project - political liberal imagination and authoritarian promises.***

This paper focuses on two public urban cultural venues. They are Trafó and Gödör respectively, the first a performing arts center, the second a cultural-entertainment venue completed by a street level small green square. They are both part of the thriving cosmopolitan urban cultural scene of Budapest and in the local urban imagination they are perceived as par excellence culturally liberal spaces. They perfectly fit and can be understood in terms of a more global spread of trendy urban cultural places, to a large degree commercialized and hence perhaps more aptly called as cultural-entertainment venues. But apart from their more global affiliation these spaces have their own local specificity and their peculiar trajectory can be understood only against this local backdrop, itself affected by the more-than-local institutional, spatial and policy transformations. (Peck, 2012) And it is precisely by tracing some of the lineaments of the local urban politics that it becomes obvious why such urban cultural spaces become sites of contestation when otherwise such spaces are most of the time mere sites of anodyne cultural commodification and entertainment typical of neoliberal urbanism. And it is also through local and more-than-local histories that one can understand why the language of civil society can have this import and purchase and why politics based on this trope stays an essentially middle class, liberal and ultimately a limited project.

I will be looking into a zigzagging course, at a reversal, a set back so to speak in the process of democratization, or more precisely into the democratizing of space. After years of 'non-contentious politics', in the form of lobbying mostly on an individual basis and behind closed doors, on the part of smaller, independent, non-repertoire cultural venues a law (2008.XCIX.law) is brought as a result of grass-roots pressure which confers a substantial degree of security and predictability in the life of such cultural

venues by allocating them money from the state budget. On a general level this law can be viewed as part of the larger process of democratization, of policies aiming at decentralization and devolution of power (occurring in all spheres towards a supposedly more egalitarian and more inclusive urban cultural regime, where smaller, perhaps more marginal, entities win recognition.) However, since 2010, small, independent urban places start closing, and more established venues silenced and restructured in a way so as to better serve the cultural urban politics of the current conservative establishment. And yet, although the reversal of this accomplishment is a clear set back of urban politics, this accomplishment carries through its limitations the very critique of this liberal urban regime. It is not simply a reversal from more liberal to more authoritarian urban regime that is taking place. The reversal, the fact that a reversal is possible, itself is symptomatic of the very limitations of a (neo)liberal urban regime.

The new conservative mayor of Budapest appoints a new director at New Theatre (Új Színház). Illustrious writers and theatre people, around one hundred people stage a protest in front of the theatre against the appointment of new director known for his nazi sympathies and against the way in which the appointment takes place completely ignoring the theatre profession's ideas and suggestions.

The Ludwig museum's director appointment ends as of January 1 2013 and again the mayor handpicks the new director ignoring the profession's wish, a series of protests are staged on the stairs leading to the museum with around one hundred participants. The National Theatre's director appointment comes to end this year too, and the jury assembled by the prime minister picks their all-time favorite. For two months before the old director is replaced by the new one every single play ends with a standing ovation, as a smaller demonstration in support of its director and against the government's measures.

And last but not least, the former head of the Hungarian National Bank finds himself on the same side with the ousted theatre directors, otherwise unlikely bedfellows, indeed, by fiat of resisting to bend to governmental pressure.

By 2010, two decades after the collapse of the Soviet block, urban politics in Budapest seemed to have become rather anodyne, business as usual, more of a series of technical questions to be solved by experts and only experts, mistaken for proof that democracy and its institutions, a full-fledged democratic polity had at long last taken hold and running on an almost automatic pilot. As if democracy could run on an automatic pilot.

Up to that point Budapest had had the same liberal mayor for twenty uninterrupted years, and although the Free Democrats, that is, the liberal party, had always been just the minor coalition partner of the socialists in the national government, the urban politics of the capital city was markedly informed by a liberal imaginary. Certainly this cannot be explained solely by fiat of a liberal mayor. The emergence of a liberal leadership at the municipal level coincided and was partly the manifestation of a wider liberal undercurrent - as Kalb remarks, one important facet of the neoliberal globalization.

