Introduction

Zsuzsa László

> Therefore freedom is a twofold determi-
> nation in time.
> Miklós Erdély, "Time Möbius"[1]

Time Travelers: The Conception of Artpool

Möbius Film, showing a looped montage of presidents shaking hands, perpet-
ually flipping their position from left to right and back, was screened in 1972
by the Hungarian artist Miklós Erdély (1928–1986) in György Galántai's Chapel
Studio.[2] In his later text "Time Möbius," quoted above and paraphrased in the
title of this book, Erdély provides various poetical and paradoxical approxi-
mations of a kind of exchange relationship between our past and future selves
mutually determining each other. Erdély, though a well-informed and active
member of the innermost circles of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde, was also
committed to distancing himself from the artistic trends current at the time,
putting them in a wider historical perspective and finding digressive refer-
ences in scientific or esoteric literature, psychology, or the daily press. When
György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay founded Artpool in 1979 in Budapest and

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1   This line is taken from Erdély's poem "Idő-mőbiusz" published in *Sorozatművek* (Se-
    rial works), exhibition catalog (Székesfehérvár: Csók István Képtár, 1976/77), 34–35. The
    poem was published in English as part of Sven Spieker's "Texts by Conceptual Artists
    from Eastern Europe: Hungary" in *Post: Notes on Art in a Global Context* (blog), Museum
    of Modern Art, November 1, 2017, https://post.moma.org/texts-by-conceptual-artists-
    from-eastern-europe-hungary/4/.
2   László Beke, "Film Möbius-szalagra: Erdély Miklós munkásságáról" (Film on Möbius
    strip – On Miklós Erdély's work) *Filmvilág* (September 1987): 46.

started its ambitious projects based on Galántai's Active Archive manifesto,[3] Erdély's speculative, maverick attitude toward personal and historical time, and thus to art history, remained a formative experience. Artpool started out as an underground initiative with the aim to share and generate information on art practices not supported by the state-socialist regime. It continued the heritage of the Chapel Studio, a self-organized summer art space run by Galántai between 1970 and 1973 in the town of Balatonboglár, Hungary. Artpool primarily focused on local and international versions of conceptual, correspondence, and performance art, visual poetry, Fluxus, and other experimental art movements—and, no less importantly, on the perpetual reconceptualization of itself as an art institution.

Another inspiration came from the cooperation between Galántai and the Italian artist and collector G. A. Cavellini (1914–1990) involving his concept of *autostoricizzazione* (self-historicization). Similarly to Erdély's *Time Travel* photo series (1976) but more focused on self-promotion, Cavellini inscribed and fictionalized himself into history and the history of art as a time traveler. Artpool's collaboration with Cavellini culminated in Galántai and Klaniczay's *Life of the Statue Vivante*, a series of actions performed creating and wearing purpose-made outfits inscribed by Cavellini with the most important names of art history—a photo of one of these actions is featured on the cover of this book. The first of these actions, the iconic *Homage to Vera Mukhina*, took place in 1980 at Heroes' Square in Budapest, when Galántai and Klaniczay reenacted the Soviet sculptor Vera Mukhina's *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* (1937), though holding not a hammer and sickle but an art history book with a reproduction of the 1937 statue.[4] The performance series signifies an attitude toward history and self-historicization that, instead of trying to invent something never seen before, or determine the next step of (art) history, contrasts the live presence of the performers with the canon and the institutions of art history, and with public memorials and the museum's historical narrative. These *statues vivante*, revealing themselves as time travelers from the future, later

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3   György Galántai, "Active Archive, 1979–2003," in *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe*, eds. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay (Budapest: Artpool, 2013), 15, https://www.artpool.hu/archives_active.html.

4   Detailed documentation and description of all the performances of this project can be found in: Júlia Klaniczay, ed., *A Muhina Projekt: Létértelmezések Galántai György életművében = The Mukhina Project: Interpretations of Being in György Galántai's Oeuvre* (Budapest: Vintage Galéria, 2018) and at: https://artpool.hu/Galantai/perform/Muhina/.

