

# The state of the arts in Hungary today

Culture, cultural policy, cultural management

**Kálmán Rubovszky and Katalin Szöllösi** In order to analyse the most important issues in current Hungarian cultural life we need to examine both from a logical and historical point of view how the concept of ‘culture’ has been defined in Hungary. In order to discuss contemporary attitudes we need to enumerate those definitions of culture which affect the principles and practices of culture in Hungary today. We then provide an overview of the historical facts that – whether denied or supported – underlie today’s Hungarian cultural life.

The brief democratic development following World War II was based on an ideology which made Hungarian culture subject to the conquering Soviet culture, and Hungarian cultural life to actual political tasks. Stalinism demanded ‘surrender without conditions’ and the concept of culture could only be derived from political practice. After suppressing the 1956 revolution, the country could be governed only by more democratic methods than in the previous period and in culture as well as in politics a more liberal definition of ‘culture’ was created, which represented very well the ambivalent character of the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

## Definitions of culture

The debate sharpened around two major topics. One of them was: how to define the range of ‘culture’; the other questioned whether the concept of ‘culture’ is value-free or gives preference to certain values. Regarding the

range of culture, Attila Ágh represents one of the extreme views by giving the widest definition of culture. He says that culture is ‘the ontological environment, in which man lives: the humanized nature, the system of social relationships and the world of specifically humanized human subjects’ – in fact ‘the concept expressing the whole of human world’. Thus Attila Ágh considers both material and spiritual culture form a cultural whole, while both Iván Vitányi and Vilmos Voigt exclude material culture from the concept, because they define this as civilization and say that only the personal, individual side of civilization belongs to culture, within a socio-economic formation. It is worth mentioning that this concept includes physical culture (sports, physical skills, etc.). Péter Józsa would exclude this physical aspect, because he believes only the reflexes of these factors made in the individual belong to culture, ‘the elements of

knowledge, values, reflexes, spiritual and emotional instincts, behaviour models and patterns, habits and superstitions’. This matches with statements by others, according to which ‘culture is the brain of mankind’.

Everyday practice narrows the perception of culture much more than we see in the above-mentioned scholars’ arguments. Culture is involved with sciences, arts and public education, for sciences, arts and languages, or most narrowly for education and arts – but always taking into consideration the material world of culture as well as the spiritual side of it. Thus, when we examine the eligibility of contemporary Hungarian culture, we have to take into account its everyday range of existence.

Another issue is whether culture gives preference to certain values or is value-free. Most scholars said that culture could be equated with what is valuable, and valuable can be equated with freedom in the Marxist sense. The essence of this is that people are free if they learn the natural and social laws acting in their environment and are able to master these without limiting the similar freedom of another person. Based on this, István Hermann says that the culture that does not meet these requirements cannot be considered as culture, but as anti-cultural activity. László Garai and József Barna, drawing on Soviet aesthetics, with Béla Köpeczi and Dezső Bujdosó referring to the ideas of Marx, share the same opinion. Alternatively, Iván Vitányi and Vilmos Voigt consider culture to be value-free.

Despite the differences between the already mentioned scientific concepts, according to the everyday definition of culture, it is not value-free but rather constitutes an area of human behaviour which carries positive values. Thus, if we say that somebody is cultured we mean this is a good person.

We said above that we would describe the historical preconditions forming the basis of Hungarian cultural life. There is no scope in this paper to give an overview of the history of Hungarian culture. We prefer to present the characteristics of the 20th century. The cultural products of the highest level were usually free from any state, political or private demands. However, there were eras influenced by specific events: the Soviet Republic in 1919, the *irredenta* and *sovinist* tendencies of the Horthy regime in the period between the two world wars, Stalinism in the 50s and demands of ‘soft dictatorship’ from the 60s, when cultural products could only be categorized as ‘supported’, ‘permitted’ or ‘prohibited’.

