

“It’s free, but it’s not free”

Artistic Autonomy in Hungary’s Illiberal
Democracy

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Summary

This thesis focuses on how artists constitute their idea of artistic autonomy in illiberal democracies. Looking at the case of Hungary, I set out to understand how the last decade of governance by the conservative right-wing Fidesz party, with the charismatic prime minister Viktor Orbán at the forefront, has affected conditions in the cultural and art fields in the country. I find that the illiberal democratic context brings about a culture of uncertainty in the art field.

Previous sociological research on artists has tended towards looking at Western democratic contexts. Less focus has been given to artists who operate within East European areas that move in autocratic political directions. Hungary can be seen to represent a prototype of how matters can unfold in liberal democracies that become more authoritarian. Simultaneously, Hungary can be seen as a unique case in that it previously has been described as one of the most successful post-communist countries in terms of establishing liberal democratic ideals, and now has suddenly taken an apparent U-turn politically (Kornai, 2015). Political power has been severely centralized. Media independence is heavily compromised, and in recent years the Orbán regime has adopted a particular focus on the politicization of the cultural- and artistic field.

This thesis is based on fieldwork in Hungary, and in-depth interviews with artists and curators cut across artistic genres. Thus, this thesis looks at the effects of macro-political shifts on the art field from the artists' perspective. The analysis implements a descriptive approach, staying close to the empirical findings, and aims to shed light on artists' conditions during what can be understood as a historically significant moment in Hungarian society. The theoretical framework is eclectic, and different sociological concepts and perspectives are used to highlight and discuss my findings. I draw on the sociology of art tradition and focus on theoretical perspectives on the autonomy of art. Additionally, I use the theoretical framework of exit, voice, and loyalty (Hirschman, 1970) to describe the choices available to the artists.

The analysis is split into four parts, based on how the artists constitute their ideas of autonomy. These are 1) The dimension of social background, 2) The macro-political dimension, 3) The international dimension, and 4) The artistic dimension. The artists describe artistic freedom as generally compromised, and give examples of subtle forms of macro-political pressure that lead to a culture of uncertainty. But surprisingly, the artists constantly

place the issue of unfreedom on other actors in the field. Based on this discrepancy, the aim of the analysis is to describe how the artists experience the general conditions in the field as well as how the artists give meaning to their own ability to maintain independence. My thesis shows that in order to understand the relationship between politics and art, one needs to consider all the four mentioned dimensions as affecting artists' ability to maintain independence. My findings show that artists' ability to uphold relative autonomy in repressive contexts depends upon a privileged social background, an international network, pre-established independence from institutions, and a commitment to artistic ideals of autonomy. An unexpected discovery is how international encounters bring about experiences of negative identity contingencies. While the artists first and foremost stress their autonomous positions, I find that, together, the macro-political and the international level represent a double pressure: 1) the pressure in the Hungarian context, exerted by intermediaries, to withhold criticism of the government, and 2) pressure in the international context, exerted by intermediaries, to engage in political work, specifically with a critical eye towards the Hungarian government.

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1 Introduction

The world of the arts at particular historical moments deserves to be studied not only for what it reveals about aesthetics, but for what it reveals about society. (Zolberg, 2015, p. 902)

The recent political developments in Hungary is an example of such a historical watershed that Zolberg describes. The charismatic Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has, in recent years, directed particular attention to the cultural sphere, describing it as a vital area in terms of bringing about lasting political change in society (Orbán, 2018). As indicated, the relationship between politics and art during political shifts towards more authoritarian governing will be the overarching topic in this thesis. Changes in the cultural- and art field might tell us something about changes in society at large, about the state of democracy, and about how individuals act in times when politics move in illiberal directions.

Over the last two decades, Hungary has taken the step from being a liberal democratic success story in the 1990s (Kristof, 2019) to have a government that describes their political regime as an “illiberal democracy” (Orbán, 2014). Hungary is characterized as the first country in Europe to move from being a Western-type liberal democracy to a hybrid regime (Bozóki and Hegedűs, 2018). In 2019 Hungary fell on the annual index of democracy compiled by Freedom House to “partly free,”; the most dramatic fall a European country has ever experienced (Puddington, 2020. p.479). The report explicitly argues that the ruling party, Fidesz, is attacking its country’s democratic institutions.

The background for this development was the two-thirds majority victory by the conservative right-wing Fidesz Party in 2010, which gave the party unprecedented power to make significant institutional and constitutional alterations. Orbán made changes to the constitution, which have weakened the freedom of the press, the autonomy of the court of law, and the central bank. Academic freedom is also under pressure, and in 2018 the Central European University (CEU) was pushed out of the country, now operating in Austria. Besides, the Orbán government has stripped Gender Studies of its credentials, and the parliament adopted a bill to increase government control over the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in July 2019.

Orbán has reached international fame for his controversial politics and speeches, and Hungary’s relationship with the European Union has grown tense during his reign. In 2018 the EU wanted to sanction the country for breaking with its ground principles (“EU

Parliament Votes,” 2018). In 2014, the so-called EEA and Norway grants, supporting civil organizations in Hungary, was put on hold after the Hungarian authorities carried out a police raid at the organization Ökotárs’ headquarters in Budapest. For the first time, The Helsinki Committee awarded the Ossietzky Prize to a European representative in the organization, namely the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, for “their fight against the authoritarian developments in Hungary.” The leader of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Márta Pardavi, said the following about the developments in Hungary:

We see that since Hungary’s illiberal turn, there is an ever-greater need to defend human rights and also an ever-greater need for human rights defenders. The victims of abuse by state authorities, our fellow citizens, [are] harassed for expressing their opinion.” (Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2019).

In recent years Hungary has been used as an exceptional example of authoritarian political developments in Europe. One example is The Economist’s article from August 2019, where they argue that Orbán’s politics could be used as a handbook on how to hollow out democracy for “would-be autocrats elsewhere” (“How Viktor,” 2019). Leaders with similar aspirations, such as by Poland’s prime minister Jatoslaws Kaczynsky, view Hungary as an example of a “successful” authoritarian development (Brekke, 2019, p.228). Right-wing populist parties also referred to as radical right parties, such as Marine Le Pen’s National Front in France, Fredrik Åkesson’s Swedish Democrats in Sweden, Nikolaos Michaloliakos’s Golden Dawn in Greece and Frauke Petry’s Alternative for Germany, are gaining support all around Europe. Arguably, Poland’s Beata Szydło and the Law and Justice Party are closest to the influence that Orbán and the Fidesz party has gained.

In light of such political developments, the relevance of research on conditions under political transitions from a liberal democracy to authoritarian governing can grow. Some call the political changes in Hungary a hybridization, in the form of a democratic backsliding (Krastev, 2007), where the political system is operating in the gray zone between authoritarianism and democracy. The Orbán governments’ politics is also referred to as competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way, 2010), where formal democratic institutions are still present, but the possibilities of opposition are severely limited.

Developments in areas such as education, the court of law, non-governmental organizations, journalism/media, and civil society, have been well researched in recent years. However, there has been less focus on how the political changes have affected the cultural

sphere and specifically the art scene. Studying conditions in the art scene could contribute to a better understanding of political developments, due to how the art scene holds a unique position within a democracy, often seen as a symbol of man's freedom in society in general (Burger and Shaw, 1985). Looking at the state of artistic autonomy could tell us something general about the state of democracy. In liberal democracies, applying the arm's-length principle and peer reviews are ideals in the art field. But what about artistic ideals in an illiberal democracy?

In a speech from 2018, Orbán gave indications of his government's plans for the cultural politics ahead. Here, Orbán proclaims that after the past years of building the new political system (illiberal democracy), the time has come to build a new "era" (Orbán, 2018). In Orbán's view, this is done by embedding his political ideology in the cultural field, indicating a stronger politicization of the cultural and art scene in the future. Although domestic research on the arts has been limited, Hungary's cultural wars and controversies regarding the arts in Hungary have been visible through the media both nationally and internationally. One example is the coverage of the National Opera's cancellation of several shows of the Billy Elliot musical in 2018 after the play was called gay propaganda by the far-right newspaper Magyar idők (Horváth, 2018). In another article from the same journal, the director of the Petöfi Museum of Literature, Gergely Pröle, is criticized for giving a platform to left-liberal writers (Szakács, 2018). The media reported other controversies as well. In 2017 the independent theater director Arpád Schilling was called a threat to national security by a member of the Fidesz government, for his political activism. In 2019 the government proposed a new law restricting theatrical autonomy.

According to Inkei and Vaspál (2014, p.12) the cultural and political opposition in Hungary condemns the government for aggressively taking over important positions in the Hungarian cultural life. People in the Hungarian art field have reacted with actions such as demonstrations, social media activism, boycotts, and new alternative art projects that are independent of Hungarian state funding.

In the sociology of art, change has been studied through a focus on internal processes rather than external influence. When external threats to artistic autonomy are addressed, it is mainly the pressure of marketization that has been brought to the forefront. Research on change in the cultural- and art-sectors has focused on the discrepancy between entrepreneurial tendencies and the ideals of the charismatic myth of the artist. Researchers have looked at the roles (Røyseng, Mangset and Borgen, 2007; Røyseng, 2011), identities (Schediwy, Bhansing and Loots, 2018), and career trajectories (Lingo and Tepper, 2013) of artists. Some claim that

new entrepreneurial tendencies demand new entrepreneurial identities (Schediwy et al., 2018), while others look at the potential emergence of new post-modern artist roles as well as the continued relevance of the charismatic artist role (Røyseng et al., 2007). Others describe that the artist roles are affected by an increased shift from specialization to generalization (Ellmeier, 2003), where the artists are broadening their skill sets, adapting to changes in the market. Studying the effects of marketization on artistic autonomy has been fruitful in understanding certain developments in the art field. Still, I argue that in recent years it has become increasingly important to consider the political sphere as an extra aesthetic force challenging artistic autonomy in a European context.

Also, the previously mentioned research exemplifies a general tendency to focus on Western liberal democratic or social-democratic contexts in the study of artistic autonomy and change in the art field. Some scholars have called for a stronger emphasis on social, political, and economic effects on the art field (Zolberg, 2015; Adams, 2005), and Adams (2005) specifically calls for more focus on repressive contexts. Studies on cultural change and the roles of artists in repressive contexts have looked at settings in the transition from punitive to more democratic political systems (Cushman, 1995; Adams, 2005). Research on conditions for artists during political shifts from liberal democratic to illiberal systems are less common. In this thesis, I focus on how the recent years of political developments in Hungary have affected Hungarian artists. I will specifically target how artists constitute their ideas about artistic autonomy inside the illiberal democratic system that developed in Hungary after 2010.

According to Luca Kristof (Unpublished manuscript, 2019), Fidesz's cultural policy changes have significantly reduced the autonomy of the cultural sphere since 2010, and developments in cultural policy have included an increased nationalist ideology, instrumentalization of cultural policy and a less clear separation between cultural policy and politics. But rather than censoring existing cultural institutions or actors, what Kristof (2017a) identifies is the emergence of a 'double structure.' The government has, for example, tried to affect the cultural canon and created parallel cultural institutions, in line with their political ideology. But Kristof (2017b) finds that while positional change in the art field has been implemented, substantial change in terms of changes in aesthetic preferences, have proved more difficult to challenge through political means. Thus, Kristof (2017b) points at processes where the autonomy in the Hungarian art field still holds a strong position, despite positional change. But how do the artists experience the situation themselves?