visited an exhibition historicizing the art of the 1950s, which transformed so-cialist realism, originally a worldview, into an art-historical style of the past.[5] Galántai and Klaniczay's performance in that exhibition, in turn, distanced the museum's historical narrative into a background of objects that had lost their meanings but still surrounded the performers as an environment and a resource. Art history is transformed to material history, to an archive, from which we are not to learn, but in which we are to recognize the traces of yet-to-be-developed potentialities: objects for *transfunctionings*.[6] The third itera-tion—a scene from which is reproduced on this book's cover—took place in the storage rooms of the Savaria Museum in Szombathely, where the living statues playfully objectify themselves again, only to act out the "disturbing strangeness"[7] of the museumized objects taken out of time, in contrast to the empowered subjects of live art. The *statues vivant* of Galántai and Klan-iczay embody the "active archive," which serves as a critical institution and an art project at the same time, researching the future while archiving the present and structuring the past. As Galántai stated, an active archive "gen-erates the very material to be archived" through cooperation, exchange, and building of non-hierarchical networks, as well as through combining art-his-torical and artistic methodologies of research. It is future-oriented and em-ploys a dynamic approach to history "as an open artwork and as an activist artistic practice."[8] Thus Artpool's mission was and still is not only to preserve collected documents but also to feed them back into projects that circulate information internationally and provoke yet-to-be-realized ideas.

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5   *A huszadik század magyar művészete: Az "ötvenes évek"* = *Hungarian Art of the Twentieth Century: The "Fifties,"* exhibition catalog, curated by Péter Kovács and Márta Kovalovszky (Székesfehérvár: István Király Múzeum, 1981).

6   *Transfunctioning* is a term frequently used by György Galántai from 1974 on in con-nection with his artistic practice, especially his sculpture; see *Galántai: Életmunkák 1968–1993* = *Galántai: Lifeworks 1968–1993*, eds. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay (Bu-dapest: Artpool; Enciklopédia, 1996), 105–11.

7   Zsolt K. Horváth referred to Michel de Certeau's term from *L'écriture de l'histoire*, which was published in English as *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Co-lumbia University Press, 1988), in connection with the paradox of the museumization of the avant-garde and also Artpool's Active Archive concept. See Zsolt K. Horváth, "Lehetséges-e egyáltalán? Az avantgárd képzeletbeli archívuma," *MúzeumCafé* 55–56 (2006): 168–80.

8   Galántai, "Active Archive."

Artpool functioned as a parallel institution for ten years, running a "periodic" exhibition program, realizing events across a range of different venues,[9] publishing an art magazine, *Artpool Letter*,[10] organizing international correspondence art projects, and accumulating an indispensable archive of Fluxus, mail art, and experimental practices. Following the regime change in 1989 it was able to be converted to an NGO, and now, more than forty years after its founding, it operates as a department of Hungary's largest art institution, the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. During the years of its independent operations, Artpool endeavored to build up both the conceptual and practical frameworks of a public art institution composed of annually changing but interconnected research topics,[11] international networking projects, collaborations with universities, running an exhibition space, organizing public art projects, developing summer exhibitions in Kapolcs, launching, in 1995, one of the first art websites in Hungary, and systematically collecting, researching, publishing, exhibiting, digitizing, and historicizing the documents of neo-avant-garde and contemporary art, as well as Artpool's own history. This uncompromisingly ambitious program was increasingly disrupted by funding difficulties, as well as the challenge of professional sustainability. Several art historians participated in the projects, but the institution was still run by its founders, who redefined their roles from time to time.

"Artpool 40" Conference and Artist Archives in Eastern Europe

Whereas this institutional evolution constitutes a unique case study, Artpool has always sought to interpret the context of its activities and its own history translocally, within Eastern Europe and also as part of a decentralized

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9   This program was called Artpool's Periodical Space (APS) and consisted of fourteen art events realized at different venues between 1979 and 1984. See Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive*, 36–85; and https://artpool.hu/events79-91.html.

10   *AL*, which stood for *Aktuális Levél* (current letter) used in English as *Artpool Letter*, was a self-published, bookwork-like photocopied art magazine, which had eleven issues and was circulated in print runs of 300 to 500 copies between 1983 and 1985. For images and content summaries, see: https://artpool.hu/AL/al01.html.