"Hegemonic neoliberalism, while de-facto allied with authoritarianism, cannot do without a political liberal imagination, pace the penal complex, or better precisely because of its close association with the penal and punitive state. Political liberalism, precisely because of its different ethos, has been one of neoliberalism's essential public supports (Kalb 2012, p.).

Along the years the coalition between the socialists and the liberals had come to be increasingly associated with liberal urban policies, building upon earlier similar associations and significations, this time translated into and manifesting itself in a rather laissez-faire urban governance and urban development.

After the 2010 national elections when the right wing secured a two third parliamentary majority, the socialist-liberal coalition lost the capital too in the local elections after twenty years of rule. The 'ballot-box revolution' as the newly elected prime minister Viktor Orbán announced 'finally completed the regime change'.

Various places, groups, ideas suddenly found themselves under attack in the aftermath of the 2010 elections, all deemed to be legacies of the former socialist-liberal coalition, expressing a liberal ethos seen as anathema, and as such, not only to be denounced but to be purged, which in practice meant most of the workers and the directors, their policies were unilaterally replaced.

I approach the two decades after 1989 as a political economic urban restructuring with a predominantly liberal outlook which attempted to construct a new order as a liberal parliamentary democracy with a decentralized urban governance. The past three years seem to mark a clear break with this through a series of unilateral and authoritarian measures giving way to a highly re-centralized statecraft which is at the same time increasingly more punitive and aggressive. This clear break between a more liberal and a more authoritarian statecraft, their pronounced sequential relation, which otherwise are postulated as the two rather simultaneous facets of neoliberalism, might compel one to draw the rather hasty conclusion that the nation state, small and peripheral, as Hungary is, still can reign supreme unencumbered by transnational, global forces as it appears to be in the position to enact a different course with the change of government and respond differently to the challenges posed by the recent financial crisis or globalization for that matter. And this is after all what the prime minister of Hungary keeps telling Hungarians, that Hungary has eventually been able to restate its sovereignty and free itself of the constraints imposed by the EU, or of the IMF, for that matter.

'Culture led urban development' by now a hegemonic urban policy refers to private and/or state capital investment in the urban fabric made more palatable by emphasizing some cultural or artistic aspect, and promising economic growth that will eventually have a societal ameliorative impact. The starting point of my analysis is that these two urban cultural spaces I have selected seemingly fit this trend, they show a by now widespread manifestation of the larger neoliberal socio-spatial restructuring in the form of some defunct industrial sites revamped into cultural urban centers. However, beyond this initial analytical orientation these two cases and the particular neoliberal urbanism they produce can be properly understood and explained only through contextual trajectories and histories.

These urban spaces are two of the most iconic spots of Budapest after 1998 and 2002 respectively, dates when they opened. The two urban spaces, however, present two rather distinct trajectories in their relation to the state. Given the sudden and overwhelming commodification of land as massive privatization of a formerly socialist

urban space and the drastic impact that this had on on the urban fabric of Budapest these two public urban spaces seem to escape this logic - at least for a while. They are public urban spaces and their cultural profile does not earn them much money, capital imperatives seem to have come second or only late.

These venues are cosmopolitan spaces in their programs, in the bands and performers invited they are very much part of a larger European context and they are keen on articulating this relation, in diverse ways, true, either as a performing arts center and as an urban public park and cultural-entertainment place with an eye to an international clientele. They address a wider, European audience which goes beyond the immediately local and national scale.

It is not only their own self-definition that has them as outward looking, as liberal-left wing (bal-liberális) but their political opponents' definition of, and identification vis-a-vis them as well, reinforces this identification, propped up with all the concomitant cliches, cutting deeper the we/they, liberal/ conservative division (see above Mouffe, Tilly), division that seems to drive much of the recent changes.

Notwithstanding their international profile, the fact that they appeal to many of the foreign students that reside in Budapest, to tourists, expats these urban spaces are at the same time literally the life of certain local groups, rather small in number, true, made up of mostly middle class people, among them students, artists, diverse cultural operators, young and not so young professionals, writers, and part of the liberal intelligentsia etc. For many of these people both their passion and work tie them here, they spend their days and partly their nights too there and their personal, emotional investment is often verging on the extreme. For many these places are their life accomplishment, having worked on putting together these places for more than twenty years. The two directors of these venues, their founding members come from around the cultural counterculture movement in the 1980s, and this biographical element and the cultural political history of the region together explain why the recent protests' repertoire was so pronouncedly informed by the ideal of civil society, ideal that gained such momentum in Central-Eastern Europe by the early nineties.

