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The Making of a Theory. Situating the Global Perspectives of Identity.

During the 1960's in Hungary the colliding political powers and ideologies of the West and East created a cultural context in which a double-colonization came into existence. This resulted in a schizophrenic identity, which was defined by the opposition of socialist realism and the idioms of the Western narrative, leaving the Hungarian art and its theory in a limbo. Through the case study of the reception of abstract art in Hungary I propose a model, which will negotiate between the two extremes, defining: what is it, that we call abstract art in Hungary.

After the revolution of 1956 the official cultural policy was more tolerant towards what they called 'abstract art' (i.e. non-figurative art). The Spring Exhibition in 1957 was the biggest and only official show of abstract works. The exhibition was doomed to be a failure. The reason was the very nature of abstract art: it was not usable for political propaganda, as it could not reflect any content, other than the problems of form and medium. It was deemed apolitical. Therefore, instead of prohibiting the presentation of abstract art, it was marginalized and discredited; its theory and history was interpreted from a socialist realist perspective. The tradition of contemporary Hungarian art and art history was colonized by the communist ideology, neglecting the local context.

Because of the marginalized nature of abstract tendencies in Hungary, it was perceived as a means of opposition; becoming paradoxically a politically active factor. The resistance was based on the notion, that the abstract tendencies reflected the *true* tradition of Hungarian art, which was *modern* – i.e. Western –, and therefore, not part of the Eastern Bloc. The argument supporting this position was augmented by notions adopted from the Western art historical master narrative – also neglecting the local cultural frame. This could be considered self-colonization, from the perspective of the Western canon. We can witness this for example in a debate about abstract art, starting in 1961, in the prominent critical journal, *Új Írás*; and also in the very important exhibitions IPARTERV (1968) and R Exhibition (1970), and their critical reception. In these cases the abstract works were interpreted as *art informel*, hard edge, pop art, etc., neglecting the fact that they did not fit these categories.

In my research I will aim to give a comparative reading of the described phenomena

along the lines of the horizontal art history, proposed by Piotr Piotrowski. I will examine the products and reception of the abstract art, presented at the aforementioned exhibitions, describing the *differentia specifica* of the genuine translations of the Western tendencies in a socialist context. My goal is to define, what abstract art in Hungary is; but from a global perspective, taking into consideration the altered functions of the artworks and their beholders. The democratization of art led to the democratization of the beholder, in an ultimately totalitarian political context, creating its own identity, located somewhere between the lines.