To complement existing research that has focused on institutional changes, cultural policy changes, and key figures in the art scene in Hungary, I focus on gaining an

understanding of how artists themselves perceive these changes. I argue that the effects of political developments must be understood through the meaning artists themselves articulate from their experiences. In other words, in this thesis, I wish to apply a descriptive approach, emphasizing subjective dimensions. I view individual accounts as signs of the culture that actors are a part of, and thus I expect to draw general conclusions on the conditions in the Hungarian art field based on the artists' accounts.

To achieve this, I conducted in-depth interviews with Hungarian artists, as well as some curators and cultural administrators; additionally, while spending 40 days in Budapest, I had informal conversations with Hungarian researchers. I also analyzed documents of Orbán's speeches. I undertook thematic analyses based on predefined issues as well as on new topics that emerged from the data material. I have aimed to stay close to the empirical findings, and my theoretical approach is eclectic rather than connected with one single theoretical framework. I discuss my results within the sociology of art and its focus on theories on artistic autonomy. I also use Hirschman's (1970) concepts of exit, voice, and loyalty to describe the choices available to the Hungarian artists. Based on the artists' accounts, this thesis will show that artistic autonomy in Hungary's illiberal democracy is under severe pressure. Still, the artists describe a discrepancy between the general situation and their ability to practice individual autonomy. I find that the relationship between artistic autonomy and the political situation in Hungary is complex, and that the artists constitute their ideas of artistic autonomy through four dimensions which are: (1) The dimension of social background and life situation, (2) The macro political dimension, (3) The international dimension, and (4) The artistic dimension.

My thesis will have the following structure: in chapter 2, I will cover essential background information for the reader to understand the context of Hungarian artists, including relevant elements of historical-, political- and cultural policy developments in Hungary. In chapter 3, will write about the applied methodology, including research strategy and the process of analyzing the material. In chapter 4, I will go through the theoretical framework used in the analysis, in Chapter 5 I will present my analysis, divided into four main sections based on the different dimensions that constitute the artists' idea of autonomy. Finally, in chapter 6, I will give my conclusions as well as suggestions for further research.

2 Background

In this chapter, I will present some background information to introduce the reader to some aspects of the context of the Hungarian artists. For that purpose, I will briefly review some political turning points that are often referred to in the history of Hungary and introduce the current political landscape under the Fidesz-KDNP coalition. Then, I turn the attention specifically to the historical role of culture in Hungarian society. Further, I will elaborate on cultural policy developments in the past and present before I introduce the reader to some recent key events in the cultural field. These were often referred to by those I interviewed. My objective in this chapter is to: 1) describe historical developments, (2) describe the role of culture (3) outline cultural policy developments in the past and present, and (4) present recent key happenings in the cultural field.

2.1 Relevant political developments in Hungary

The history of Hungary includes several centuries under foreign rule. From the sixteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century Hungary was under the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburgs. After the first world war, Hungary's borders were drawn anew in the Treaty of Trianon¹, which was a devastating loss for Hungary, leaving 3.3 million Hungarians outside of post-Trianon Hungary (Ra'anan, 1991, p.106). The memory of Trianon is, to this day, essential to the Hungarians, and the issue of giving citizenship to ethnic Hungarians outside its borders has been a recurring case in Hungarian politics. Some Hungarians believe that the treaty denied Hungary its "natural" borders (Inkei and Vaspál, 2014). During World War II, Hungary had their own Nazi party called the Arrow Cross and took Germany's side. Furthermore, in the Communist period from 1945 to 1989, Hungary was a part of the Warsaw pact and had close ties to the USSR, with Soviet military forces stationed in the country. In 1956, the Soviet military was used in repressing an attempted revolution in Budapest. Many have understood the recent political developments in Hungary as a backsliding into an authoritarian political system similar to what existed in Hungary under Communist rule. A

¹Trianon was a peace treaty signed in 1920 by most of the allies of WWI and Hungary, resulting in 30% of the Hungarian people under foreign rule (Ra'Anan, 1991).

striking feature in the history of Hungary is the rapid political transformations over a short period. Over a few decades, Hungary went from a subject of Communist rule after WWII, to liberal democracy, and has recently shifted towards illiberal democratic governing from 2010 until today. The transition from communism to liberal democracy is a period commonly referred to as the “system change” (Rendszerváltás) by Hungarians. Since the system change in 1990, Hungary has had free elections, a constitutional court, and a representative government. Hungary’s move towards a Western type of liberal democracy has further been manifested with memberships in organizations such as the European Council in 1991, NATO in 1999, and the European Union in 2004 (Bozóki and Simon, 2010). Today, the political system in Hungary consists of parliamentary democracy, a multiparty system with a prime minister.

At the time of the system change, Fidesz was a small liberal right-wing party but turned into a conservative right-wing party in the middle of the 1990s. Since then, Fidesz's popularity has increased rapidly. Before the parliamentary elections in 2010, Fidesz was the dominant party, together with the socialist party, the MSZP. However, after a significant scandal in 2006, referred to as the *Őszödi beszéd*² (the *Őszödi talk*), the MSZP lost its support. The event was considered to be a determining factor for the fall of the center-right party side in the 2010 elections, and the two-thirds majority victory for the Fidesz-KDNP coalition. The two-thirds majority victory in the parliament meant that the Fidesz government could make intervening institutional changes. One of the first changes from Fidesz was naming their regime the System of National Cooperation, highlighting their emphasis on national unity. The changes they made to the constitution in 2016 was similarly accentuating a increased focus on Christianity, traditions, and national values (Ministry of Justice, 2017).

In a speech commonly referred to as the “Illiberal Democracy Speech” in 2014, Orbán addressed the “system change,” stating that Hungarians must stop using the fall of communism as a reference point with which to understand the future. Instead, Orbán considered the financial crisis in 2008 as what should be regarded as the most meaningful “regime change.” The financial crisis represented a significant economic setback for Hungary, and Orbán further emphasized that the big task ahead was to understand what political system should be considered the most economically beneficial. His answer was illiberal democracy.

According to Freedom House (Puddington, 2020. p.479), Fidesz has since 2010 made continuous attacks on democratic institutions, gaining a stronger hold on “opposition groups,

² The PM and leader of MSZP, Ferenc Gyurcsány, held a controversial internal speech that was leaked in the press.

journalists, universities, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) whose perspectives it finds unfavorable.” For instance, in 2010, a new regulation was passed on by the parliament, and the National Media and Telecommunication Authority was established, giving the Fidesz-party unprecedented power over both private and public media (Bajomi-Lázár, 2013).

While the political system in Hungary since 2010 has been described as both a hybrid regime, as an illiberal state and directly authoritarian, Körösényi, Illés, and Gyulai (2020) describe it by the Weberian concept of plebiscitary leader democracy. This term implies a political regime that is based on charismatic leadership with authoritarian as well as democratic features, where the leaders break with conventions, shape institutions and legal orders rather than being controlled by public policies (Körösényi et al., 2020).

2.2 The role of culture and cultural policy developments

Historically, culture has played a significant role in the Hungarian society. The 19th century has had a particularly prominent influence on Hungary’s cultural institutions and traditions of today. Hungary's Eastern European social structure comes from this period, which consisted of a developed upper class, with high cultural standards versus an underprivileged oppositional majority (Inkei and Vaspál, 2014). Hungary was seen as one of the more Western among the Eastern European countries. However, they did not have a developed middle class akin to Western European standards, and half of the population belonged to the peasantry until the middle of the 20th century (Inkei and Vaspál, 2014). The Eastern European social structure from the past is viewed as significant even today due to the low living standards of the Hungarian middle class (Tóth, 2011, p.557).

After World War one, cultural politics in Hungary was viewed to have a strategic role in overcoming the national trauma of the Trianon Treaty (Inkei and Vaspál, 2014). After WWII progressive elements in cultural policy from the Bolshevik period were eliminated and a more schematic Soviet type of policy was implemented until the revolution in 1956. When the Communist regime was weakened, more subsidies were given to the cultural field and in the 1980s there was a development of commercialization in the cultural field where the liberal “Soros Foundation” gained a significant role (Inkei and Vaspál, 2014).

The cultural policy developments after 1989-1990 were eclectic and split between the national tradition before communism and modern Western ideals. The cultural sphere went through a shift in priorities, particularly regarding decentralization. Different policies were

implemented, such as the arm's-length principle, tax reductions for cultural goods and services, and autonomous cultural institutions were established such as the National Cultural Fund in 1993 (Tóth, 2011, p.558). In this period the artists' role was not only focused on the art itself, but the artists had to become more of an entrepreneur (Tóth, 2011, p.556). In the period from 1990 to 2006, the direction of cultural politics changed with the political shifts from left to right.

An interesting feature in of the contemporary Hungarian cultural politics is that there is no officially written cultural policy program. The cultural policy can be said to be organized pragmatically. In addition, governments' cultural budgets have traditionally lacked transparency (Inkei and Vaspál, 2014). Still, Kristof (2017a, p.129) describes that in practice, today, Hungary has a similar cultural policy structure to other European countries: the state is intervening and actively supporting the cultural field. Further, Kristof uses 'democrat elitist' as a term to describe a paradigm in which the Hungarian cultural policy focuses on expertise and institutional autonomy for key actors, rather than accessibility and democratization of the art. This focus on expertise is also the basis for policy decision making (Kristof, 2017a, p.129).

The present political climate in Hungary is arguably one of the most polarized in Europe. This polarization is described as mainly based on symbolic and socio-cultural issues such as nationalism and religion (Vegetti, 2019). The main cleavages are between urban/folk-ideologies, religious/secular and political classes (Vegetti, 2019, p.83). So called 'cultural wars' are viewed to be a historically common feature in the cultural scene in Hungary. Kristof (2017a, p.130) writes that cultural wars have dominated after the collapse of the Kádár regime in 1989. Unlike the political elite, the cultural elite has not been as affected by such regime changes and their positions in the cultural field has been more stable. She points to the fact that there are two main narratives that have historically dominated in the intellectual life in Hungary: 1) The left-liberal view that the cultural elite, established under the Communist regime, was based on meritocratic processes, and that the cultural canon is culturally legitimate, and 2) the right-wing view that there is a left-wing hegemony in the culture, due to decades of biased selection by the post-communist elite (Kristof, 2017a, p. 130). In this way, Kristof confirms that in the leftist intellectual community there is a tendency to gain positions based on reputation-producing mechanisms, as I will elaborate on in chapter 5.

2.3 Cultural policy changes during the Orbán regime

After his defeat in the 2002 elections Orbán started to put more emphasis on economy and culture, and even allegedly blamed his loss on the lack of cultural embeddedness of his politics (Kristof, 2017a, p.130). The main trends of change in cultural policy in the country have since then been a stronger focus on nationalist ideology, an instrumentalization of cultural policy and a less clear separation between cultural policy and politics (Kristof, Unpublished manuscript, 2019). Further, the changes in the cultural sphere have been characterized by a development of right-wing institutions parallel to the existing ones, creating a sort of ‘double structured’ cultural strategy (Kristof, 2017a, p.141). One example is the right-wing cultural client organization Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA), an organization that the Orbán regime has even enshrined in the Fundamental Law (Kristof, 2017b). The government has also tried to re-write the cultural canon with projects such as the book series called the National Library and commissioning paintings of Hungarian historical events. They have explicitly expressed that the aim of the project has been to challenge the left-liberal cultural cannon and strengthen the right-wing cannon (Kristof, 2017, p.134). Bozóki (2013) describes that the cultural policy consists of developments such as a concentration of power, limitation of self-governance and delegating tasks to political clientele. The cultural policy program in Hungary has traditionally changed with the political shifts, but Kristof argues that the Orbán-government has attempted to “restructure the whole system”, by making institutional changes such as delegating power to the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA) (Kristof, 2017a, p.135).