The Space Away from the State. Version 1.

Trafó, The House of Contemporary Art (Kortárs Művészetek Háza) is a performing arts center in the downtown of Budapest. To many people it has come too occupy a special space in the urban fabric of the city for the past one and half decade.

By the time Trafó opens in 1998 everyone is already talking about it, there is a positive buzz around it. It is novel, is is hip and it has the smack of not only cultural but of societal progressiveness about it too. Not only those directly involved in contemporary dance as performers, instructors, cultural operators or ardent fans, but a largely liberal audience made up of outstanding writers, journalists and diverse intellectuals, and a large body of students show up. Liberal-left politicians find it also important to attend the opening ceremony too and bask in the limelight. The mayor of Budapest member of the liberal party the Free Democrats, one of the system changing parties ("rendszerváltó párt"), by then an iconic figure of the earlier political democratic opposition ("demokratikus ellenzék") running the Samizdat journal Beszélő ("Talker") is there too. The then governor of New York, of Hungarian descent, sends a congratulatory letter which still adorns the lobby wall. It is eight years after the system change but the opening of Trafó still has something of that spirit in 1998. The opening is not simply about dance finally finding its proper house. It is much more than that.

After the 2010 elections a surprising debate took shape in the house and then hit some media outlets. The bizarre question was whether an old time German punk band, once anarchic, should perform or not at Trafó lest this were too much of a provocation of the new conservative government. The end of the tenure of the director was approaching with a new round of competition in sight and rumors went that the new conservative local government had a clear favorite for this position, and this was not the director who otherwise had been running the place since its very beginnings. Approximately one year later an acclaimed choreographer and dancer who was by coincidence the first dancer to perform at the opening of Trafó in 1998 was declared the winner of the competition to replace the director. Professional circles expressed their dislike and opposition claiming

that the application of the winner was, if judged by professional considerations alone, inferior to that of the previous director. In the end she resigned and in her open letter denounced what she saw as a unfair and mean campaign that tainted her reputation as a choreographer. The municipality announced a new round of application in August when the new year was to begin in September. This time another choreographer was picked by the municipality, someone who had been working in France for the previous twenty years. First time the application he had submitted was a half page trifle, first not made public. The municipality declared the application invalid and called for another round, this time the same choreographer, and the only candidate for the position, handed in a more serious application material. The old director did not take part in the last round any longer saying it was clear the Municipality, or the jury hand picked by it, would never choose him. Meanwhile attendance surged, ticket sales beat records and being there acquired a special meaning. Each performance became in fact a protest against the new government, and against its unilateral decisions reminders of an authoritarian regime by now long gone. Not since 1989 could artistic performances claim this importance. A couple of liberal and socialist politicians could be seen again at Trafó, and the best contemporary writers agreed to take part in the usual New Year's Eve show and the short stories or poems that they wrote for this occasion all played on the image of the prime minister as a mini-dictator. It felt as if the clocks had been turned back to times when writers, theatre directors or public intellectuals for that matter were still an authority and their opinion was relevant to an entire society.

The new choreographer took over as the new director of the venue by January, the old director after some months trying and working as a real estate agent, could return as an external expert to help the director run the place. However for the past year the attendance to Trafó has sharply fallen, with many fans and staff members deserting the place, feeling that this was not their place any longer. As someone put it: "after they shit in your house you do not want live there any longer."

