

REPORT ON OSA BLINKEN FELLOWSHIP, February-March 2025

KATA BENEDEK: WITHIN AND OUTWITH CENSORSHIP

To support my upcoming projects, I proposed two—perhaps unexpectedly interrelated—research topics: (1) state-socialist queer representation and (2) the figure of György Aczél. Both are centered around contemporary understandings of state-socialist censorship, examined through the particular lens of Miklós Haraszti's seminal work, *The Aesthetics of Censorship / The Velvet Prison: Artists Under State Socialism*. By revisiting key aspects of the mechanisms and effects of censorship, my inquiry integrates theoretical approaches with evidence-based, pragmatic, reconstructive research. This involves a multidisciplinary exploration that weaves together political, legal, social, and cultural realities, aiming to deepen our comprehension of how censorship functioned both in official structures and in more nuanced, informal ways.

I. THE ACZÉL ARCHIVES

OSA x MTA: The Aczél-Archives

As part of my pre-research for the forthcoming exhibition on Aczél and censorship at the Open Society Archives, I have examined the Aczél files in multiple locations, primarily at OSA and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (MTA). György Aczél, the most influential cultural policymaker of the Kádár era, remains a deeply polarizing figure in contemporary remembrance.

At OSA, I have gone through all available files on Aczél, including official and unofficial indexes, background reports, collected articles, and most of his published texts. My primary aim was not to engage in retrospective evaluation but rather to grasp the internal logic of the political and institutional operations that shaped the cultural field at the time. To contextualize this research, I have also revisited contemporary theoretical and critical literature, including the works of Miklós Haraszti, Iván Szelényi, and György Konrád, alongside samizdat publications. I have read full articles from original samizdat sources, covering political and philosophical matters as well as critical reflections on cultural phenomena.

At MTA, I explored a different facet of the Aczél archives—his private yet inherently professional correspondence. These documents had remained confidential at Aczél's own request to protect those who were in contact with him. Despite the challenging process of accessing these materials, I gained insights into his style of communication, which offers valuable nuance to dominant narratives on both the structure of censorship and Aczél's role within it. These findings will contribute

significantly to the exhibition, providing a more layered understanding of cultural governance and control in socialist Hungary.

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II. QUEER CULTURAL CAPITAL IN POST-STALINIST HUNGARIAN PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC'S CULTURAL FIELDS

Inspired by my findings in the Aczél Archives and building on a hypothesis from my dissertation and my paper *Deconstructing the Imagined Queer Censorship in the State-Socialist East-Central Europe: The Hungarian Case*, I have finally written my long-planned paper on the Bourdieusian framing of queer artifacts in the late socialist cultural fields.

Abstract

I propose that instead of focusing on the real or imagined difficulties of releasing artefacts featuring LGBT themes under state socialist regimes, we should consider examples that gained success for the creators. With a careful application of field theory to state-socialist cultural fields, I build on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital and argue for the introduction of the term queer cultural capital—which encompasses both knowledge derived from lived experience and/or acquired knowledge of queerness, as well as the skill set necessary to navigate these topics within state-socialist cultural fields successfully. The aim of the inquiry is not to tackle the exact forms of knowledge but to expand our contemporary understanding of state-socialist ECE queer epistemic and discursive realities.

To provide empirical evidence, I will examine four highly successful cultural careers in which queer issues were significantly present, either consistently or occasionally. I analyze four individuals from different backgrounds (*habitus*) and across various cultural subfields: the Soviet-Russian emigrant visual artist El Kazovszkij (1948–2008), who identified as a gay transsexual man; the lesbian peasant author Erzsébet Galagóczi (1930–1989); the straight male film director Károly Makk

(1925–2017), from a bourgeois countryside background; and the straight male author György Moldova (1934–2022), the son of a poor Jewish family from Budapest. Despite their distinct biographies, artistic genres, and social and cultural capitals, what unites them is that they featured queer elements into their work and capitalized on them within the post-Stalinist Hungarian cultural, social, and political fields.

III. MY CONTRIBUTION:

THE FORTHCOMING GRUNWALSKY COLLECTION AT THE OSA

During my residency at the Open Society Archives, I reached out to Judit Tóth and cinematographer-director Ferenc Grunwalsky to gain access to their unfinished documentary from 1986-87, which followed the trial of Giulia, a 19-year-old transgender woman in a Budapest court. I discovered that while the documentary was never completed, the uncut footage—including interviews with Giulia and others involved in the case—still existed. With the support of Zsuzsanna Zádori and Dariusz Krolkowski, we successfully digitized approximately ten hours of this historically significant material. This unique footage, with national, regional, and even global relevance, now enriches the OSA archives. Additionally, thanks to my initiative, Zsuzsanna Zádori and Judit Tóth are now in discussions to collaborate on establishing a dedicated Grunwalsky collection at OSA, ensuring that his work is preserved and made accessible for future research. Beyond securing its archival future, I am committed to further exploring this material, analyzing its socio-historical significance, and working toward a comprehensive study based on this footage.

IV. FORTHCOMING RESEARCH: AIDS IN THE EASTERN BLOC

During my stay, I also explored the Radio Free Europe collections on the AIDS crisis in the Eastern Bloc, which contain background studies, radio reports, and clippings from various sources. In addition to these collected folders, I expanded the research by conducting targeted searches within national archival systems, uncovering further documentation on the subject. This material offers a rich foundation for a comparative historical reconstruction of a largely underexplored aspect of AIDS history, particularly in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. By drawing on these newly accessed archival materials, I aim to take this research further, ultimately producing an in-depth study that situates the region within the broader global discourse on the AIDS epidemic.

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