In the absence of a formal cultural policy program, Orbán’s speeches have been used as a basis for understanding cultural policy goals in Hungary. In his speeches where the cultural sphere is mentioned Orbán puts emphasis on the instrumental role of culture and on stronger politicization of the cultural field. In a speech after Orbán’s second election victory (again by a two-thirds majority) in 2018, he emphasized the role of the cultural sphere as the next step of their political project:

Our two-thirds victory in 2018 is nothing short of a mandate to build a new era. It is important to remind ourselves, however, that an era is always more than a political system. An era is a special and characteristic cultural reality. An era is a spiritual order, a kind of

prevailing mood, perhaps even taste – a form of attitude. A political system is usually determined by rules and political decisions. An era, however, is more than this. An era is determined by cultural trends, collective beliefs, and social customs. This is now the task we are faced with: we must embed the political system in a cultural era... After the third two-thirds victory we really need to adopt a spiritual and cultural approach; and there is no denying that from September major changes lie ahead of us.

(Orbán, 2018)

The speech became famous in the cultural field in Hungary for its strong emphasis on culture and the changes it implied would happen in the cultural field ahead. Orbán's emphasis of the essential role of culture in embedding their political system points at how significant the cultural field is viewed to be in terms of manifesting political change.

2.4 Key events and debates

Debates within the art field can be said to mirror the sharp political division in the Hungarian society. Since 2010 there have been several key happenings related to the cultural scene and cultural politics in Hungary that point to the political direction of the Fidesz government as well as cultural wars in the field. A review of these happenings can give an idea of some of the main controversies and collective references in the cultural field in Hungary since 2010.

Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA)

Since 1992 there has existed two Academies of Arts. One is the Széchenyi Academy of Letters (SZALA), which is considered a liberal institution and is connected to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The other is the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA) which is an outspokenly conservative and so-called independent organization with 'national commitments' (Kristof, 2017a, p. 141). Between 2013-2014 the MMA was given increased influence in the cultural field as well as having three state buildings transferred to them, including the Kunsthalle (Mücsarnok), the biggest institution for contemporary art in Hungary (Inkei and Vaspál, 2014, p. 11). The Orbán-government included the organization in the new constitution and delegated state functions to MMA. The president of the MMA at that time, György Fekete, a symbol of the anti-liberal views of the government, became one of the most influential actors in the Hungarian cultural field (Kristof, 2017a, p. 136). The MMA has also gained a stronger influence on the distribution of funding through the National Cultural Fund,

which by critics is viewed as targeting the autonomy of the funding system since the MMA is viewed as controlled by the government (Kristof, 2017a, p.138). State support for the MMA has grown rapidly and the funding was raised from 330 thousand Euros in 2011 to 22 million Euros in 2016 (Kristof, 2017a, p. 137). The increased influence of the MMA has been the source of much controversy and after the reorganization of the MMA, artists formed a protest group called Free Artists, and engaged in a boycott (Nagy, 2015).

The National Theater

Hungary has a state-funded theater structure and theater directors change with political shifts. As in the two Art Academy's, the theater field has two theatrical societies. The liberal version is called the Hungarian Theater Society (Magyar Színházi Társaság), and the Hungarian Theatrum Society (Magyar Teátrumi Társaság), which was founded in 2008 as a counter organization to the liberal theatrical society (Kristof, 2017b, p. 139). The latter is closer to Orbán's conservative ideology. The two most prestigious positions in the cultural sphere in Hungary is the president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the director of the National Theater. The director of the National Theater is elected by the government and represents a symbolic position that defines the cultural values of the nation. The reputable actor and stage director Robert Alföldi has been the director since 2008 but was attacked in the Parliament by members of the far-right party Jobbik allegedly for his liberal views and homosexual orientation. At the end of his term, he was replaced with the founding president of the Hungarian Theatrum Society, The exchange evoked demonstrations and represented a great cultural scandal in the Hungarian cultural field (Kristof, 2017, p.139) because Alföldi was much liked and his replacement was considered to be politically motivated.

Kassak Museum and the series of articles in Magyar Idök

In 2018 the far-right newspaper Magyar Idök posted several articles on cultural issues, targeting left-liberal cultural events, as a part of an article series that started in 2017 called Kinek a kulturális Diktatúrája (Whose Cultural Dictatorship is It?). The idea of the series seemed to be to criticize a left liberal hegemony in the art field. The articles created debates in the cultural scene and the happening was even commented on by Orbán in a speech in 2018: "This is why it is logical – and in no way surprising – that it is precisely in the field of cultural policy that we have seen the explosion of what is currently the most intense debate. This occurred almost immediately after the election." (Orbán, 2018). One of the articles in Magyar Idök was targeting the director of the Petöfi Museum of Literature, Gergely Pröhle, accusing

him of giving a platform to left-liberal art (Szakács, 2018). Even though Pröhle was a member of Fidesz, his aesthetic approach was perceived as too liberal. Another article targeted the National Opera House's musical Billy Elliot, calling it gay propaganda (Horváth, 2018). After the article, the National Opera House canceled several shows, which according to them was due to a decline in ticket sales. Hungarian critics of the Magyar Idők article series claim that the articles were meant to harass left-liberal actors and to destroy their careers in publicly funded cultural institutions (Adam, 2018).

Stop Georg Soros

The liberal philanthropist George Soros has been a recurring target of the Fidesz government for his support of the liberal civil society in Hungary. Soros has been a central figure in the development of the cultural field in Hungary since he established the Open Society Foundation (OSF) in 1984. The OSF is the world's largest private foundation, supporting independent groups that work for liberal democratic values around the world. In 2018, the OSF left Hungary and moved its regional headquarters to Berlin because of “increasingly repressive political and legal environment in Hungary” (Open Society Foundation, 2018). The ‘hate campaign’ against Soros has by many been understood as a part of the Fidesz party’s anti-immigration campaign. The governments even named a law after him, the Stop Soros Law, which criminalized assisting illegal immigrants (“Hungary’s Parliament”, 2018). During the campaign for the Stop Soros Law, government funded billboards were put up around the country, showing Soros’ laughing face, accompanied by the words: “Don't let Soros get the last laugh!”. Soros was also the founder of the Central European University (CEU) that was pushed out of Hungary in 2018. Despite the government’s efforts, the OSF is still influencing the Hungarian civil society and the cultural scene. In 2019, the foundation stationed in Berlin started a 1.1 million Euro art grant to: “support independent arts and culture in Hungary, amid growing concerns over the influence of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s ruling Fidesz party in arts funding decisions.”(Open Society Foundation, 2019).

EEA and Norway grants

Hungary has been a receiving country of the EEA and Norway grant since 2004. Norway provides more than 95% of the Grant, which is distributed to European countries in order to “reduce social and economic disparities and strengthen bilateral relations”. Hungary receives 214.6 million Euro each period, and between 2004 and 2014, the funding was distributed within areas such as the environment, scientific research, and civil society, including cultural

initiatives. The fund is organized by the local independent organization Ökotárs, an environmental organization with a liberal profile. Ökotárs has also been supported by George Soros. But in 2014 the Norwegian fund was frozen, due to a conflict between Norway and Hungary. According to a report by the Helsinki Committee, the conflict started when the Hungarian government moved the administration of the fund to a state-controlled company and the Hungarian state blacklisted 13 non-governmental organizations (Czimbalmos, 2016, p.3). The Hungarian authorities also carried out a police raid at the Ökotárs' headquarters in Budapest. The then Minister of EEA and EU Affairs Vidar Helgesen condemned the police raid and claimed that the Hungarian authorities were pressuring NGOs that were critical towards the authorities (Helgesen, 2014). The Hungarian government on the other hand, has criticized the distribution of the funds for being biased towards the left liberal civil sphere and for serving foreign political interests. A point that might be considered relevant since civil society can be viewed as a way for the international society of gaining influence over a country. Orbán commented on the issue in a speech in 2014: "If we look at civil organizations in Hungary, the ones in the public eye, debates concerning the Norwegian Fund have brought this to the surface, then what I will see is that we have to deal with paid political activists here. And these political activists are, moreover, political activists paid by foreigners" (Orbán, 2014).

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the aim has been to create a backdrop that hopefully will make the context of the Hungarian artists more understandable to the reader. I have done this by describing - 1) historical developments, (2) the role of culture in Hungary, (3) cultural policy developments in the past and present, (4) selected situations and controversies in the cultural field.

The selection of issues in this chapter is based on a general reading of Hungarian history and relevant literature; they were not exclusively selected on the basis of how interviewees referred to historical and contemporary developments. In the analysis I will focus more on issues that were often highlighted by the interviewees. In the next chapter, I will describe the applied methods.

3 Methods

The research question precedes the methods and strategy of research applied in a thesis. The question that has informed the methods, research strategy and analysis in this thesis has been: How do artists constitute their ideas of artistic autonomy in illiberal democracies? In this chapter I will give the reader insight into the methods of my research. I will describe my research strategy, field work and collection of data, my interview guide, declaring limitations to my study, ethical considerations as well as coding methods and the steps of the analysis of my data.

3.1 Research strategy

In order to investigate my research question I found it purposeful to follow and abductive research strategy (Blaikie, 2010, p.115), where the researcher aims to describe the social world of actors, which is seen as the background for their choices and the basis for understanding their roles. Thus, it is the actors' conceptualizations, and how they give meaning to their context, that is under investigation. To gain access to the artists' experiences I found it fruitful to conduct in depth interviews with artists and other cultural workers. I look at how artists constitute their understanding of the political context and how this affects them in their artistic roles and choices.

The epistemological assumptions of abductive research strategies are that knowledge is viewed to be reached through entering the everyday social world, interpreting peoples' meanings, which are understood as intersubjective. This indicates that people's depictions in interviews are not just private accounts but can be taken as indications of the culture that they are a part of (Blaikie, 2010, p.115). Similarly, I expect to be able to say something more general about the situation for artists in Hungary and the role of autonomy, based on the artists subjective accounts. I partially agree with the ontological assumptions applied to abductive research strategies that social reality is: "the social construction of social actors" (Blaikie, 2010, p.115). Yet, I sympathize with the approach of Benzecry, Kruase and Reed (2017) and their agnostic epistemological approach to research, where they dismiss any a priori ontological assumption of what social reality consists, such as actions, networks, structures or interactions. Even though I use such theoretical concepts as tools in the analysis,

I strive to avoid making a priori theoretical underpinnings and rather stay close to the empirical findings and the artists own descriptions.