11   For instance, 1993 was the year of Fluxus, 1994 was devoted to Miklós Erdély, 1996 to the internet, and 1999 to contexts. The program from 2000 to 2009 was organized around the conceptual interpretation of each numeral, zero through nine: https://www.artpool.hu/events-from92.html.

network. Though timelines differ locally, in the second half of the Cold War so-called parallel cultural spheres were developed in many Eastern European countries governed by state-socialist regimes that assigned some degree of political-ideological control over art institutions. With links to both the peripheries of state institutions and the grey zones between them, as well as to dissident movements, this network of self-organized initiatives, journals, art spaces, and archives gradually became more collective, strategic, organized, and international. Within this realm, archives became important resources for various activities, including the organization of concept- and mail art projects, as well as for the historicization of avant-garde art.[12] On the one hand, artists documented their own and their colleagues' activities because state institutions ignored, marginalized, and at the same time supervised, inspected, and ridiculed them. Thus, though self-documentation was an essential element of neo-avant-garde art practices worldwide, in Eastern Europe it was also meeting a need, since artists were forced to be their own curators, critics, archivists, and art historians—and to construct alternative accounts and historicizations.[13] Archives constituted a means to attain relative self-reliance and self-assigned power and for artists to write their own histories. Archives built by Eastern European artists are also counter-collections in the sense that they valued information, systematic knowledge, networks, international integration, and contextualization instead of aiming for commercial value—or to be used as raw material for individual artistic practices. In the last few decades this self-organized network of parallel archives has had to go through different versions of post-socialist transitions in addition to the inevitable transition from the semi-private to the public sphere.

In Artpool's new institutional situation as part of a state museum, it has become crucial to reanimate and strengthen Artpool's transregional network. Therefore, an international conference was organized in 2020 to celebrate the

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12   For critical and reflective approaches to parallel cultures and institutions in Eastern Europe, see Reuben Fowkes, ed., "Actually Existing Artworlds of Socialism," special issue, *Third Text* 32, no. 153 (July 2018); Edit Sasvári, Hedvig Turai, Sándor Hornyik, eds., *Art in Hungary 1956–1980: Doublespeak and Beyond* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018); Dóra Hegyi, Zsuzsa László, Zsóka Leposa, and Enikő Róka eds., *1971 — Parallel Nonsynchronism* (Bucharest: Punch; Budapest: tranzit.hu, 2021).

13   Zdenka Badovinac, "Interrupted Histories," in *Prekinjene Zgodovine = Interrupted Histories* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2006).

fortieth anniversary of its founding.[14] This volume grew from selected papers presented at the conference, which aimed to stitch Artpool's specific example into a polyphonic narrative of parallel institutions established in the countries of Eastern Europe. The conference took Artpool's Active Archive concept as a common point of departure and explored its contemporary interpretations, applications, and similarities with and differences from other inspiring archival projects as well as their critical readings. From the wide-ranging pool of approaches presented at the conference, this volume focuses on a turning point that not only Artpool is facing but one that is relevant for many other artist archives and the networks they have created.

This turn is related to yet also distinct from "archive fever" (Jacques Derrida's term) of the 1990s, "archival impulse" (after Hal Foster's 2004 article) of the 2000s, and "performing archives" in relation to contemporary curatorial and artistic practices.[15] Whereas the sociological as well as artistic deconstruction of certain archival principles has revealed the politically determined structures of knowledge production, in the specific context of East Central European regime changes, archives—both self-organized and institutional (including declassified state security archives)—have become fertile grounds for rewriting, correcting, and emancipating, but also for forging, alternative histories. However, as described above in connection with Artpool's Active Archive concept, archives can be approached not only as archeological grounds, as imprints of an era, as passive objects of scientific or artistic research, but also as subjects, as active, self-conscious agents maneuvering through history. Thus the phrase "artist archive" here does not stand for

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14   Artpool 40—Active Archives and Art Networks, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, February 20–21, 2020. The conference was organized by Júlia Klaniczay, Emese Kürti, and Zsuzsa László from Artpool Art Research Center—Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest in collaboration with Judit Bodor (University of Dundee) and Beáta Hock (Universität Leipzig).

15   Several publications and articles are available that give an overview of all these discourses and artistic as well as curatorial practices. See, for example, Wolfgang Ernst, *Das Rumoren der Archive: Ordnung aus Unordnung* (Berlin: Merve, 2002); Charles Merewether, ed., *The Archive*: Documents of Contemporary Art (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); or a succinct summary, including an Eastern European perspective, by Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez: "Archive(s)," in *Atlas of Transformation*, eds. Zbynek Baladran and Vít Havránek (Prague: tranzit.cz; Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2010) 58–59. I refrain from citing a comprehensive bibliography here.