Meanwhile, the mechanism of training for culture and public education functioned as part of cultural life, changing with the years but following similar laws. In the beginning of the century this was called popular education, education of the nation, after the World War II it was called free education, from the 1950s again popular education, from the 1970s public education. Creative, professional science and arts had often differentiated themselves from the mechanism that was to make them widespread and popular by means of an apparatus imposing political objectives on science and arts. Those who shape today’s cultural life criticize mostly the cultural reflexes that were created by Soviet example in the 1950s and try to get rid of them. A typical example is that even in the 1960s playing music in theatres was suspicious, because instead of pure philosophy it entertained in the Western style. It should be spurned just as should Coca-Cola, also from the West. Meanwhile the arts and amateur arts movement followed Soviet-type guidelines in the 1950s, first by regulations, later by hidden mechanisms. For example, it was obligatory to attract the largest audience for Soviet films, second to the Hungarian ones.

The cinemas were given bonuses based on these figures.

### Houses of culture

In the 1950s Soviet-type culture houses were established throughout Hungary. These had a large hall, suitable for political gatherings of the communist party as well as for theatre and cinema. Besides this, the culture house had a library and smaller rooms for group activities, amateur arts and village community activities, where earlier there were no other cultural institutions besides the church. Others argue that the culture house as a typical Soviet institution was established to concentrate certain chosen activities and restrict civil initiatives in the field of culture. This had the advantage of controlling the activity of the population as well as enforcing state ideology.

Later these houses of culture were changed into culture centres, which served for public education purposes as well. This was the era of public education, beginning in the 1970s. This type of institution was still under state control but civil initiatives and demands became more relevant, especially from the 1980s on. The state still considered these culture houses as the most important centres of culture and most of the state budget allocated for cultural purposes went to them. However, with the spread of television and later, with the massive increase in second jobs, the attendance at culture centres decreased. So institutions chose between two alternatives: either to compensate for the drop in income with central budget support, or to organize public entertainment adjusting to the low level demanded by the masses. The culture centres have tried both alternatives but because of the central budget in the 1980s these institutions have become more and more the place for public entertainment, often hired for events organized

by other institutions. Although many people still indicate the positive sides of these institutions in spreading culture they are now being sold – due to the increasing expenses of operation and the lessening of their functions – often for non-cultural, commercial, entertainment purposes.

### Education of culture

It is also part of the recent history of cultural life that while higher education in sciences and arts began earlier, university and college training for those who were to distribute culture only began in 1956. This can be compared to adult education training at universities worldwide. For example, in 1971 the Department of Adult and Public Education was launched at the University of Debrecen and the Institute of Culture in Budapest became the centre of scientific research in this field. Almost 2000 students have since graduated from this faculty throughout the country, and this is considered by many as a relevant result. However, some indicate that while ideological subjects were previously stressed during the training, now the role of professional subjects should be emphasized. That is why many of these faculties try to develop a programme resembling an arts management training at a western European university.

### Political shades in cultural life today

Characterizing Hungarian cultural life today we can say that it reflects the shades represented by the political parties of the Parliament.

The Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) follows closely the institutional system of the former regime, as most of their members were 'reform communists' during the time of the failure of the party state. The socialists argue that party-state direction of culture was wrong but even during the dictatorship the state

sacrificed more for culture, and within this for public education, than does the new government after the political changes. In the new situation low quality mass products, best sellers, record breakers, gutter press and the business approach to culture dominate cultural life. Theatres are struggling, works of art are not purchased, cultural institutions are not used for cultural purposes and so the sorry tale goes. This may later cause irrecoverable damage.

The leading party of the coalition government, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) is conscious of the problems but, with reference to other problems, such as paying compensation for the victims of the past 40 years, it has to diminish rather than increase the support for culture. In the central budget, culture had always been supported according to the residuum principle (i.e. culture gets what remains from the budget after other sectors have been supplied) and although the Parliament Assembly mostly consists of intellectuals, they cannot change this situation at the present. Besides, like past regimes as well as the Socialist Party – although on other grounds – the present government supposes a cultural system where certain values have privilege.