Corvinus University, before 1989 called Karl Marx University, is the most prestigious university of economics in Hungary. In the 1980s this is one of the places where progressive ideas take hold. The first director of Trafó recalls the eighties as a time of

experimentation when more and more alternative economic and cultural activities happen in parallel. As a graduate of economics he starts running the Közgáz Klub, the university club. This is an effervescent urban youth spot where some of the new bands perform, and progressive cultural activities happen. It is at this university that the debate whether the Hungarian Young Communist League (KISZ) should be the only youth representative happens, and discussions after the 1981 Polish events are held there. It is also around this time that the Liska lectures on economic work councils bring in a entirely new perspective. Hungary takes up a huge IMF loan (1982) and economic imperatives became more and more pressing and difficult to ignore and slowly the appearance and spread of new economic associations next to and chipping off the huge state owned factories are more and more tolerated by the state.

All these and other factors contribute to creating an atmosphere favorable to the entrepreneurial ethos. Being entrepreneurial, having an initiative becomes progressive and starts paying off. As an employee of the club and later of Pecsá, a cultic concert hall, where instances of censorship are still not rare and organizers have to explain why certain bands perform when questioned by the people from the ministry of interior, Gyuri Szabó becomes more and more involved in cultural management. As he reminisces, it was cultural innovation that attracted him, and less or not at all politics or the reform economics of that time. At the beginning attendance in the club, Pecsá or FMK is conditional on membership, thus people can be to a certain extent monitored, but as marketization gains ground it becomes sufficient to be able to buy the ticket and attend the gig. They are among the first to start extensively using posters for advertising programs and all in all they embody a different attitude, more in line with the entrepreneurial spirit that is slowly gaining ground, extending and modernizing the fledgling service sector. As he puts it these days his goal then was to extend the university youth culture, to show that this could express a wider society's culture, not simply a subculture confined within the walls of the university. He believed that this culture represented society's real consumption needs and not something hermetically sealed from the world. (Interview)

In Gyuri's words "the world comes to Hungary" at that time and this means that one can conduct business with anyone and certain cultural institutions pave the way for this. The

Dutch Matra Fund, the British Council, the Swiss Pro Helvetia, and the German Goethe Institute are appearing around this time in Hungary and start funding all sorts of cultural projects. Pecsá (opened in 1981 by KISZ the Youth Communist Association), as Gyuri put it, 'did not have anything except for its large space', quality which makes it excellent not only for large music concerts but also for dance productions. It is a Dutch performing arts group that makes a lasting impression on Gyuri and more and more he starts inviting dance groups most of which at that time are of higher standards than most Hungarian dance groups perhaps with the sole of exception of the Bozsik-Árvai duo.

The first state financial support comes from the Municipality of Budapest for a dance festival, but by the time the money arrives the festival has already happened. It is, however, the Dutch Matra fund that first supports a three year project, and it is only after this that the Municipality is willing to financially participate in this, it is the Matra fund's financial support that convinces the municipality to assign money for this. At that time it is an impressive thing and quite effective if you can show that you have foreign support. Based on his earlier trips abroad both in Europe and the US Gyuri concludes that this kind of work is unthinkable without state support, and this can not be run as a private venture.

The 1990s, as the founder of Trafó recalls, is the time when classical capitalization sets off, when more and more firms appear and go bust, and one has to increasingly think it over why to start a business. Whereas in the 1980s as part of the ongoing economic reforms specific economic forms get introduced, which then mature to a certain extent, this time an entire society is switched onto a different economic logic and this is a huge difference. It is at this time that for example the Madách theatre gets restructured and the entertainment aspect becomes more pronounced. Trafó starts as a cultural artistic institution which is in itself quite a status, however, soon it becomes clear that in the absence of similar partners lobbying will be quite difficult, so Gyuri starts lobbying in order for Trafó to be categorized as theatre. Theaters have a tradition much stronger and even if Trafó is at the bottom of this ranking, and not a repertoire theatre, this category means stability and increased capacity to plan, which is all the more important

in a project-based riskier system (see Boltanski, 2005 for more on a project-based system).