the sheer collection of documentation of an artist's own activities but, much more, for conceptually conceived self-organized and future-oriented systems for archiving, structuring, processing, historicizing, sharing, and circulating documents and information. Their formation is driven by institutional critique but, in the long term, they cannot avoid contact with institutions and turning their initial institutional critique on themselves. Rather than spatial embodiments of memory politics, artist archives are discussed in this volume as both initiators and objects of institutional critique. Travelers in "Möbius time," they cannot remain intact by their own evolving history, but they may pertain their capacity for action and agency through reflecting on their temporality. This book addresses the challenge of continuity, sustainability, and institutionalization of archives established by Eastern European artists, i.e., how they survive and stay authentic in radically changed contexts compared to the ones in which they were established. The authors of the volume, eleven internationally renowned scholars, propose innovative museological, curatorial, academic, and artistic perspectives that can be applied to discuss artist archives and archival practices not as static time capsules but as self-organized institutions actively shaping their own histories and futures.

As an opening to the reader, **Kristine Stiles** shares a Henri Bergson–inspired poetic phenomenology of the archive that materializes time experienced as a fleeting dividing line where future continuously becomes past. She gives a generously personal but conceptually reflective insight into the future-oriented motives and experiences behind her archive, which is are now part of the Duke University Libraries. Though based in the US, during her travels to both Western and Eastern Europe, Stiles encountered approaches to archiving that inspired and informed the foundation of her archive, which integrates—in the hope of potential, but still unknown, future relevance—personal and professional correspondence, artists' writings and books, ephemera, and the documents of art events and her own curatorial projects, including several related to Eastern European artistic practices.

The volume then proceeds with conceptual proposals, derived from artistic practices, that have a potential to dislodge a static understanding of archives. **Sven Spieker**'s chapter, interpreting the works of Andrea Fraser and John Baldessari from the US, Sándor Altorjai from Hungary, Cornelia Schleime from the DDR, the subREAL group from Romania, and the MAMŰ studio, originally active in Târgu Mureş, Romania, exposes archiving through the necessarily complementary dualism of accumulation and destruction, remembrance and oblivion, transparency and obscurity, structure and dis-

order. Spieker argues that artistic disruption of the order or integrity of archives does not aim at annihilation but is rather a *kulturtechnik* employed to adapt collections of documents into new contexts. He also points out that Eastern European artists taking the liberty not only to aggregate but also to discard and rework documents manifest a desire to be "archive workers rather than archival objects."

Daniel Grúň also focuses on the interplay between archival and artistic processes in the context of Eastern European art scenes, where artist themselves were historically the main documenters of artistic activities, and thus became their own historiographers. It was characteristic of the Cold War era that actions and exhibitions were often staged just for the sake of documentation, without the possibility to make them public, whereas their records circulated afterward in a wide range of circuits in ever more globalized artistic networks. In his essay, Grúň juxtaposes two projects, one by Stano Filko first realized in cooperation with Miloš Laky and Ján Zavarský, and the other by Dóra Maurer. In both cases, artists' (self-)documentation and archive building were not activities external to their artistic practice but comprised an essential and collaborative part of it, as is more and more recognized by recent art history writing. In the specific cases discussed here, radical reduction and abstraction of the artistic material and individual touch through mechanical transformations can also provide a conceptual framework for the inevitable reorganization and transfiguration of artist archives surviving the era of their foundation.

Artist archives also function as in-between zones of public and private, social and artistic, and historical and fictional spheres, as **David Crowley**'s essay uncovers. Crowley discusses a group of artists and intellectuals active in Moscow in the 1970–80s who researched, documented, and created pseudoscientific taxonomies of such social phenomena as the rise of religious sects in an atheist society. With a crosstalk between conceptualism and the poetics of "bureaucratic aesthetics," artists such as Ilya Kabakov, Viktor Pivovarov, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, and the members of the Moscow Conceptualists created catalogs of ritualistic use of ordinary objects. Crowley presents these practices as artistic means to document and create material histories.

Zdenka Badovinac also discusses artist archives as agents of the historicization of ignored and marginalized subjects and voices in specific historical contexts, starting from the regime changes and Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and leading to the repeated migration crises of the 2010s. At the same time, she raises the crucial question of what museums and art institutions can

learn from such self-organized archives and how it is possible to integrate them—while preserving their authenticity—into more rigid and controlled museological systems. Using examples from her own curatorial practice, e.g., the 2006 exhibition *Interrupted Histories* and *The Heritage of 1989* from 2017, Badovinac reflects on the significance of surveillance, interruptions, losses, and absences as constituents of the histories that archives created and processed by Eastern European artists can tell without the spectacularization of repression or misery.