The party-state preferred freedom in a Marxist sense. (In reality the party accepted only those works of art and actions that fitted into its existing or long-term political objectives.) The present government states that Christian and national values have highly important standards in cultural life (according to the interests of the present coalition). At the same time, the government intends to centralize – again – to a certain extent the direction taken by culture, according to their preferred values. However, it is prevented in this by the democratic opposition, the Association

of Liberal Democrats (SZDSZ) and the Association of Young Democrats (FIDESZ) who immediately start criticizing the government.

In general the government tries to get rid of funding culture in as many cases as possible and give space to business enterprises while stimulating cultural institutions to look for sponsorship and support from Hungarian and foreign foundations. It willingly patronizes the church, as – with a steady fall in living standards – the government counts on cultural and charitable help from the church. That is why it has to enforce that the church reoccupies schoolbuildings, which used to be church property. This may later do as much harm as good, since in the meantime state schools have been developed in the former church buildings and have become outstanding workshops of intellectual training. Their closing would mean destroying our cultural values. According to the Association of Liberal Democrats (SZDSZ), cultural life cannot be determined by regulations, and the government should not be considering what cultural events to interfere with, but what to distance itself from. The SZDSZ considers that the cultural policy to-be-developed has to overcome three historical challenges. First, to stop the deterioration of the human infrastructure, second, to end the centralized and ideological state control and, third to elaborate a government policy concerning those just beginning to act as intermediaries between information and culture (media).

We have already mentioned the first challenge. To the second we would add that the Liberal Democrats – as well as the government – consider it beneficial to replace the centralized direction of culture by local government and a 'mixed-owners' system, in which centralized state property, property of local governments

and private property of companies, foundations, associations and individuals can live side by side. Seen this way, the problem lies not with Hungarian culture but with its institutional system.

Regarding the third challenge, the Hungarian cultural government should consider the challenges of the so-called 'post-industrial' economic development. What we see in developed countries is that the importance of product sectors has decreased and that of the service sector has increased. Besides education, mass communication forms part of the latter, which would need the introduction of an adequate media law (presently being prepared in Hungary). The problem facing both the government parties and the opposition is to work out how the government could take part in culture under the new circumstances.

#### **Government's role in cultural life**

We can distinguish four basic models in public support for culture. The first, the Facilitator state supports culture through indirect subsidies, such as tax allowances, as happens in the USA. The Patron state allocates support for culture through an independent body, the Arts Council. The third attitude of state is that of a Manager, considering culture as part of the welfare system, and establishing a Ministry of Cultural Affairs in order to function in the cultural market directly as a purchaser or funder, as in most European countries (e.g. France). The fourth, the Engineer attitude that characterized the totalitarian party-states, which wanted to dominate every phase of cultural processes and governed by 'manual control'.

The cultural experts believe the last-mentioned is no longer wanted in Hungary, and our circumstances can rather be compared with the patron-and-manager attitude. Naturally,

the facilitator attitude for tax policy cannot be missed either. Thus the government has to realize that the market plays a determining role in cultural life. But it should not, on the other hand, give up shaping and influencing the cultural market. In this respect there is an agreement that cultural policy cannot be exclusively formed by artists but the Parliament and its Cultural Committee need to have a say in it as well. The state has to construct a relationship with the autonomous artists' trade union, the church and the public education associations, the company and private foundations. Finally, the state has to support cultural institutions and projects, for example, guarding against further deterioration of museums.