Establishing and consolidating Trafó happens on two fronts: first, along essentially bureaucratic lines involving extensive lobbying, most of it invisible, shaping and bending urban and cultural policies. First to get a building suitable for dance performances and this lasts mostly through the nineties against a disorderly real estate market when property relations are continuously shape shifting and the urban regulatory framework is still just running behind already accomplished events. When he stumbles upon an old electric transformer house already discovered and inhabited by some French artists cum squatters he knows he has found a place good enough to house dance performances. He succeeds in pulling the necessary strings and the municipality purchases the building. After the initial success it becomes obvious that a stable funding framework needs to be devised if the place is to last more than one season. All the years since 1998 in this respect are in one way or another about work to consolidate the place, to turn it into a lasting urban cultural space. Then or rather in parallel claims are made towards the cultural department of the municipality, the ministry of culture which leads to the securing of the category of theatre, a clear accomplishment in this respect. As a cultural policy tool he manages to claim the category of theatre for Trafó. He uses an already existing and hence more stable framework, and the category that comes with it as a means of defending the place from the vagaries of the market or of politicians.

Between the two levels of government, the state and the municipal level, Trafó finds its more sure allies at the local level. Budapest has a liberal mayor till 2010, and the city follows an essentially liberal urban policy. For many of this policy's critiques this is simply a policy of non-interference or of letting things happen. Between 1998 and 2002 there is a clear antagonism between the state and the local levels, the ministries run by conservatives and the capital by the liberal-socialist coalition with a liberal mayor. Opened in 1998 Trafó is somewhere between the traditional theaters and the indie places that start increasingly to appear for the past decade. The fifteen years mean a certain degree of institutionalization, which also means that Trafó is not the most experimental or radical. This is something that its former director readily acknowledges

when he states that the foreign performances seen at Trafó are usually the more established ones in the West, by far not the most experimental or innovative, for which there would probably not be enough audience. The many ruin bars that line Budapest's inner districts and which sometimes are seen as a threat to Trafó in that they siphon off the possible younger audience by simply being cheaper and still offering some sort of cultural programs as a form of entertainment point to the wider tendency where real estate speculation often with state approval runs the fortunes of places up and then quickly down. That is why one friend could remark that Gyuri unlike many others who kickstarted some enterprise and then quickly moved on to the next more profitable venture, persisted despite the odds and made Trafó into what it became by 2010.

Dance can no doubt offer an exhilarating experience. The fact that Trafó occupies this rather exceptional position in the imaginary of city, however, cannot be solely explained by artistic reasons. The status of this cultural space is the result of a framing and identification process that has tied this urban spot to the rhetoric of the system-change (*rendszer váltás*). Secondly, it has to do with the transnational network Trafó has become part of. Along the years Trafó has hosted a series of high quality performances and this work has secured the venue a sure slot in this transnational network. This has turned this urban space into a cosmopolitan place and it has formed and attracted such an audience and alienated all those who do not identify with this line.

While the concept of civil society is very much invoked as a democratic ideal worth fighting for, the fact that this civil society emerges as a largely middle class trope and practice in fact, relegating the language of social rights and collectivities to the margins, transforms it into a neoliberal ideal shorn of its radical capacities.

Gyuri is right in insisting on comparatively cheaper tickets with respect to other mainly West European prices so that a not so well-off Hungarian middle class audience can afford this place. And this and Gödör are just middle class spaces, no more than that. And while many of the 'new theatre' plays do address pressing social questions, and it is great they can do so, these plays are mainly viewed by that not so well-off middle

class audience only, offering little consolation to the the many more unable to afford what strikes them as pricey tickets, as unaffordable luxury.

The Space Away from the State. Version 2.

The Nation's Pothole.

This summer the local government set up a giant wheel, a Budapest Eye on Erzsébet square. The square looks already full, the ground, at any moment, about to give way under the weight of the masses flocking there every day. After the wheel is moved to Sziget the place will close for some months during which the long overdue renovations and additional construction will be completed.

The Parliament passed a law that starting with August 1 2013 the state becomes the owner of the cultural venue, and that the municipality offers the buildings to the state without the latter having to pay anything for the real estate. The role of the club of putting together the programs and in fact determining the profile of the venue will be now assumed by the state. The Ministry of Public Administration and Justice (KIM) stated that with this decision the state will finally complete this urban development program that had been lying unfinished for a more than a decade.