The translation of the actors' descriptions of their social lives into theory includes two stages: 1. describing the actors' activities and meanings, and 2. making concepts and categories that serve as a basis for understanding the issue under investigation (Blaikie, 2010, p.117). These two steps have informed my analysis as well. Schütz (1962, in Blaikie, 2010, p.117) claims that interviews represent indirect knowledge and that a scientist can never fully understand the consciousness of an individual. Similarly, I understand the limits to my comprehension of the interviewees meaning making, and I agree that the social sciences are second order constructs, or "constructs of constructs made by the actors in the social scene," as Schütz (1962, in Blaikie, 2010, p.117) defines it.

3.2 Considerations of my role

My interest in researching the Hungarian art field is partly grounded in the fact that I have a Hungarian family background and have worked as a professional artist. This means that I have knowledge about both the Hungarian cultural context as well as the international art scene. I can speak Hungarian (Magyar) which has been of essential importance due to the fact that many news articles, reports and research are only attainable in the Hungarian. Since I have worked within the art field in Sweden, Norway and internationally, I understand the artistic context and am familiar with issues such as artists precarious working conditions and freelance living. I have 'been in their shoes', so to speak, and view this knowledge as a strength considering that it may lead to interpretations that are closer to the artists' experiences. I see my role in line with the abductive researcher role of a 'faithful reporter', a 'reflective partner' or a 'conscientizer' (Blaikie, 2010, p.126), while still balancing that role with a critical and reflexive approach to the material.

3.3 In the field

I stayed in Budapest for 40 days, between 20th of October to 30th of November in 2019 and I conducted my interviews, except four, within this time frame. I conducted 11 individual interviews with people working within the art field and the interviews lasted between 1-1,5 hour.

I lived in a neighborhood that both went by the name of Erszebetváros, 7th district and Bulinegyed (Party quarter). Most of my interviews were held in this area close to my apartment, and many were held in a coffee place in the same building. This was mostly for convenience as I was traveling with my four-month-old baby and it was practical to be close to home. Doing field work while nursing, naturally represented some limitations in terms of what I could do. I could not attend programs and events late in the afternoon, such as performances and panel discussions, but had to attend events during the day. Still, I did not consider this a big problem as my focus was on the material collected through interviews. One interview was conducted at the interviewee's workplace, one at a different coffee place requested by the interviewee and two were held through Skype. I expected that talking through Skype would be challenging, but I did not experience any difficulties. In addition to the interviews, I had informal conversations with artists and researchers. I paid attention to news reports on TV, what was commonly referred to as propaganda TV, where recurring themes were the immigrant crisis, drug crime and about the newly built football stadium in Budapest. Of note as well was the news coverage on the consequences of the Scandinavian countries different refugee policies; Denmark's restrictive policies was presented in a positive light, whereas Sweden's liberal policies were shown as leading to increased crime rates. One of the few TV-channels that is considered independent from the government, ATV, often showed political debates and discussions. At some point they discussed a controversial event at the parliament. A former Fidesz member, Hadházy Ákos, held signs in front of Orbán, saying "he has to lie because he stole too much". Another read: "Stop propaganda, stop corruption". This was referring to recent accusations of state corruption.

Another important event was that right before my arrival, a new mayor from the opposition parties had been elected: Gergely Karácsony. This meant that for the first time in nine years, the opposition parties had won the local elections in Budapest as well as several other cities. The newly elected mayor was very visible in the media landscape, in television and newspapers, and was often positively referred to by the interviewees.

Other than that, I visited cafes, the historical museum, the great synagogue, and the theater house Trafo during daytime. Trafo was one of the places that the interviewees mentioned the most, describing it as one of the few places where it was still possible to show critical art. The experience of being in Budapest for forty days, focused on my topic, gave me the opportunity to get a better understanding of the context of my interviewees. I held a preconceived notion that the political situation would create a restricted atmosphere. I discovered quite the contrary. People invited me into their workplaces and galleries or offered

me a seat on the bus when I needed to breastfeed. I saw gay men hold hands and overheard people talking loudly and openly on views critical about the government in cafes. The atmosphere felt free and open, like the interviewees often described, despite the illiberal political development, there was a sense that people were free to do what they wanted.

3.4 Linguistic considerations and consequences

I conducted all of my interviews in English except for one interview which had to be conducted in Hungarian due the artists lack of English skills. My Hungarian skills also came in handy when the artists English knowledge sometimes fell short. I chose to mainly conduct the interviews in English because even though I speak Hungarian, I am not fluent, and I knew that transcribing interviews and interpreting them would take an exorbitant amount of time if they were conducted in Hungarian. By doing the interviews in English I was more on the same level with the interviewees, as we spoke English equally well. Since English is not the first language of either the interviewees or me, it must be taken into account that some meaning might have been lost or misinterpreted. Another consequence of conducting the interviews in English is that it might have affected which artists agreed to participate and not. One artist I contacted did not wish to participate due to lack of English knowledge. Thus, the people who accepted taking part in the project might represent artists with a more international orientation.

3.5 Recruiting interviewees and thoughts about my selection

To get access to the Hungarian art scene I used the snowball, or chain referral sampling method (Andrews and Vassenden, 2007, p.5), by first contacting former Hungarian artists friends as well as contacting sociology researchers in Hungary who provided me with suggestions for interviewees. The interviewees gave me further suggestions for informants. Characteristic of the snowball methods sample is that it represents an availability sample (Grønmo, 2004; Thaagard, 2003; in Andrews and Vassenden, 2007), meaning that one will get access to informants that are available rather than securing representativity. This method of selecting informants was practical and beneficial for my project since the task to find

informants in a city where I did not have significant previous contacts was demanding. Instead of aiming to collect a strategic politically heterogeneous sample of artists, that I initially considered, I realized for practical reasons it was necessary to “let the field guide me”. Most of the people I interviewed consider themselves to be progressive, contemporary artist or curators, part of the independent art scene, which means that they worked freelance and independently of any state-run institution. All of them were politically in opposition to the government. The indication I got from the artists was that being against the government is representative of the art field in Hungary in general, while there are conservative artists as well. Thus, the interviews might be considered to give information about different views and experiences that oppositional and progressive artists experience in Hungary.

Many of the artists were financially independent from the governments cultural funds and were more dependent on international funding and collaborations. The majority lived and worked in Hungary, but mostly abroad, and some lived temporarily or more permanently abroad. I decided to only interview people who were born in and had grown up in Hungary to be sure to target artist who had a significant amount of experience and commitment to the Hungarian art scene. I only interviewed people who lived in Budapest or had formerly lived there.

My initial plan was to solely interview artists and exclude other type of cultural workers such as curators and cultural administrators. But a common feature within the art field is that people hold multiple roles. A visual artist can also be a curator, writer or a producer and such roles often overlap each other. As the idea of artist roles, ideals and artistic freedom can be viewed as discourses that exist in the art field as such (Wesner, 2018, p. 22). Ideas about artist roles and artistic ideals can be understood as something constructed by all actors engaged in and around art making. Thus, I found it beneficiary to open my study to interview people within the art field in general and not only target artists. The interviewees thus consist of mainly artists, but also two curators and one cultural administrator. The artists were working within, and sometimes across, the dance-, theater-, literature-, and visual art-field, while the curators mainly worked within the dance and visual arts scene. In the following list of interviewees, the artists social background, occupation, education and country of residence can be viewed.

3.6 List of interviewees

Name	Artistic occupation	Social background	Education	Financial support	Country of residence
Dora	curator	Middle class	University degree	Independent of the government	Hungary
István	writer	Middle class	University degree	Independent of the government	Hungary
Anna	Visual artist	Middle class	University degree	International funding, Hungarian state funding	Hungary
Judith	Writer, poet, performance artist	Working class	University degree	International funding	Recently moved abroad
Imre	Visual artists	Middle class	University degree	Independent of government, international funding	Hungary
Julia	curator	Middle class	University degree	Independent of government, international	Abroad
Maria	Dance artist	Middle class	University degree	Hungarian state and international	Hungary
Gabor	Theater artist	Unknown/ from “non-intellectuals” , the countryside.	University degree	Independent of government, stopped working as an artists	Recently moved abroad
Sandor	Dance artist	Middle class	University degree	Unknown	Hungary
Janos	Dance artist	Unknown	University degree	State funding and internationally	Hungary and abroad
Robert	Cultural	Unknown	Unknown	State employed	Hungary

	administrator /critic				
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3.7 Ethical considerations

All the interviewees received a document with information about the project and the implications of their participation. It included contact information in case they had any questions or concerns about the project after the interview. At the beginning of this project I lacked a clear understanding of how sensitive it would be for the artists to talk about artistic freedom in Hungary. I was aware that artists had lost financial support due to expressing criticisms of the government and I did not want my project to cause any problems. I let the artists know that they were free to withdraw their participation consent at any time. I asked for permission to record the interview before we started and if they had any questions before we began. I told the artists that I would secure their anonymity by not using their name or specific details that could reveal their identity, and that I would erase the recordings after the end of the project. To my surprise, the artists did not seem particularly worried about being anonymous and a few even urged me to use their names freely. However, one interviewee was more worried than the others, and he emphasized his wish to stay anonymous. While he did not give a reason for this, the fact that he worked at a state funded institution might have influenced his wish. Even though most informants were not worried about expressing their views, many described the Hungarian art context to represent an unpredictable landscape where the limits of acceptable behavior seemed obscure. As a precaution I decided to anonymize all the interviews, which I also found purposeful as I did not wish to give extra significance to any of the interviews in the thesis.

My role as a Norwegian researcher in Hungary also needs to be considered. My background may have affected their willingness to speak candidly about their working conditions. Among other things, I represent a country that is giving EEA and Norway grants to Hungary and at least one of the people I interviewed received funding from them.

Taking on a neutral position in qualitative sociological studies has been viewed as an impossible task, resulting in the inevitability of taking sides, as Becker (1967) argued. Considering that my political sympathies are close to those of the interviewees', there is a risk that this will shape my analysis. Howbeit, Liebling (2001) stresses that the researcher does not inevitably chose a side, but rather the researcher's sympathies can fall more broadly, and they

can sympathize with various groups at the same time. I find myself more in line with Liebling's stance and consider it to be the foremost commitment of a scientific professional to objectively analyze and describe the actors accounts, to practice self-criticism as well as a reasonable skepticism towards the informants' depictions.

3.8 Limits to the study

It is important to stress the limitations of my study. Since this is a master thesis and not a research project, I have been subjected to certain limitations. It was not my intent or aim to gain a representative selection of artists to say something general about the artistic field in Hungary. Rather, the interviews I conducted must be understood as examples of how the situation for Hungarian artists can unfold itself. My study exemplifies that being an artist in Hungary does not represent one thing but rather, should be viewed as complex and multifaceted. The limitations of the study are also a result of the specific logic of the snowball method (as described in section 3.5).

3.9 Interview guide

I conducted the interviews in a semi-structural way (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). I had established categories and set questions which I followed as closely as possible. But I also asked open questions and encouraged the artists to talk freely. Most of my informants were very talkative and had a good understanding of my topic. Sometimes they covered several of my questions by answering one. Letting the informants talk freely gave me the possibility to better understand what was important to *them* concerning their situation and the effects of the political developments in Hungary. It also allowed for new topics to emerge. Still, I actively guided the participants with my questions to ensure equivalence between the interviews. I asked about their social background, current works, their political views, their experiences with pressure, their ideas of artistic roles in Hungary, censorship, self-censorship, artistic freedom, and international experiences. I ended the interviews by asking the interviewees if there were questions I had missed, in line with Skilbrei's (2019, p.159) suggestions for ways to wrap up an interview.