#### **Restructuring the cultural infrastructure**

Political changes have also resulted in economic changes in the cultural field. According to the cultural government, cultural goods in Hungary can be categorized both as private goods, partly subsidized but marketable goods ('mixed' goods), and totally subsidized goods (completely financed from public money). When deciding the content of these categories they take into consideration the consumers' sovereignty, the autonomy of arts, and (long-term) national cultural interests. It is no longer a state monopoly to serve the interests of culture but the state still feels responsible for safeguarding national cultural values. In principle, the central and local governments have to solve problems that private patronage and the market cannot solve but in practice the case is often the reverse: cultural institutions have to look for private patronage when government support is not enough or not available. The state is visibly trying to abolish financing cultural institutions with the aim of leaving them to the mercy of market conditions.

Both the cultural government and the local governments would like to find a solution for funding culture. We have already given an overview of the various ways suggested by the different political groups to solve this problem. The cultural government would like to set up a National Cultural Fund to protect monuments and cultural heritage in the long term, and also to provide grants for artists and professional organizations. It would have an independent legal status and a social curatorium. The basic idea of this national fund is also supported by the opposition who add an additional function, that is, the National Cultural Fund would have the right to dispose over former state-owned cultural property. The aim of this function would be to protect the cultural institutions against the possible danger of using them for non-cultural purposes. However, the opposition sees this as the means of the cultural government to control the distribution of cultural property according to its interests.

There are various methods for gaining public support. The government can allocate a budget for culture or give VAT-exemption to cultural bodies. The economy can contribute to cultural budgets in various ways, such as 'percentage for the arts' or by imposing tax on profits arising from other sectors which benefit from the cultural sector (e.g. tourism, catering, entertainment, etc.). National culture could be supported from profits coming from the consumption of foreign cultural goods. Profit-making enterprises should contribute to culture in terms of their profits and pay VAT in terms of their income. Tax-exempt status could be given to non-profit cultural activities. These are merely proposals, since the coming tax law is seemingly not in favour of arts and culture.

Not long ago artists and scientists protested in the press against the tax system to be

introduced on January 1, 1992, which will not differentiate between entrepreneurs and artists, nor between different forms of arts. It means that the same income tax will be imposed on everyone, regardless of the non-profit nature of artistic work. (The cost of culture is not only the material used but the exhibitions held by the artists, etc.). Who is going to assume these costs once state support disappears or decreases, if the income tax ignores them? These works of art are part of our national culture and their absence would be harmful not only for our cultural life but for the whole nation. Alongside these debates and controversies, changes are taking place in cultural life. Foreign and Hungarian profit-making enterprises have appeared in the cultural industry, state companies are being privatized and transformed to limited and shareholder companies, also in the cultural sector.

In Hungary, with the fall in living standards (for the majority of the population) the time and money spent on culture is also diminishing. At the same time the structure of cultural consumption is becoming more directed towards the spread of media, instead of the traditional cultural media (books, theatres, etc.). The cultural organizations cannot compensate for the diminishing subsidies by the income out of traditional cultural suppliers. So they adjust their equipment, services and staff to the new needs (computers, audiovisuals, etc.). As mentioned above, culture centres are now used to organize or hold conferences and launch profit-making enterprises.

During the last years of the old regime the government had to realize that cultural institutions have acquired a new role in society, they are no longer a means of propaganda but

provide cultural services for the public. Thus a cultural system directed from above does not meet the needs of recent cultural development. There are social and political changes behind the spread of new methods of support for cultural organizations. The present process, with the state trying to dispense with financing the cultural sector, had already started before the changes set in. It was to be continued by the new government for economic reasons. Diminishing state support together with the transition to market economy has placed cultural institutions in a difficult situation. Cultural institutions have to adjust to the new situation by finding fresh sources of support to finance their activity and by retaining or raising the interest of their audience. For both goals they require adequate management and marketing skills.

#### Private support for the arts

State subsidies are still essential for cultural organizations. However, to bridge the gap between income and expenses, support is needed from alternative sources, such as private patronage and corporate sponsorship. Considering the standard of living, very few people can afford to patronize the arts and culture in Hungary, and those who could do invest their money in profitable enterprises.

