

*Mgr. Daniel Grúň, PhD.
art historian, postdoctoral researcher,
Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava (Slovakia)*

Final Report / Közép-Európai Egyetem

Project title:

“Underground publishing and participatory models in second culture of 1970s and 1980s Eastern Europe”

Research period: from June 17, 2013 until July 17, 2013

Research background

My research explores the significance which lies in an artist's self-history, as well as the sort of documents that become the “art archive”, and the distinction between an artist's archive and the institutionalized archives. It is outlined as a comparative study of artists' archives in former Eastern Europe, their uses and role in writing art history, focusing on artists practices of the 1970s and 1980s. My point of departure is notion of parallel institution based on self-archiving strategies which describes archivist practices of alternative artists from former Eastern Europe. Self-archiving described by Beatrice von Bismarck as praxis of recording and organizing one's own activities, often in an effort to control their reception. In this process artist becomes the individual bearer of the archive, taking the place of the collective one of archiving public institutions. By usurping their archiving activities, artists challenge the ascendancy of institutions and those who work in them. Self-archiving thus appears to be primarily a political strategy, it represents a counter-model to the institution and its consecrating function, which – at least when installed inside the institution itself, as an archive within the archive – not only exercises its own power, but also illustrates and makes visible its conditions. Similarly to samizdat literature underground publishing by artists is defined here as activity that leads to creation of public awareness and social agency. However, the terms are not so clearly distinguished. Tibor Várnagy in his essay titled Hidden Story characterized samizdat movement as part of the so-called “second publicity” or “parallel culture”; recorded and objectivized part of the complex activities a society used in order to save its culture and identity in an environment suffering from a lasting shortage of

information. In my project the term of underground publishing is understood as participatory activity in which various initiatives are merging to share or distribute printed ephemera, periodicals, leaflets, artist's statements. Can we identify some common features in visual representation of diverse practices using expression of leaflet, commix strip, collage or performance documentation? During my one month fellowship in OSA Archivum I focused on material from Poland, Hungary and former Czechoslovakia as well as on books exploring theory and history of samizdat literature in former Eastern Block from the OSA and CEU libraries. One of the key aspects of my study is that OSA Archivum covers the period from the point of records on protest movements active from the 1970s and 1980s until fall of communist regimes in East-Central Europe. Therefore documents of major significance for my research were accessible here in the OSA collections, specifically funds of Records of Radio Free Europe.

Findings in OSA

In Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute my key focus was on Czechoslovak Unit in which I explored "Collection of Documents on 1968" and "Collection of Documents Relating to the Czechoslovak Opposition and Protest Movement" from the late 1970s and 1980s. Because of emerging of mass protest awareness in Czechoslovakia, actually for the first time in the history after the communist takeover in 1948, printed documents collected by RFE reveal important information on the subject. In the "Collection of Documents on 1968" I focused on telegrams, leaflets, and press during the country's occupation by Soviet troops. In "Collection of Documents Relating to the Czechoslovak Opposition and Protest Movement" my main focus was on files containing issue of Resistance, Dissidents, their Organizations and Periodicals, Cultural Criticism and Charta 77, and Texts by dissidents. From this files I was following records on underground alternative culture periodicals such as Czech magazine "Voknoviny", Slovak magazine "Fragment K" and "Jazz Section". Samizdat periodicals and protest writings of various social and interest groups such as Charta 77, Christian opposition circles were of equal importance to my study. In relation to Documents on 1968 I was studying how giving opinion changed and how it was individualized in sharing political jokes reported occasionally to RFE in the 1980s recorded in "Telephone Calls to the Czechoslovak Desk" from 1984-1987. Another important findings from OSA Archivum are related to the "Polish Underground Publications Unit" in which I searched for Printed Ephemera and Publications Based on Polish Underground Press. Both are related to Solidarnost movement in early 1980s Poland and surprisingly reveal Anti-

Government Propaganda such as boycott of official elections and satirical representations of the executors of the Martial Law. From Hungarian side I checked Gábor Demszky samizdat publication unit and focused on the role of László Rajk who created many book covers and illustrations for the samizdat editions (AB Kiadó), which is quite well documented (in the book *Földalatti vonalak, Budapest, ...*). For deeper exploration of oppositional artistic practices in Hungary I visited Artpool Art Research Center (Budapest) where I studied theoretical field of underground publishing and focused on artist's files such as Inconnu Group active in the 1980s. Although organized on different principles in many ways I found both archives complementary for the issues I deal with in my research.

Collaboration with other researchers

Parallel Archive helped me to meet frequent notions and various points of view on OSA Archivum as well as possibility of networking. I followed the documents uploaded by colleagues who are focused on similar topics. During my fellowship in OSA I met several researchers who deal with similar issues in their work so we stay in touch and consider to build research/symposium project.