3.10 Coding and analyzing the data

I transcribed all my interviews as closely to the recordings as possible, only making some grammatical adjustments. One interview was partly translated from Hungarian to English. I coded the data thematically, first into bigger categories and later into smaller subcategories. Some of the categories were defined before the interviews, while other categories emerged from the material. The latter were themes that the interviewees emphasized, such as international relations, social background, and life-situation or based on theoretical concepts such as ‘identity contingencies’ that I found to be relevant for the later analysis. After this process, I aggregated the material into higher categories in terms of four main dimensions that described how the artists constituted their ideas about artistic autonomy. These were the level of social background and life situation, macro-political level, international level, and artistic level. This process can be said to go in line with the idea of categorical analysis (Skilbrei, 2019, p.180), where the focus is on identifying especially significant processes, happenings, or practices, as they appear to the interviewees, but also concerning the research topic. This focus on the actors’ perspective goes in line with Heinich’s view that good sociological research should, to a certain extent, be guided by issues that actors themselves find relevant (Danko, 2008). However, the researcher is the one who chooses the perspective in the analysis.

I followed Pugh’s cultural-sociological view of what in-depth interviews give information about: “people’s motivation, beliefs, meanings, feelings and practices – in other words, the culture they use” (Pugh, 2013, p. 50). Further, “interpretive in-depth interviewing allows us to think about the cultural context of these meanings, to situate the feelings people feel in an emotional landscape they themselves sometimes ascertain, and always convey” (Pugh, 2013, p.47). Pugh describes that in interviews, people tend to want to put themselves in the best light possible, which again can say something about what is honorable behavior in their social context (Pugh, 2013, p.51). She calls this type of information ‘the honorable.’

I also agree with Pugh that contradictions contain valuable information about the complexity of individuals’ lives and thoughts, as well as the culture they are a part of (2013, p.48). Mead’s idea of the self as an ongoing conversation (O’Brian, 2011, p.241) points to the idea that there is not a core self, but people are constantly reflecting on their actions and interactions. The self is thus reflective and changeable. Similarly, contradictions in interviewees’ accounts can be understood as to how an individual’s opinions are never a finished activity, and that the individual is struggling to make sense of their views and is constantly figuring things out.

By being open to the similarities and differences in the informants' experiences, I strive to gain a broad and rich understanding of the field. Still I agree with the notion that self-reporting in-depth interviews must be treated as incomplete, in other words, that people do not always know the motivations and reasons for their actions, views or feelings (Robert Weiss (1994, p. 181) in Pugh (2013, p. 54)).

4 Theoretical perspectives

In this chapter, I will go through theoretical perspectives and previous research I find relevant to understand the role of artistic autonomy in Hungary's illiberal democracy. Based on my agnostic epistemological stance and lack of commitment to specific ontological preconceptions, I apply an eclectic theoretical approach. Rather than using a single theoretical framework to analyze the empirical material, I find it more purposeful to apply a broad range of theoretical concepts and theories across sociological traditions to enhance my findings. Such an approach will enhance my effort of not making a priori theoretical assumptions.

I will start by introducing relevant trends within the sociology of art tradition. Then I will present theoretical concepts such as artistic autonomy and the model of exit, voice, and loyalty (Hirschman, 1970), which will be actively applied and discussed in the analysis. The main objectives in this chapter will thus be to (1) place my study in the sociology of art tradition, (2) present theory around artistic autonomy and external pressure, (3) discuss the role of politics in art and (4) present key concepts applied in the analysis.

4.1 The sociology of art: critical and descriptive

Inglis (2010, p. 119) claims there are two main streams in the sociology of art. One is the 'critical' stream, which is characterized by the demystification of the art field. Here, the art scene is mainly viewed as a field of hidden power struggles, and the researcher's job is to 'expose' these relationships. The other stream is the 'descriptive' stream, which has its roots in American empirical research from the 1950s.

Bourdieu is considered a leading figure of the critical tradition. He describes the art field as a hierarchical field where actors engage in social distinction. He stresses that any sociological explanation must include an understanding of agents' systems of dispositions (*habitus*) and systems of positions in the social field (Broady, 2012, p.12). In his work *The Rules of Art* (1996), Bourdieu uses empirical examples to show how artists' social backgrounds (dispositions and positions) affect their chances of reaching recognition for their work. He explains that artists who come from middle- or upper- middle-class backgrounds are predisposed to achieve such success, primarily due to their taste and cultural capital (Bourdieu,

1996). Bourdieu also understands artists' autonomy and artists' their ability to affect change to be interlinked and dependent on their habitus and positions in the field. Bourdieu mainly understands developments in the art field to be based on the inner logic of the field. For a change in the art field to happen, there needs to exist enough autonomy for artists to be able to challenge the existing power structures (Broady, 2012, p. 12-13).

Becker is also partly placed within the critical stream. He dismisses the idea of the artistic genius, pointing at how the production of art is the result of a division of labour. In Becker's famous work, *Art Worlds* (1984), he explains the creation of art works as based on a *network of cooperation*. Becker emphasizes how hierarchies in the art field are established by gatekeepers and their value judgments (Inglis, 2010). DiMaggio also highlights the gatekeepers in the art field, in terms of formal institutions, that determine the opportunities for artists (DiMaggio and Stenberg, 1985, p.108). DiMaggio is viewed as critical for his focus on the institutions rather than on the artists as innovators but he applies a descriptivist approach as well. New institutionalism focuses on how social choices are formed through institutional processes and that these institutional processes are again affected by the cultural context (national and international) they are situated in. The hierarchies in the art field are distributed among different groupings in the arts field: what Becker calls art worlds. Becker distinguishes between four different art worlds types: (1) The Integrated Professional Artists, who have conventional training in a specific art form within the dominant or commercial cultural field, (2) The Maverick Artists, who are also trained according to the same conventions, but who break with such conventions and instead risk failure and exclusion, (3) The Folk Artists, who work traditionally within their communities' lore, and finally (4) The Naïve Artists, who establish themselves outside conventional training, and rather follow an "internal urging" (Zolberg, 2015, p.904). The importance of social background for the autonomy of the artists, the role of gatekeepers, and formal institutions, as well as considering the national and international context they are situated in will be relevant in my analysis. Becker's art world typology will also be applied, as I found it partly transferable to how the Hungarian artists distinguish among groups in their field and show how power relations between these groups are shifting.

Heinich is understood as a key scholar in the 'descriptive' stream, distancing herself from Bourdieu's critical sociology (Danko, 2008, p. 245). The focus of this stream is on describing the art scene empirically, highlighting structural aspects and the work of the artist. Heinich rejects sociological inquiries that are directed towards criticizing and revealing the 'true value' of the research object, and instead stresses that sociological research should focus

on describing these value systems, as the actors define them. In Heinich's view, the researcher must also be open for contradictory value systems to coexist and that artists' accounts can include constructions, deconstructions and reconstructions of value judgments (Danko, 2008, p.245).

The discussions between these streams have informed my analysis. The research question in this thesis emerged out of an interest for the societal development in Hungary, and rather than describing the art scene in Hungary in detail I aim at untangling the different descriptions that the interviewees put forward in the interviews. Thus, in practice I may be closer to the descriptive turn than the critical. The goal is to bring a better understanding of broader societal developments in Hungary with artists as a strategic sample, and not necessarily to explain the workings of Hungarian art, although that may occur as well.

4.2 The Charismatic myth and artistic autonomy

A central theme within the sociology of art has been to look at the construction of artist roles and how they change, or persist, over time. A dominant idea of the artist has been connected to the idea of the charismatic myth, dating back to either romanticism (Mangset, 2004, p. 49) or classical antiquity (Kris and Kurz, 1979). The charismatic myth describes the artist as someone who holds extraordinary abilities and an inner urging towards working with art. The charismatic myth can be viewed as a discourse or a cultural idea about the artist (Wesner, 2018, p.22), but might also be viewed as a role that artists internalize and that become a part of their self-understanding. Røyseng (2011) summarizes Mangset's (2004) review of how the sociology of art has looked at the development of the romantic or charismatic artist role through three steps. First, from being an anonymous craftsman, the artist increasingly became an *individual*, meaning that the artist gained a higher status. Second, the charismatic artist role is connected to the idea that the artist has a special calling or gift, connecting them with a sort of godliness, that sets them apart from the social world. Third, the charismatic artist's role is defined by a discrepancy between artistic ideals and economy. The artistic ideal means to prioritize artistic ambitions, not letting economic or other interests control their work (Røyseng, 2011). Artists' commitment to charismatic artist ideals has been used as a basis to understand why artists accept precarious living conditions, what Bourdieu has termed the 'interest in disinterestedness' and 'backwards economy' of the art field (Bourdieu, 1983). Drawing on sociology of professions, charismatic artists roles can be understood as part of the

legitimization of artistic autonomy in society and a form of social contract between the two (Røyseng, 2011).

The significance of the field of art as a separate field has been understood in light of the division of labour and means-end rationality that developed in the modern society. Bürger and Shaw (1985) writes that during the development of the bourgeoisie society, art took over from religion as the only area where “men’s lost wholeness could be recovered” and art received the role of formulating a critique of society as well as engaging in rendering it (Bürger and Shaw, 1985). This points to the historical role art has played in society, not only for the art field itself, but also as a symbol of man’s wholeness. Thus, when artistic autonomy is threatened, this threat can be understood to symbolically threaten the autonomy of people in society at large. Bourdieu (1996, p. 218) described the development of art as an autonomous ‘field’ as something that developed during the second half of the 19th century.

The autotelic slogan ‘art for art’s sake’ refers to this ideal that true art is engaged with art as an end in itself, as self-referential and independent of other fields. According to this ideal, artists first and foremost compete for the recognition of their peers, competitors, critiques and other intermediaries (Gustavsson, Börjesson and Edling, 2012), and are less dependent on outside institutions such as the mass media, politics, and state power (Broady, 2012). In his empirical study of the emergence of autonomy in the literary field (Bourdieu, 1996) and the visual arts field (Bourdieu, 1983) in France, Bourdieu shows how autonomy is dependent upon both internal and external conditions. Bourdieu’s definition of a field demands that struggles exist between different groups and their value systems. Bourdieu defines two competing subfields in the cultural field: the subfield of large scale or mass-production and the restricted subfield, which he also refers to as the heteronomous and the autonomous poles (restricted subfield). A developed and autonomous field is characterized by the emergence of struggles between the autonomous and the heteronomous pole. These poles operate based on their different values and ideals. The autonomous pole operates for a limited market, while the heteronomous pole creates for the broader public. Their positions are decided by the demand for their type of work from the outside public, i.e., the market. In order for the field to gain a high level of autonomy the autonomous pole needs to be in dominant positions according to Bourdieu (1996). Such developments create the conditions for the autonomous pole to manifest certain forms of capital and habituses. These work as criteria for defining the dominant idea of what constitutes artistic quality. These value systems in turn work as excluding mechanisms of external influences such as the logics of the economic sphere. Bourdieu divides the restricted subfield, into two categories: the successful

consecrated avant-garde and the less successful bohemian avant-garde. This hierarchic relationship stimulates the bohemian avant-garde artist to distinguish themselves by rejecting the consecrated avant-garde, identifying them as “sell-outs” and themselves with pure and free art (Gartman, 2002, p. 258).