With the introduction of the Foundation Act in Hungary there came a boom in the establishment of foundations, especially with the purpose of supporting culture. This act allows foundations to invest their capital in enterprises whose profits are allocated to support the aims of the foundation. The objective of this legislation was to make this form of operating attractive to cultural organizations and also to provide a forum for private support (or private/public partnership)

of the arts and culture. Donations to foundations are considered as of public interest and as such are tax-deductible. However, these foundations are often established with the purpose of hiding former state property and operate with this 'money'. Private persons and the non-cultural sector also set up foundations with cultural purposes though often for tax relief rather than in the interests of culture. Local authorities have a greater role in financing cultural activities and are now more than simply executives of state cultural policy.

#### Corporate sponsorship

Corporate sponsorship is the magic word for cultural organizations that struggle for survival, but it can only provide them with occasional support. In the past, corporate sponsorship was a political obligation for companies, imposed by party officers. Large factories or companies and the state itself were sponsors of the arts, providing entertainment for their employees by purchasing theatre tickets or establishing a company dance group. Such sponsorship was not related to the company's interests, only, possibly, to the personal interests of its management. Even later, when state subsidy started to decrease and cultural organizations tried to raise support from industry, the companies' attitude was that of a donator. They considered patronage as a charity, as many of them still do. Personal connections dominated the cases of sponsorship, while image and branch or name recognition did not play a role until even a few years ago. On the other hand, cultural organizations did not have experience in approaching corporates for support – it was more a case of their begging for money rather than offering business benefits to the sponsors.

In the new situation cultural organizations are forced to ask for support from companies, whose

attitude is also changing towards sponsorship of the arts. However, corporate sponsorship is still not a regular marketing means. There are relatively few companies that sponsor the arts and culture for well-defined purposes and business benefits. These are mostly financial institutions, banks and insurance companies that have recognized the importance of sponsorship and patronage in building a good image for their company. Mostly they sponsor large-scale cultural events with important media coverage. The high prestige of cultural events is worth more than direct advertising.

However, most Hungarian companies are not great sponsors – either for economic reasons or for lack of incentives. Under the present tax legislation there is no exemption for sponsorship, only for donations by foundations. If the state wants to lose the burden of financing culture it has to facilitate the indirect means of support for the arts and introduce tax allowances for private patronage and sponsorship.

#### A practical example from the film industry

In connection with the present government practice, it should be said that the government tries to support institutions even in the present anxious financial situation but more willingly supports projects, as we can see from the following example.

The Hungarian Moving Picture Foundation was initiated by 15 professional film organizations in September 1991 and supported by the Film and Video Department of the Ministry of Culture. Thus the foundation is responsible for the allocation of the budget that was formerly distributed by the Film Department of the Ministry. From October 1991, the budget of the foundation is allocated by different administrative bodies, who grant subsidies for film production and distribution

as well as for film makers. The members of this foundation are, on behalf of the Hungarian state: the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Public Education, on behalf of the film industry: the Art Movies Association, the Béla Balázs Studio Foundation, the Budapest Filmstudio Company, the Dialog Filmstudio Company, the Association of Film Distributors, the Trade Union of Film Artists and Employees, the Filmworld Foundation, the Hungarian Film Institute, Independent Film and Video Association, and others, a number of associations including film makers, cameramen, movies and video studios. The list gives an insight into the new situation that has recently developed in this branch of culture, in the film and video business. We see a colourful range of enterprises and public initiatives.

The National Secretariat of the foundation got HUF 570 million from the government in 1991 (approximately \$ 7,125,000), and HUF 220 million (approximately \$ 2,750,000) of this has so far been distributed by the Secretariat, based on the proposals of the professional secretariats. These are in the following fields: the Art Movies and Film Club, documentary films, film distribution, feature films, experimental films, film studies, and video.

