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**„FORCED COURSE OF ACTION”**

**Specific Aspects of the Pedagogical Turn of the 1970s  
in the work of Péter Forgács and the Balázs Béla Studio**

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## ABSTRACT/ THESES

Contemporary art discourse uses the term *educational turn* to refer to those process-, community- and communication-based art practices that emerged around the turn of the millennium, seeking to break free from art institutions, and questioning the scene itself as well as traditional notions of authorship and reception. As with many trends in contemporary art, its roots go back to the critical art and critical pedagogies of the 1960s and 1970s. As to the sporadic appearance of such practices in Hungary, however, the artistic contextualisation and processing of local achievements of critical art pedagogy of the seventies was largely missing. With my dissertation and the closely related, complementary exhibition, I would like to contribute to the possibility of such connections by presenting and analysing two specific pedagogical/creative undertakings of the late Kádár era, which were rooted in the artistic field but realized in the field of education or public culture. By highlighting the term 'Forced Course of Action' in the title, I suggest that although the exchange between the artistic and pedagogical fields in that period, in retrospect, seems more organic when compared to what we have today, this was in many ways due to the constraints and limitations created by the ideologically and culturally restrictive policies of the socialist system.

The dissertation starts with an introduction to the environment of public education in the Kádár era (Chapter II). Chapter III describes Péter Forgács' complex experiment of aesthetic education (1974 – 1978) by analysing Forgács' own theoretical texts, a documentary film on the subject (*Objective Picture*) and the film he produced with children, *Gyerek mozi* („Children's Movie”). Chapter IV introduces “social distribution”, a specific cultural initiative of the Balázs Béla Studio in the period between 1969 and 1980. This chapter leads me to the plan of my master work (Chapter V), as I will be carrying out the iconological analysis of the educational films included in the social distribution within the context of an exhibition.

My starting point was the impression that the pedagogically relevant achievements of the artists and intellectuals whose work is treated in my dissertation are either faded out from cultural memory – for example, Péter Forgács' educational activity was virtually forgotten –, or its achievements are only available for a very narrow circle of professionals. While the output of the experimental cinematographers belonging to Balázs Béla Studio (BBS), and even the occasional pedagogical projects made by them, has been researched and canonized by art history (i.e. the work of Miklós Erdély, Dóra Maurer, Imre Bak), the contemporary reception of the Studio's

proper project of public education shows a specific unbalance: while its progressive legacy has been taken on by small documentary film or film theory workshops, and within largely marginalized individual efforts, with a low cultural impact, the broad representational activity of the Hungarian Academy of Arts canonizes it in a conservative context. I propose that such idiosyncrasies of the reception can only be explained through a sociological analysis of the artistic milieu and the history of different attempts at cultural hegemony since the regime change. Although this is not a sociological dissertation, while analysing concrete artistic attitudes, I will try to give certain clues as to what might have had an impact on the present-day reception (or the lack of it) of a certain kind of cultural production of the Kádár era.

My research also focuses on the pressures, as well as on individual and collective aims, that fostered (or, in cases, provoked) the „educational turn” of creative artists, which either involved a proper educational praxis or it appeared „only” as a thematic, contextual choice. I propose that in most cases in the Kádár era children culture became an important field of operation for those artists and intellectuals who found themselves in a peripheral situation in the artistic field, either as a result of explicit political pressure or of a personal choice of separation.

In examining Péter Forgács's complex experiment in aesthetic education, I come to several important conclusions:

1. It was because of its experimental nature, that the experiment was not effective enough in integrating its innovations into the school system.
2. Although Péter Forgács' school activities were an open critique and subversion of the official pedagogical culture, his position as a researcher, and the peripheral position of visual education in general, protected him from eventual retaliation.
3. Forgács' programme is related to the ideology of Marxist-based critical pedagogy. His methodology fits well with critical pedagogical ideas, as his pedagogy is clearly inspired by the (Western) Marxist intellectual tradition.

While in the case of Péter Forgács' experiment my research is original, the activity of the Balázs Béla Studio is a richly studied domain. This is one of the reasons why I decided to develop this part of my research within the exhibition medium. The novelty my research presents is that I analyse the selected films within the intersection of pedagogy and art field. With the close reading and iconological analysis of the films in the exhibition I want to shift attention to the field of education history research; I wish

that the stories and issues presented in the films gave a certain professional munition to Hungarian educators, at least by enlarging the scope of their own history writing. The analysis of social distribution and pedagogical films lead me to two conclusions:

1. The strategy of social film distribution directly drew on the degenerated ideological slogans of the regime and the empty organisational forms of social life, and filled them with real, left-wing critical content, thus marking out a feasible way for Marxist cultural production. The peculiarity of the current Hungarian cultural discourse is that this context, which is in my opinion clearly neo-leftist, does not even appear in the accounts. The filmmakers themselves interpret their former activity in the framework of an either liberal or nationalist critique of socialism, or do not attribute any political aspect to it.
2. The films *Nevelésügyi sorozat*, and *Kísérleti iskola* (both made in the BBS and part of the social distribution) I will analyse in the dissertation are not simply films with a subject matter chosen from the field of education, but also their methodology can be considered a pedagogical experiment.

The aim of my dissertation to explore and reconstruct certain events of the past was achieved through content analysis of primary sources and through the analysis of selected literature in the field of education and film studies. My research on subjects of the dissertation (Péter Forgács's experiment; BBS's social distribution) were supported by interviews with the creators and participants. My doctoral work is an art-based research and as such, the dissertation and the masterwork (exhibition) are treated as an integral unit. In my research, I have been using a combination of classical research methods (resulting in the dissertation) and artistic tools (creating social, dialogical situations, manipulating archival materials, visually enhancing certain elements of the research, etc.), depending on what kind of means allow for the most thorough exploration of the given problems and phenomena.