Bourdieu stresses the importance of demographic changes as external factors affecting the art scene. As an example, he uses the literary field in France during the second half of the 19th century where people increasingly educated themselves and by this they contributed to a larger educated population searching for work in Paris (Bourdieu, 1996). This increase in the educated population and a subsequent increase in established and less established writers in the Parisian literary field lead to an increase in struggles and thus a developing autonomy in the field.

4.3 External pressure versus heteronomy

In addition to demographical changes, Bourdieu saw the increased influence of marketization as a significant threat to the art fields' autonomy (1996). A focus on the effects of marketization has influenced much of the later research on artist roles (Schediwy, Bhansing, and Loots, 2018; Ellmeier, 2003). Many have argued for the continued relevance of charismatic artist roles, despite changes towards marketization in the art field. Kris and Kurz (1934) viewed the charismatic artist role as something that had persisted over different epochs since antiquity. Mangset (2004) finds that the charismatic artist role is still a meaningful way to describe art student's ideals, but he also detects what he calls a differentiation of artist roles. He indicates that artists can assert to several roles simultaneously, such as entrepreneurial- and charismatic artist roles, without understanding this as problematic. He mentions roles such as the cultural entrepreneur and the postmodern or de-institutionalized artist, who merges art with other social fields. He understands such phenomena as the art student's practice of combining charismatic visions with a kind of *strategic realism* (Mangset 2004, p.254-255). This points at how the idea of artistic autonomy must be understood as an ideal type, where pragmatic aspects of artists' lives will always inflict on their choices and art practice.

Similarly, Wesner (2018) points to the continuity of the charismatic myth among German artists under the German unification. During the unification, artists were active in fostering political change, and Wesner claims that the charismatic artist role merged with political engagement. The artists interpreted social engagement as a part of their artistic

calling, or autonomous artist roles. Wesner understands the charismatic myth as an adaptable cultural value that can serve as an explanation for the artists' careers, their success, risk-taking, and individuality, as well as representing security in uncertain times (Wesner 2018, p.18).

On the same note, Røyseng (2011, p.11) sees artists' roles as something that at different times has developed in a symbolic negotiation between the artists and their surroundings. Hulatt (2013) accounts for the idea of artistic heteronomy, pointing at how the artists or works of art can be viewed as, to some extent constituted and determined by extra aesthetic or heteronomous processes. Banks (2010) emphasizes the importance of the market for the autonomy of the art field. He argues that autonomous artists were a product of the commercial society that developed during romanticism and that the art field is, therefore, inevitably linked to and depended upon the commercial world. The art market itself functioned to liberate rather than constrain the artists. The expansion of the art market at that time was a reason for why critical, and avant-garde movements could develop, as well as the possibility to acquire "higher levels of taste" (Banks, 2010, p.253). Banks finds that rather than rejecting capitalism, artists seek to find opportunities for meaningful self-realization within the limitations of society, what he calls the 'struggle within' the system. The practice of being an "autonomous artist" includes being committed to art and commercial necessities, as well as balancing this with protecting personal health, well-being, and social obligations for instance (Banks, 2010, p.263). While, in my case, the external threat consists of political pressure, the process of struggling from within the system will be an applicable way of interpreting the processes described by the artists in this thesis as well.

4.4 Artistic agency in repressive contexts

The sociology of art tradition has been biased towards looking at art in Western liberal democratic countries. Less attention has been given to artistic production and artists' roles within eastern or/and repressive contexts. Also, a broader context such as the effect of political change and authoritarian politics on the art field has been under-researched. Balancing this bias, scholars such as Zolberg (2015), Adams (2005), and Rothenberg (2014) emphasize the political context and look at the art field under repressive political systems. Adams (2005) has looked at why political art changes over time. In her case study, she looked at protest art ("Arpilleras") made by shantytown women in Chile, during the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. To explain changes in artistic genres, she highlights the "intermediaries," meaning the organizational actors that connect the producers and the buyers

of the art. Change in the arts can reflect intermediaries and buyers' as much as the artists' preferences. The intermediaries connect artists and politics, and Adams looks at how changes in the national politics can affect the way the international intermediaries relate to the artists in the country. It is intermediaries working with oppositional art who are especially likely to be fearful in repressive contexts and who react by ordering less offensive artworks (Adams, 2005, p. 532). Adams introduces the concept of *solidarity market*, which describes a process where international buyers of the Arpilleras favored pieces that showed the hardship and violence in the lives of Chilean people because this fit with their idea of the situation and with their wishes to support democratization processes. Adams concludes that: "To a limited extent, then, political art changes in tandem with changes in society." In addition to pointing at how changes in the art field must be understood as a result of different factors working together, she emphasizes how the national, local as well as international political and economic dimensions affect such change (Adams, 2005, p. 554-555).

In Cushman's (1995) empirical sociological study of the effect of historical political shifts in Russia on rock music counter cultural movements, he shows how authoritarian political developments can evoke political engagement among artists. Cushman criticizes the "Western myth" of the Soviet Union as an exclusively closed society and argues that instead of understanding societies in terms of closed and open, one must apply the sociological idea that the dialectic of agency and structure exist over time and space (Cushman, 1995, p. 33). He stresses that even in liberal societies there are social processes that make them less open. Cushman describes homologies between Russian Rock culture and Western rock cultures, pointing at how even if the Soviet Union's cultural ideology was totalitarian, there were still ways in which rock musicians met Western rock culture. Like Adams, Cushman thus points at another important factor which is the need to include international or global dimensions into analysis in social research. The concept of the solidarity market and international dimensions will be important for my study as well, seeing how the international art field is an essential dimension in the artists' lives.

Zolberg points to how changes in the art field can reveal significant changes in society at large. She highlights how the exclusion of certain types of art in the art field, such as art by ethnic minorities and women, can say something about political tendencies. Zolberg (2015, p.902) further point to how the growing popularity of African art, African carvings and art made by women must be seen in relation to social changes, as well as changed preferences in the art field. Similarly, Rothenberg (2014) points to how the expansion of the Black middle class in America in the 1960s, was a reason for increased interest in collecting and buying

African American art that spoke of a Black experience and identity (Rothenberg, 2014, p.124). By looking at the experiences of the Hungarian artists I similarly expect to be able to say something general about the social changes in Hungary at large.

4.5 The choices of exit or voice, and questions of loyalty

Hirschman's (1970) concepts of exit, voice, and loyalty explain actors' choices in situations where economic, social, or political systems become dysfunctional. While Hirschman has primarily used the concepts in the context of economic downturns, the concepts apply to describe actors' choices when political and state apparatuses are disrupted as well. "Exit" refers to the choice actors make to leave their situation. "Voice" points to the choice to stay and protest or demonstrate for their cause. Hirschman argues that actors will most often choose exit over voice if possible since exit consists of a preferable clear cut "either-or option.". In contrast, voice is "an *art*," continually evolving and taking many directions (Hirschman, 1970, p. 43). If both exit and voice are viable options, the decision to choose voice depends on their sense of loyalty to their place in the economy, society, or state. Importantly, loyalty is not merely idealistic behavior. Instead, loyalty also refers to the rational and calculated choices actors make. The reason why actors show loyalty despite being dissatisfied with their situation (or country) can be the cost of exit or a belief that the situation will eventually pass (Hirschman, 1970, p. 38). Hirschman also writes that in certain cases, the role of voice will increase when the viability of exit decreases. He also claims that it is more likely that people in less developed countries use voice more loudly than people in advanced economies. This is because people in advanced economies often have many choices when it comes to how they want to live their lives, while in less advanced economies, actors usually have fewer options. When people in advanced economies are dissatisfied, they tend to choose a silent exit over voice (Hirschman, 1970, p. 35). While the model seems simple, the interplay between exit, voice and loyalty is complex when applied to empirical examples. I will use this typology to discuss how the artists react and are affected by the political developments in Hungary and how they motivate their actions of protesting or leaving Hungary. What will become clear is that the question of loyalty in the case of the artists is complex due to their lack of a real workplace. They work freelance and independently. Thus, the question is: What is the most important frame of reference for the artists towards which

they direct their loyalty? Is it the Hungarian art field, the Hungarian state, or rather artistic autonomy itself? By using Hirschman's concepts, I will be able to show how the artists navigate and motivate their actions in the field when faced with decay in the Hungarian art field.

4.6 The ambiguous role of politics in art

Bourdieu once stated that "Sociology and art do not make good bedfellows" (Bourdieu, 1983), and the same could be said of art and politics. The question of political engagement or politics in art has been an ambiguous matter in the art field. This ambiguity can be examined regarding the ideal of autonomy in the arts. This autonomy involves the distortion of outside phenomena according to the art field's logic; the way that politics is integrated into art is thus an essential factor and a matter of distinction.

Prins (2016, p.94) examines the tension between artistic autonomy and political engagement. Historically, artists have often considered their art to be politically engaged, but it has been a source of debate as to how this political engagement is expressed. Prins (2016) defines this as a debate and conflict between ideals of "art for art's sake," that values the politics of art in itself, and "art for everyone's sake" that valued socially engaged art. Slaatta and Okstad (2014) describes that political art has undergone a change of status in the art field. The idea that art should communicate a political message to the audience developed in the 19th century and was actualized with Marx's notion of bourgeois culture. Marx argued that art was one way that class hierarchies reinforced themselves, which brought about a crisis in arts' self-understanding, as a progressive force in society that served the working class. Slaatta and Okstad further describe that during the interwar period, the idea of art as a politically progressive force gained in popularity, citing the developments of Communist societies in Europe. This radicalization of the political role of art developed into the stigmatization of politically infused art (Slaatta and Okstad, 2014). Political art was contrasted with the more avant-grade art of modernity, where the ideal was to make artwork complex and open for numerous interpretations by the audience.

In her study of artists under Germany unification after WWII, Wesner (2018) points out that during unification, artists started to engage more politically. She also argues that artists had to balance their political criticisms, as many were dependent on commissioned work and did not want to be seen as unfriendly to the regime. (Wesner 2018, p.120). Thus, in repressive contexts, artists may have to balance between their artistic ideals and the ideals of

the governments, to avoid going against the artistic etiquette, but also prevent sanctions from political or financial patrons. Weiser describes how, after the unification, German artists started to travel more. When coming from the East, they often experienced being treated like heroes.

The political development thus opened opportunities for artists (Wesner 2018, p.29). Weiser describes that the nature of the charismatic myth of the artist changed from an inward-looking elitist ideal to an open and politically motivated artist. In other words, she argues that artists' motivations for being artists related to the charismatic myth in all periods. Still, the role and conditions of artists differed significantly from one period to the next, from lack of freedom to heroization, to marketization. Sapiro (2003) points at how during specific moments in history when there is increased political pressure, artists can interpret their inner artistic drive as in line with social engagement. Nagy (2015) describes such a phenomenon to have developed in the Hungarian art scene and finds that Hungarian artists have become increasingly socially engaged after the Orbán government came to power in 2010. He quotes an artist from the group PanoDrama who talked about their increased political engagement:

I never liked political theater, but what I'd like even less is to not talk about what's going on in Hungary these days. We perform Chekhov and Feydeau as if murderous racism hadn't reappeared in our streets. As if we hadn't been seeing the slogans of the 1930s on our buildings' walls and in some of our papers." (Nagy, 2015.)