To begin with, the foundation was almost totally financed by the central government, which wanted to develop a system of management tasks. At the same time it assumes a patron function with the following goals:

- to promote the spread of the film culture in Hungary, paying special attention to European works of art, and to help Hungarian film art and industry to be present in Europe and the world;
- to preserve the values of Hungarian film-making and general film history;
- to contribute to better conditions for creative work;

- to promote the representation of the Hungarian film business at international forums and festivals;
- to take part in professional training and research, in publishing film press and literature, to bring about a greater role for films in education, to assist the career and training of young professionals;
- to follow the technical innovation of film culture, to establish the information system of the film business, to initiate the reform of legislation concerning the film business;
- to promote the cooperation of national and local TV stations and the film industry;
- to initiate entrepreneurial activity in order to enlarge the financial base of the film industry.

In the first year 300 applications arrived amounting to more than HUF 1 million (approximately \$ 12,500). After multiple selection the Secretariat was able to distribute HUF 220 million (approximately \$ 2,750,000). Most of this was given to making films, and distribution of foreign films (e.g. Derek Jarman: *The Garden*). The foundation of Debrecen University was supported in its training of students to be film experts. Two magazines were subsidized to overcome the difficulties of survival and to print a book on research for a film. The Hungarian Film Archive was given HUF 4 million to update its archives.

Thus the state is making efforts to help the film industry avoid last year's failure when the traditional festival of Hungarian films could not be organized because of lack of films. There are plans to privatize the film companies which carry out industrial and servicing activities but their majority shares have to stay under national ownership, as do the workshops and studios where Hungarian films are made.

Film is only one field of culture. According to

the opposition, the Association of Liberal Democrats (SZDSZ), a more general National Cultural Foundation should be established and within this certain professional funds should be established and defined.

#### **Culture in Hungary: the prospect**

As we said in the introduction the theoretical problem of defining culture may play a role in specifying financing issues. It seems that in the cultural concept of the opposition the arts are also seen as main elements of culture, and public education, museums and archives are marginal considerations. Objections are raised by only a minority and the majority accept the arts as king post of cultural life.

The other issue, whether or not culture should advocate certain values, becomes important, when the opposition party urges the establishment of a National Cultural Foundation. According to the liberal view this would be a body resembling an Arts Council, which would keep authorities at arm's length and would not show favouritism – unlike the government's and the old regime's cultural policy. That is, it would consider all social cultural requests on an equal basis: Christian values or Buddhist, national values or minority ethnic ones, as well as cosmopolitan concepts – all could be supported.

Despite the views mentioned above, the opposition could not avoid giving privileges to certain values and attitudes for, according to the opposition, representatives of the church, minority groups, trade unions and parliamentary parties are to be involved in the National Cultural Foundation.

Contemporary Hungarian cultural life is affected by the same factors as the economy and commerce. But those that have the money often forget – or are forced to forget because of economic reasons – that culture produces

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different standards of quality from industry. Thus, business enterprises and companies mushroom in cultural life, trying to be more profit-oriented. So it is not surprising that best sellers are those that meet the 'public' taste for: sex, astrology, political extremes, religion in its many aspects, the domestic life, homeopathy and so on. Many people argue that the flood of such topics is not a problem until it overwhelms more important but less marketable issues.

Those who distribute culture need to be able to move smoothly among the new circumstances of the market economy. But higher education is still waiting for funds to introduce arts management training which is essential for implementing the changes in the cultural infrastructure. Despite the difficulties mentioned there is a chance that the present financial and economic progress will raise cultural life to a respectable level. This must not take long, argue many people, because otherwise culture will be irreversibly destroyed in Hungary.

Edited by Wendie Shaffer

## A comment on Kálmá Rubovszky and Katalin Szöllösi

**Andras Török** There is very little to add to the above scholarly paper, one which seems to be even-handed and fair and outlines the history of cultural management as well as the present outlook of major political forces in Parliament. If there is something to add, it is from another, less of a bird's-eye view, by the editor of a high-brow literary and social monthly – myself.