The Gödör Club closed on February 1 2012 after almost a decade and the Acqvarium Club took over enjoying the backing of the state. There was no competition and the former club had two weeks to clear the place instead of the required three months. They had been conducting talks with the ministry since 2011 and had submitted several detailed program offers to which they received no answer and in the end they were simply replaced. A farewell party was organized in sign of protest, too, to properly mark the end of a decade. Gödör Klub did not disappear for good, but moved to a new location, it rented a place not far from the original location.

In 1998 the year when Trafó opened, on another location, pretty much in the downtown of Budapest the National Theatre was about to be built according to the designs of

Ferenc Bán. However, in 2002 Gödör opened there instead, while the National Theatre was built further down south on the bank of the Danube.

While Gödör, the Pothole is regarded by most Budapest residents as the outcome of a rather inauspicious start, of a failed state urban project, it has nevertheless become the most popular urban square in the city, if only judged by the crowds of people visiting it. It has 150.000 visitors a year.

The downtown square of Budapest, the Erzsébet square turned into a 'pothole', the Nation's Pothole, as residents of Budapest started to call the area, when the then prime minister Viktor Orbán unexpectedly called off plans to build the National Theatre here. This ministerial decision defied the professional jury's choice about who was to design the new national theatre and where and instead it assigned a different architect and different location. As the National Theatre project came to halt on this square, by 2002 the area had been a construction hole for quite a while with work suspended and dreams about a national theatre abandoned. After the national elections the socialists were back governing and under their leadership work was resumed about doing something about this construction site. A design competition was announced for building a cultural-entertainment venue in a way so as to incorporate the already completed underground chambers. It was the private architectural office UNI-CO Ltd. who continued the development of the area partly based on the winning designs of Firka Studio. It completed the Erzsébet Square Cultural Centre and Park alias the Gödör Klub. Formally the owner of the building was the Municipality of Budapest, without, however, the building having been registered as the property of the Municipality, a legal anomaly the Gödör director never failed to point out. The maintainer was the Ministry of Human Resources based on the contract between the Hungarian State and the Municipality of Budapest till 2010, when the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice, KIM took over this responsibility. The running (*üzemeltetés*) of the building and the operating of Gödör was done by UNI-CO Ltd. based on an agreement with the respective ministry. The Erzsébet Square Cultural Centre and Park according to the conception devised in 2000 is;

'a self-maintaining "urban agora", an open, multifunctional cultural location, which is simultaneously a public park, a cultural-community space, contemporary arts center, location of civic events and entertainment place' as its former website read.

The place started to fall apart as soon as it had been built in 2002. It was never entirely completed, and for ten years it operated till 2012 as an already run-down place in a state of ruin and prone to be closed at any time. And not solely because of its dilapidated state, but much more so because of being virtually a no-man's-land in the very center of Budapest. As part of the decentralization of governance different levels of government were created and urban development in the capital came to happen at the intersection of district, municipality and state levels. The ideal of the devolution and spread of power among state, municipality and district levels of governance, true, created the terrain and possibility for diverse actors to participate in urban politics. But it also created a rather opaque regulatory framework difficult to maneuver for whoever wanted to do something in the city. Although an initial contract was drawn binding together the Klub, the Ministry, the district and the Municipality, this contract expired quite early and then Gödör would operate on the basis of three months long contracts for a full twelve years. For reasons hard to disentangle neither the state nor the municipality settled this situation. Stark observes when writing on the property transformations or as he puts it the 'recombinant relations in property relations' in the transition to a market economy in former socialist countries in Central Europe; 'to gain room of maneuver, actors court and even create ambiguity. They measure in multiple units, they speak in many tongues. They will be less controlled by others if they can be accountable to many'. (Stark, 1989 p.135) Although used in a different political-economic context, does not "the fuzzy embrace of public-private partnerships' (Peck, 2012) replacing large-scale privatizations somehow refer to a similar phenomenon, that 'hybrid mixtures of public ownership and private initiative' that seem to characterize both state socialist and capitalist economies?