Artistic self-historicization, though an alternative to institutional history, does not necessarily perform all its reflective and critical potentials. **Lina Džuverović** calls attention to the need for the feminist reevaluation of previously unreflected upon gendered subordinations and omissions in the historicization of artist groups formed around progressive ideas of collectivism, and she particularly examines those in the context of Yugoslavia. The feminist revisiting of Eastern European art histories is complicated by the fact that whereas socialist societies ostensibly embraced women's emancipation and equality, latent sexism was present in both state and parallel culture. Comparing authorship as indicated in the catalogs and films of the Slovenian OHO group with art-historical publications and present-day interviews made with the group's members, she deconstructs and uncovers ignored mechanisms of marginalizing female participants.

The chapters that follow unpack case studies of particular Eastern European artist archives that worked out generative solutions to deal with the dilemmas of independence, collaboration, participation, canonization, and institutionalization posed by changing cultural-political contexts in Eastern Europe and beyond. As **Emese Kürti**'s chapter testifies, neither the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio of György Galántai nor Artpool was conceived as a genuinely underground venue. Artpool had to survive in the loopholes of the system but, on some occasions in the 1980s, was able to cooperate with state-run institutions and developed strategies that it can still rely on now as part of a state museum. Kürti dismantles the narrative of the heroic avant-garde and argues that Artpool's ambition, already in the 1980s, went beyond the informal and contingent sphere of the underground and instead aimed to expand, not subvert, the possibilities allowed by a Marxist understanding of culture.

Closest to Artpool's institutional consciousness was the Polish artistic duo KwieKulik's mission to transform their Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation into a state-financed public institution. **Tomasz Załuski** uncovers—as a potential history—systematic but repeatedly failed proposals for-

mulated by KwieKulik for cultural policy makers and thus underscores the contrived nature of historicizing Eastern European art scenes through an oppositional framework of official versus non-official spheres. For KwieKulik's institutional critique, which—similar to that of György Galántai, as explored by Emese Kürti—was not fighting against but for socialist modernization, Załuski proposes the term *alternative official*. In addition to providing parallels, these case studies shed light onto the particularities of each archive's history. Though the cultural politics of Poland in the 1970s allowed much more optimism regarding the possible neo-avant-garde reform of socialist art and its institutions, in Hungary of the 1990s Artpool was able to open its public venues and ventured to become an independent organization whereas the KwieKulik archive continued negotiations with state institutions for decades and, after many failed attempts, it became part of the Museum of Modern Art Warsaw only recently.

Ewa Partum's Galeria Adres (1972–77) in Łódź also functioned as a tactical institution—first public, then semi-public, and finally underground—that shared information and documents collected through international correspondences fueled by the emerging mail art networks. **Karolina Majewska-Güde** compares the resulting archive of Ewa Partum to that of the Austrian artist VALIE EXPORT. Both archives were established under similar artistic impulses and institutionalized in the 2010s, but after in-depth exploration, they manifest very different organizational principles. The symbiosis between private space, private life, and institutional functioning—also present in the practice of KwieKulik and to a lesser extent in Artpool—gave rise, in the case of Ewa Partum, to an archive still very much attached to the artistic and curatorial practices of the artist, which are intentionally resistant to systematization and spectacularization. At the same time, VALIE EXPORT's archive was able to be converted to a professional research center that, while also representing the artist, is less centered on giving insight into the artist's curatorial, archival, and artistic processes but rather presents her as a public intellectual and as a researcher herself.

Artpool, as well as other artist archives, has also acted as its own historiographer, recycling the documents of earlier projects and inserting them into new constellations. As early as the 1990s, Artpool started to digitize its collection through its website, which, as pointed out in the chapter by **Judit Bodor** and **Roddy Hunter**, did not create a secondary reproduction of the hitherto paper-based archive but, on the contrary, actualized Artpool's "focus on information and data as the currency of exchange." Thus the online presentations

of several Artpool projects are not sheer remediations but are granted a second life and a previously unimaginable accessibility that also poses challenges of maintenance.

We believe the wide range of perspectives in this volume offer applicable insights and methodologies for scholars and practitioners working with or interested in artist archives whose previous interpersonal networks and utopian translocality are now not only driven to adapt to volatile, globalized, and digitalized environments but to proactively interact with them.