It may be common knowledge, but I cannot help stressing: the totalitarian states spent too much money on high culture – more than they could afford. Of course, prices were unreal for a long time – in the cultural sphere much longer, even after ordinary prices started to approach real ones. The state allocated huge funds to publishers, literary magazines, theaters and film companies, that were all directed by 'reliable' characters. Hungary in the mid-1970s started to become less of a totalitarian state, on the way to an authoritarian one, and the experts in charge of the cultural organizations then tended to be quite civilized people with sophisticated tastes – career experts, ready to serve the party, but only as a second god. The basic difference between Hungary and the other former satellite states is, that the list of officially favoured artists and the really outstanding ones started to overlap in the mid-60s, and almost coincided by the mid-80s. It happened largely through an evolutionary process. Interestingly enough, the 70s and early 80s turned out to be a Golden Age of Hungarian literature and the cinematic arts (perhaps not for the Fine Arts and the theatre). The reason is difficult to discover. Maybe there was the 'right amount' of oppression in Hungary, while in other places there was too much ... Roughly at the same time the government started to reintroduce reforms such as no restrictions on setting up small businesses, a decisive force entered the Hungarian cultural scene that eroded the remaining ideological domination of the regime. This was called the Soros

Foundation. The Foundation, established by Hungarian-born British/American billionaire George Soros, spent 4-5 million dollars a year in Hungary from 1984 on. It provided country libraries with xerox machines, facilitated conference attendance abroad, and supported hundreds of small cultural initiatives in faraway places, while assisting hundreds of writers and scholars on a monthly basis.

The main lessons of its magnificently run programs were that there was another source to turn to than the state. Its main objective, to convert Hungary into an open society, could only be partially achieved. The regime could not be more liberal than that. Then came the changes. The ancien regime was not overthrown in Hungary. It simply melted away. Common sense started to infiltrate the government in the 1980s – but it did not fully regain its status until after the changes. It was obvious that the cultural budget had to be curtailed to the size the country could afford. Few people doubted that – some feared that corporate sponsorship can only slowly assert its new responsibility.

It is here that I can give you some good news: events are moving swifter than it was expected. Bank executives and new corporate tycoons are much more eager to sponsor the arts and high culture in general than was anticipated.

A highbrow monthly is always in the red. The one I co-own and co-edit is no exception.<sup>1</sup> It is edited by seven friends who do the job for fun, for a nominal sum. It started the moment free press started. (Earlier only the state, or associations could publish periodicals: but associations could not be formed.) It has been published by a prosperous weekly. It pays the printer's bill and is patient about compensation for the loss from other subsidies. We are subsidized by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, to a substantial degree, by the Soros Foundation (which has partly backed off from

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encouraging civil initiatives, saying it is not its business in a democracy, and is turning more and more to supporting high culture) and one of the smaller banks.<sup>2</sup>

To get the necessary funds is a matter of image – in the cut-throat competition among high quality periodicals. Our magazine fares quite well in this competition, with its polished, ultrasophisticated publicity strategy, and brotherhood image. Some of this image is certainly true. We do have our editorial hours in legendary Cafe New York, on Thursday afternoons, from 2 to 4. Whenever you are nearby, please do not hesitate to drop in for a coffee and share the 40 per cent discount we provide the management.<sup>3</sup>

By the time we are sipping coffee there I hope that the government will have understood that they are too ephemeral to decide on matters that might influence the state of the arts for a generation. So I trust that they will have opted for a state-of-the-art solution in government patronage. If so, they cannot have omitted to listen to some of the ideas of the opposition.

1. For details see *Books: The Budapest Book Review*. Winter, 1991, p. 41.
2. More details from the resourceful book by Soros himself: *Opening the Soviet System*. Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1990, especially pp. 26-69.
3. (Budapest VII, Erzsébet korut 9-11).

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