The upkeep of the real estate cost 100 million a year. The returns from the underground garage under the centre had secured this sum until 2005. Then a ministry non-profit firm took over the operating of the garage but at the same its state budget subsidy was

slashed precisely on the account of the profit made by the garage. The missing resources had to be replaced somehow from the state budget, and the upkeep of the building had become incidental, done only by the UNI-CO ltd. either from the income derived from the cultural programs or from the architectural firm's own resources. Before the change of management in January 2012 many of its quite large halls were still unfinished and underused and the entire complex was slowly decaying.

During my interview with the director of Gödör he took every opportunity to repeat that he takes pride in the fact that the place is the outcome of what he perceives as 'organic evolution'. The Gödör Klub owned by the private firm UNI-CO ltd. ran the place devising the programs for almost a decade in fact and neither the state nor the municipality had any say in the club's doings. He proudly claimed that he did not want to become 'the 13th state theatre' as he put it and then be told what to do. Even more, he took pride in the way the place took off, he considered it a miracle of some sort for the simple reason that the construction of the cultural venue had been preceded by a political debate about its future form, with many juries having passed judgement before, and in this respect according to him the whole thing could boast more participation, or a more inclusionary approach than any other interventions in the urban fabric of Budapest.

On the farewell day, which was at the same time a gesture of protest, the language and repertoire built upon the idea(l) of the 'third sphere' (Somers, Arato & Cohen) of civil society and as such the day claimed continuity with the spirit of 1989. The ideal of civil sphere again became a major concern, a potent call to the arms. But unlike the support that this ideal enjoyed in 1989, now it has proved just a ripple on the surface, and mobilized only few people. The organizers and participants enacted this farewell and protest in the spirit of defending freedom of expression and press freedom. For this memorable dates such as 1848, 1956 and last but not least 1989 were invoked to voice their indignation and give this indignation a certain standing by framing this moment similar to those earlier outstanding events of the nation.

The fact that directors of diverse cultural venues could be replaced at a whim, without involving the respective sectors, or listening to professional juries, simply ignoring

professional considerations variously struck people numb, left them incredulous at or oblivious to what was happening. The protest that Gödör organized on January 30 2012, however small it was, was one of the first to come against the several governmental measures thought to be anti-democratic.

In the summer of 2011 during the annual Roma festival that Gödör used to organize visitors encountered a life-size replica of a Roma house with all the required accoutrements. Not only that visitors could enter but they could also sit down around a table, take some cherries from the basket placed on the center of the table and even drink a sip of palinka from the bottle that seemed to be always around. By the small hours Roma and non-Roma would party together, share the same space, practice that otherwise rarely happens.

One of the organizers of the festival, a Roma woman told me the story of how one morning when she wanted to leave Gödör she spotted a Roma family sleeping in the mock Roma house before their train would take them back home. To her this was proof that the installation fulfilled its task, it came to life as people engaged with it. This meant that Roma and non-Roma could party for a week, or share the same place in a party mood for a week. The family could find shelter for a brief time till their train arrived. They took part in the festival and then they went home. The installation well captured an ideal, and its approximation.

Other than this can such places do more?! In certain moments this is quite a lot when people openly promoting fascist ideas can end up directing public theaters.

But then to assume that by virtue of two or three such places an entire city, let alone a society is transformed, this would mean to harbor unrealistic expectations that are ridiculous as they are in that they are totally misplaced. Secondly the assumption that culture is salvation, and not a momentary one, but in its current guise as culture led urban development as the solution to more structural problems while masking off or displacing the possibility of a more structural correction. It is a delusion, and this delusion maintained by the dominant liberal imaginary (that conservative governments

are equally enthralled of) that has downtowns everywhere revamped, upgraded and redeveloped. It helps us buy into the promise and maintain the fallacy that such urban developments are in fact markers of progress.

If we regard neoliberalism as a 'combination of micro-economics and bourgeois ethics' (Kalb, 2012), a central area of this ethics concerns the ideal of civil society. The changes in Eastern-Central Europe of 1989 all mobilized for this society, and they all hoped it to be a realm of freedom properly insulated from arbitrary state action. Along the two decades the power and purchase of this ideal lost its luster, in great part due to the fact that the practice and rhetoric of good governance displaced it, made it into a matter of technical expertise and thus less tangible to citizens both as a responsibility and practice which is kept alive only through real involvement.