The quote shows how artists who consider themselves autonomous or avant-garde can see it as their responsibility to engage socially due to increased political pressure in Hungary. Thus, the charismatic artist role must be understood as changeable, context-bound, and always heterogeneously connected with extra aesthetic dimensions.

Bourdieu's concept of *refraction effects* (Bourdieu, 1996) describes how autonomy in a field is high when an external phenomena is incorporated into the field using the logics and beliefs specific to the field itself. If the autonomy in the art field is high, external matters will go through a process of being diverted, translated, and interpreted according to the logic of aesthetic taste. Hilgers and Mangez (2014, p. 7) describe refraction effects as a process where, when autonomy in the field is extensive, the actors tend to see the world through "a prism constructed in the field." Following Bourdieu's line, looking at the way the artists incorporate political matters in their work can say something about the state of autonomy in the Hungarian art field.

4.7 Artistic freedom and Autonomy: intersecting concepts

The idea of artistic freedom is closely connected to the concept of artistic autonomy since both are concerned with the art field's independence of external pressure. These two terms will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis. While in the interview questions, I focused more on artistic freedom; the analysis involves interpreting the artists' conceptions as expressions of ideals of artistic autonomy. I make a distinction between the two terms on the basis that artistic freedom can target both the legal, political, and sociological aspects of art's role in society. In contrast, artistic autonomy is more connected with the internal logic of the field and the idea of art for art's sake. Slaatta and Okstad (2014) describes the idea of the artist as a "truth-seeking subject," with special needs to express themselves freely, distinct from the rest of the population.

Slaatta and Okstad (2014) explains that in order to understand the state of artistic freedom the dependencies and power relations in the art field must thus be investigated. A way in which the state of artistic freedom is measured is by looking at if the artists experience an increase in editorial or curatorial resistance. This will be a fruitful way to measure the artists' perception of artistic autonomy in my thesis as well. A compelling point Slaatta and Okstad make is how artistic freedom, to a great extent, is understood as a subjective matter. Violations against artistic freedom are based on the artists' own experience of such exclusion by intermediaries. Artists views on censorship can differ from other people's perspectives; being asked to change a work of art, or not have a book accepted for publishing, can by the artists be experienced as a violation of their freedom. Simultaneously, the general public might not understand this as problematic at all (Slaatta and Okstad, 2014, p.13). Censorship does not only occur when the art is already created but can happen during the production or even before the art is produced. The state or intermediaries can perform such censorship, even the artists themselves in terms of self-censorship. Bourdieu calls this a priori censorship (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991, p.138), and Butler calls it indirect censorship (Butler, 1998, p.251), which are concepts I will apply in the analysis.

4.8 Theoretical encounters in the following

In this chapter I have presented the theoretical backdrop of my thesis. I have done this by (1) placing my thesis in the sociology of art tradition, (2) defining and problematizing the idea of artistic autonomy and external pressure, (3) discussing the role of politics in art, (4) presenting key concepts that will be applied in the discussion. My theoretical approach is eclectic, and the theoretical concepts will be used broadly to highlight the analysis. I will stay close to Heinech descriptive-analytic approach as I want to stay close to the artists' descriptions of their situation and views while addressing theoretical concepts to highlight my findings.

5 Artistic Autonomy in Hungary's Illiberal Democracy

The central aim of this chapter is to gain insight into Hungarian artists' experiences with the illiberal democratic developments in Hungary after 2010. More specifically, I search to understand how artists constitute their understanding of artistic autonomy in this context. A striking finding in the material is that many of the artists describe a discrepancy between the general situation and how the political situation is affecting them individually. The main narrative of the artists was that while artistic freedom was perceived to be under severe pressure in general, this pressure is described as influencing *other* artists and intermediaries in the Hungarian art scene rather than them. My analysis will show that the relationship between politics and art is not a straightforward matter, but rather constitute a complex relationship, mediated through many different dimensions. I find that when the artists talk about the effects of the political situation in Hungary, they constitute their ideas of autonomy on four levels. These levels are, as mentioned before: (1) The dimension of social background and life situation, (2) The macro-political dimension, (3) The international dimension, (4) the artistic dimension. The first level indicates that the artists' possibility to work autonomously depends on a privileged social background as well as a simple life situation. The second level shows how the artists understand that the macro-political changes of the Orbán-regime are indirectly affecting their autonomy, creating a culture of uncertainty. The third level discusses the implications of the artists' international relations, which represents a chance to sustain independence from the government, but also reveals stereotypical expectations on the Hungarian artists imposed by international intermediaries. Together, conflicting expectations in the macro-political- and the international dimension represents what I define as a "double pressure." The fourth level describes the artistic context and how the artists relate to social engagement within their art while emphasizing artistic autonomy. Together, these four levels serve as a complex framework for understanding how the artists constitute their ideas of autonomy within Hungary's illiberal democracy. What will become clear is that even though the Hungarian artists are subject to animosities and political pressure, artistic autonomy is still

the essential ideal and the basis for how they create meaning around their views, situations, experiences, choices, and actions.

Accordingly, my analysis consists of one extensive chapter with four main sections, which each is about one of the four mentioned dimensions. In the following section, I will first discuss how social background and life situation played into the artists' understanding of autonomy.

5.1 The dimension of social background and life situation

Previous research and theory have often focused more on the social background of art consumers and less on the background of producers of the art. But surveys that have looked at artists' social backgrounds suggest how people from the middle and upper-middle class are over-represented in the cultural sector compared to the rest of the workforce (O'Brien, Brook, and Taylor, 2018). Others have found a connection between having a middle-class background and being involved in classical music, for instance Bull (2019). In the book *Rules of Art* (1996) Bourdieu looks at how the success and failure of the artists Duchamp and Cladel, can be ascribed to systems of dispositions (*habitus* and *capital*) and positions in the field, where privileged social backgrounds lead to more success and social recognition. Echoing Bourdieu, Ljunggren (2016) finds that economic class origins lead to considerably higher incomes in the Norwegian cultural upper class, which in that study consists of actors and other cultural producers.

In contrast to the research mentioned above that gives outside perspectives, the following will show how the artists themselves talk about the effects of social backgrounds. The social background and life situation of the artists were not predefined topics in this thesis. However, based on the artists' depictions, the question emerged as an essential aspect to include based on how the artists saw their privileged social background as intertwined with artistic autonomy. Further, they saw their specific life situation, as well as agency, as enabling an autonomous art practice, despite the political pressure of the Orbán-regime. Their social circumstances were also as allowing for upholding their professional ethics. The fact that most of the artists in my study described a privileged social backgrounds might be due to an over-representation of privileged individuals who inhabit the art field in general. I have not found any statistics on the social backgrounds of Hungarian artists to confirm or

reject such a supposition. However, a survey based on the cultural field shows that in 2009 over 70% of the Hungarian cultural elite had white-collar fathers (Kristof, 2017). Kristof's findings indicate that it is more common to become a part of the cultural elite if you are from a privileged social background. Still, it does not say anything about the social background of the artist population in total or of actors outside of cultural elite positions. The artists in my thesis indicated that their privileged situation represented exceptions in the art field and contrasted their privileged backgrounds with the majority of artists who graduated from college in Hungary, for instance. Nannyonga-Tamuzuza (2005) suggests that people who are selected for qualitative interviews often tend to represent "formally-resourceful informants". Thus, the artists in my study may represent a well-off minority in the art field, who in Bourdieu's framework might experience the most autonomy in their social context. Slaatta and Okstad (2014) describe how artistic freedom relates to the specific position that artists have in the art field and that different positions can represent different levels of autonomy. A well-established artist might experience greater autonomy than what is representative of the art field in general. Assumptions of the state of autonomy of a whole field based on the experiences of a few well-to-do artists might thus be misleading and represent what Bourdieu understands as orthodoxies or myths about the autonomy in the art field (Bourdieu, 2000, in Slaatta and Okstad 2014). Therefore, as Slaatta and Okstad (2014) suggest, while artists might have equal rights to make the art they want, the risk and consequences for doing so will differ based on the artists' situation. Similar viewpoints were highlighted by the Hungarian artists as well, which will become apparent in the following.

5.1.1 Autonomy as a matter of privilege

The artists viewed their privileged backgrounds as providing essential support systems that made taking risks possible. Their parents were doctors, sociologists, government politicians, poets and publishers, kindergarten teachers, and from the nobility. Anna, a young visual artist, understood both her privileged background and life situation as a part of her possibility to work freely with art:

My parents are not very wealthy but quite wealthy, so if anything happens, they can always help me. I don't have children; I am very independent... So I am not that vulnerable. I see my position. I see my privileges. But it doesn't mean that I cannot

imagine that the actions of the government can affect people's lives very heavily. But somehow, my life is different.

Anna further described how working freely with art was also a matter of choice:

I think it is an existential question. You *can* be free. A lot of people choose self-censorship because they would like to provide food for their families. So, I am not afraid because I have my background and I am a chef, so if I don't have money, I'll just work at a restaurant. It is also about what you want from life...I have friends who are not well off and still are very rebellious, but you know, they don't have, for example, health insurance [laughing]. They live with their friends in a commune. So, it depends. You can be free, but then you have to choose that life. (Anna)

Anna describes that her ability to stay autonomous due to her privileged social background is also intertwined with her life situation and individual choices. A privileged social background can explain the possibility of being autonomous to some extent, but she argues that the artist's agency is crucial as well. While Anna describes it as a choice to work freely and independently with art and without "responsibility for anyone," McRobbie (2016) points at how being successful in the creative industries often requires actors to develop specific skill sets and lifestyles that reflect the precarious conditions in the art field. Thus, artists can be forced to accept the terms in the field and shape their lives accordingly. While Anna's life situation allows her to pursue a career as an artist currently, it may be different if her life situation changes. In addition to the already precarious conditions of independent artists who often lack social security, the political pressure in Hungary could potentially worsen the conditions as well.

Imre reflected upon how many of his peers at his former university had to take other jobs to support themselves, because of their social background:

... and this is a problem because it is super hard to be an artist for people who are not from a better economic background. There are some examples where it happened, but it's really hard.

Imre thinks that coming from an economically privileged background is essential for making it as an artist in Hungary. He sees his social background as a decisive reason for why he has

succeeded and describes how less privileged artists who do well, represent exceptions to the rule.

Judith considered herself to be such an exception. She was the only artist who explicitly described that she came from underprivileged family conditions. Still, she had found her way into the art field after going through many years of university education. Thus, Judith described her upward mobility and entry into the art field as encouraged through her education rather than her social background. Judith described her (and her partner's) journey towards becoming a successful artist in terms of a folk fairy tale:

In the Hungarian folk-fairy tales, it is usually that: 'once upon a time was a very poor girl and she goes for a trip, to find himself or herself and her fortune.' It was our case as well: two poor people from different villages, without any support or opportunities, just made a decision... and we landed these literary NGOs one by one, and then my books were published, and I had residencies abroad, and this is how it went. (Judith)

Judith's provides a playful and romantic account of her journey, from being a poor girl in the countryside to become a well-established literary artist in the city. Her ability to enter the art field with her less privileged social background needed to be put into the context of fiction because it represented such an "unlikely story." But Judith's journey from the countryside to the urban city involved going through higher education and experience with living in cosmopolitan cities such as Budapest and London, evoking the idea that she has developed a middle-class cosmopolitan habitus (Butler and Robson, 2003). While Judith's family background did not enhance her opportunities in the art field, her habitus or cultural capital, developed during higher education and by living in an urban environment, can be seen to have contributed to her successful career trajectory.