In my paper I sketched the trajectory of two cultural public spaces in Budapest in order in light of neoliberalism understood as a programme of massive restructuring, a historical, constructed formation with a distinct spatiality peculiar to its location. Peck writes about 'the necessity for virtually real-time theorizing, in which 'local' instances of neoliberal restructuring/resistance are (implicitly or explicitly, carefully or casually) 'located' on a still-moving landscape, marked by an array of fast-moving institutional, ideological, and ideational currents and counter-currents'(Peck, 2012. 177) These places appear as momentary respites in what Peck calls as 'the rolling programmes of marketisation, commodification and privatisation'. (Ibid.) They seem to be shielded from, for a while at least, direct market constraints, especially Trafó, which, at the beginning is also in the blessed situation of being virtually the only place of this kind in Budapest, and as such, with no competitors to fight in attracting and retaining visitors. Gradually, however, there is the increasing pressure, unrealistic as it is, but increasingly pervasive, to become self-sustaining, self-financing, to be able to operate on the income generated by ticket sales. This pressure is formulated by either the municipality or the state, and is part and parcel of a general policy framework that clearly sets up priorities and relegates cultural, educational activities to the margins and ties them to a shoe string budget and thus makes them hyper-dependent on ticket sales. This imperative to save and to stay within the tight pursed confines interestingly becomes interiorized by the

various actors and institutions which otherwise question these pressures. While on the one hand it appears as the state or the municipality, for that matter, that impose these budgetary restraints, on an other level of abstraction these policies are also the remote outcome of occupying a particular slot in the global system of states that leaves individual states and their local governments, especially but not only, peripheral ones shorn of resources and thus compelled to preferentially redistribute their more meager finances and discipline certain groups and sectors.

Trafó and Gödör emerge as urban cultural spaces at a certain distance from the state, and while they grow out of FMK or Pecsá, these two the outcome of the socialist party-state, at the same time they differ in one major aspect, namely that they are not state projects born with the intention to monitor different youth activities. Now in the post-socialist era in principle anyone, any group is invited to start an enterprise, to take part in some sort of place making, or for that matter, to construct and claim a place as its own, and if it is a public space then without formally banning others from joining it. This is a sphere which is presented and much effort is put into constructing it, discursively at least, as sufficiently autonomous from the state with the rule of law to guard that healthy modicum of autonomy. These two cultural venues show two different ways in expanding that space, and both are initiated by individuals who do so in a historical moment that favors such attempts, and attaches a distinctive value to this practice. Seen from different analytical framework the historical moment mentioned above can be understood as a process of neoliberalization which restructures the state market relations in a way that also sanctions unduly state interference, true, rather selectively.

Trafó and Gödör are not the response to and do not follow a party/state decree. This is something that the founders never tire to repeat, albeit put differently in the case of Trafó. There the director does resort to state funding to secure the long term functioning of the place. It is a meagre support but it keeps the place afloat and allows it to plan ahead, to design the following year's program. This state funding does not come with any strings attached, ideally, at least it was so until 2010. The only factor to be considered was the audience numbers, but no state or municipal approval was needed

for any performances which Trafó staged. However, what has been taking place since 2010, points towards a reversal in that the state hijacked by the conservative party is set upon defining and disciplining these urban spaces and everything much else to its liking. Arato and Cohen warns that "[The] absorption of independent social life of 'civil society' by the party/state, involving the replacement of social ties by statized relations" is nothing else but totalitarianism (Arato and Cohen, 1992 p. 36).

As I traced the formation of these places I attempted to show how they are perceived and what they have come to stand for. I juxtaposed their trajectory before 2010 as part of a largely liberal urban politics and then the sudden reversal in politics with the clear attempt at redefining their identity in the aftermath of national and local elections. The two urban spaces can be understood as expressions of a liberal outlook, liberal, first, as opposed to the conservative to be understood within the Hungarian historical cultural context, and secondly liberal with respect to the global scale as neoliberalism's pacifying other. I argue that these two distinct meanings cannot be easily kept separate, and it is through their interaction that many of the contradictions of the urban cultural political economy of Budapest can be untangled and explained.