While the artists emphasized the importance of social background in terms of economic privilege in reaching preferred positions in the art field, research has pointed at the significance of cultural taste in reaching middle-class positions in the workforce, which is especially the case in the cultural and creative sector (Koppman, 2016, O'Brien et al., 2018). So, while it may be true that economic capital enhances the artists' chances of reaching autonomy in their work, their habitus or cultural capital must be considered to contribute to maintaining positions in the Hungarian art field.

5.1.2 Professional ethics as a matter of positions and dispositions

Røyseng (2011) claims that although the art field can be viewed as a weak profession inside a sociology of profession framework, it can be said to have profession-like traits. She claims that the norms connected to artist roles constitute a kind of professional ethics and that such norms among artists are often dominant and go above other considerations such as commercial interests (Røyseng 2011, p. 11). While receiving economic support from the government might seem unproblematic in terms of upholding artistic autonomy in liberal democratic or social welfare states (Slaatta and Okstad, 2014, p. 61), this was not the case for the Hungarian artists in my study. As a consequence of the Orbán government's reorganizations in the cultural field, where cultural institutions were perceived to be biased towards conservative ideologies, new ethical considerations had emerged among the artists. The issue of receiving support from the state was understood as a moral dilemma. The artists' privileged social background was seen as enabling the pursuit of upholding artistic ideals, such as protesting the government's actions. There was a boycott against the MMA, allegedly focused in the visual art scene, and several of the interviewees were participating. But the artists expressed doubts about the effectiveness of a boycott as well as the moral pressure it represented for other less fortunate artists. Imre was one of the visual artists who was boycotting the MMA, but who had some concerns on the issue:

I think that a boycott against this Hungarian art academy isn't such a good idea. It's a good idea for me, but when somebody applies for a grant, their names will be shown in public, which means that they would lose everything in the independent art scene. They would not ever get an invitation again. I have a flat in Budapest; I have an OK financial background. So, I can do a boycott, but some people who are from the countryside, for example, for them it could be a chance to work with art and not as a barista.

Imre describes a moral pressure in the Hungarian art field and the implications that this can have for less privileged artists. Dora emphasizes how the moral choices that the Orbán-regime's actions evoke are most problematic to handle for artists who have some social awareness:

There are all these kinds of moral choices that artists have to make constantly. What you subscribe to and what not, where you apply and where you don't apply, if it means anything to make a personal boycott when others are just getting the money, and you don't, and there is no alternative. I think it has been pretty tough in that sense for artists who do have some political awareness. And existentially really difficult... Not having income from any state-related sources like I do is super rare. Very few people are able to do that in the visual arts.

Dora describes herself to be in an exceptional situation as someone who has managed to become independent of the government.

Julia, a curator, living in Berlin, describes that she has personally become independent from the government. However, she was still applying for funds from Hungarian cultural institutions on behalf of Hungarian artists that she invited to Germany. She describes that she is continuously engaged with questioning her choices and tactics and if she should stop her collaboration with institutions that were supported by the Hungarian state:

On the one hand, I feel that I don't want to collaborate with the institutions that are linked to the government. On the other hand, I know that than I, as an independent curator, will not be able to give a platform for Hungarian artists in Berlin. There are no funding possibilities. Should one cut all connections, or should one "play the game" until matters change? These are questions that I am dealing with. I am also aware that I am in a luxurious position. That I don't have a family, I don't have to take care of small kids. It's just me at the moment. So, I don't want to say this is the way everyone should work. (Julia)

Julia describes how she is navigating in the political landscape based on ideals of autonomy as well as tactical considerations. Julia also sees her ability to navigate and make choices based on moral commitments as a privilege. Trautmann et al. (2013) describe the relationship between social background and ethical decisions as a complex mosaic where moral values, social orientation, and costs and benefits of various actions affect ethical behavior. They stress the emergence of substantial class differences in all these areas, which means that people's social backgrounds cannot explain their moral choices alone (Trautmann et al., 2013, p. 487). While the artists point at their privileged economic background and situation as reasons for

their ability to uphold professional ethics, cultural capital, ideas of costs and benefits, and social commitment play a part in artists' choices as well.

As Pugh (2013) writes, interviewees often tend to put themselves in the most admirable light possible when they talk about themselves in interviews. The way interviewees describe themselves can be viewed as a cultural barometer of what is admirable behaviors in the actors' social setting (Pugh, 2013, p. 57). In the case of the artists in my study, what seems to represent admirable behavior is to show awareness of what their privileges enables, and reflexivity towards how matters are for less privileged artists. It might be difficult for artists to admit to how their cultural capital gives them an advantage in the art field due to how it can represent hard-to-grasp internalized aesthetic preferences and norms. The importance of cultural taste and reputation in the Hungarian art field is highlighted by Kristof, who finds that cultural capital has since the 1980s been an essential element of reaching elite positions in the Hungarian cultural field (Kristof, 2017b). I will elaborate more on the importance of the artists' cultural taste in the artistic dimension. The following section targets how the artists constitute their ideas of autonomy through the level of macro-politics.

5.2 The Macro-political dimension

The major external threat to the art field has been viewed as privatization and marketization in the art field (Bourdieu, 1996, p.345-347; Kleppe 2018), which can be understood as central problems in liberal democratic contexts. However, those analysis falls short considering the Hungarian context, where a strong state seems to represent a severe challenge to the art field's autonomy. Research that targets political influence on the art field emphasizes the role of intermediaries, who work as mediators between politics and artists. In repressive contexts, such intermediaries are described to become especially fearful, subjecting themselves, and in turn, artists to self-censorship. But what about being in the context of politics in-between authoritarianism and democracy? Researchers have described that artistic freedom in Hungary is restricted due to the reorganization of the cultural field in line with the government's ideology, centralization of power, and a neglect of the arm's length principle (Bozóki, 2013). Kristof (2017b) also points at the elite circulation in the field, where government-loyal actors have advanced in terms of gaining positions (Kristof, 2017b).

This section aims to give an insight into the effects of such structural changes from the artists' perspective.

5.2.1 Culture of uncertainty

Whereas artists during dictatorships can expect direct censorship by the government, what seems to be characteristic of the artists' experiences in an illiberal democratic context is that it represents a culture of uncertainty. The artists describe an everyday reality where they lack a clear overview of potential consequences that their actions would have. The artists do not define their experiences with structural pressure as direct, but rather indirect censorship, that comes in the form of structural changes, obscure threats, and centralizing of power by the Orbán-regime. Financial cuts to the independent art scene and reorganizing art subsidies under new criteria, in line with the government's conservative agenda, are two examples of this phenomenon. Curator Dora describes the structural changes of the Orbán government as 'structural censorship' that quite invisibly undermine the progressive art scene. The changes in the National Cultural Fund (MMA), is described as particularly influential, due to the vast amount of money and power they have gained in the Hungarian art field. Dora calls the changes of the MMA unconstitutional:

You know it [the MMA] was like a private group of friends that overnight became like a private body. So whoever was member of the association like next day they were like public decision-makers. Even the constitutional court ruled against it, but then it still remained in place. (Dora)

Dora also talk about how changes in the TAO system³ is an example of the concealed ways in which the government have gained more control over public money. While the government compensates the theaters that lost money after the TAO was removed, it ensures that they can define the criteria for receiving funds, since the government selects the jury. Dora describes that one of the requirements for receiving money is "the positive representation of Hungarian national identity and the presentation of our belonging to European Christian culture." Dora describes that one of the consequences of the TAO's removal is that theater companies with critical approaches are excluded from funding:

³ The interviewees described TAO as an arrangement implemented by the previous government where companies, instead of paying tax to the government, could choose to pay an amount to the cultural sector. The TAO represented a source of economic security for the independent theater sector. In 2018 the TAO was removed for theaters funds were given directly through state support.

There have been some theater companies that has been really critical and of course, they don't get support. So, the censorship is structural. It's not like the production is presented and then the government says 'this is not in line with the censorship law.' They just make it impossible for people to work. Like Arpád Schilling, he was officially named national security risk. It was really tough, and he gave up and moved away. So, this is much more effective than creating heroes. And Arpád Schilling was even the closest to becoming a hero in this story.

Dora further describes how the governments' subtle and almost invisible interference in the art scene has proved to be a very effective tactic in suppressing the independent art scene. Such experiences evoke Bourdieu's description of "a priori censorship". He shows how the most effective types of censorship are the ones that are concealed and that exclude actors from communication and from certain groups and spaces where one can speak with authority (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991, p.138). While the artists did not experience direct censorship, this indirect censorship might be considered to work just as effectively to hinder certain kinds of art from public visibility. Dora mentions the case of Schilling⁴ as an exception and an example of more direct types of censorship. Dora, as well as many of the other artists, explain how the marginal visibility of the visual arts in the cultural field was a reason why she does not experience pressure in her art, in addition to her not using the infrastructure of the government. The artists' marginal positions in the field are perceived to make it less important for the government to control them. Several of the people within the dance field also explain the lack of pressure they experience is due to the marginal position of their field and that they are living in a "bubble." Becker (1984, p.187) writes that even in repressive political contexts, the state can be indifferent to the kind of art that the small cultural elite is engaged in and will only start caring when these expressions reach a broader audience. Like Dora, several artists describe the theater scene as especially subject to government control, because of their visibility and central role in the Hungarian cultural field. Also, Kristof (2017a, p.138), describe theater to be a historically significant genre in Hungary that is politically controllable, through state funds and policies. The theater field's important role in the Hungarian cultural

⁴ During a close-door session by the National Security Committee in 2017, Fidesz claimed Schilling was "participating in the disruption of Hungary's internal order." and called him a threat to national security (Spike, 2017).

scene can therefore be understood as a reason for the government's interference. The case of Schilling can also be explained by how his visibility in the public scene is perceived as a threat to the government. Due to his critical approach and position in the field he might be seen as a threat because of his potential ability to reach mass mobilization.

Kristof describes how, apart from the theater field, the literary field has been the target of the Hungarian government's efforts to change the cultural canon (Kristof, 2017a, p.134). As writers are perhaps often more prone to write for newspapers, they are in closer proximity to the general public than visual or dance artists, for instance. István is a writer and describes that until recently, he had been writing for the major Hungarian newspaper *Magyar Nemzet* for five years but had suddenly encountered pressure for his critical approach. The paper had changed its editor, and so did his chances of writing there. The reasons could be many, but István thinks his critical perspectives on the government has made the editors step back from him:

I wrote in newspapers like the old *Magyar Nemzeti*, but suddenly everything had changed and I couldn't write there anymore... I got some 'colors' to my lines [from editors]. They asked me why I wanted to hurt my lovely country. I am really critical, but it was years ago. It gave me existential problems, I didn't have money, from anywhere. So, for me, it is a bit of a sensitive question: how can I live from my writing while not selling myself. That is always a question for a free speaker or for a free writer. But later on, I started my online newspaper with friends, and we got some funds, and it has absolutely worked. I can write anything that I want.

Thus, István describes having been affected by changed preferences of intermediaries who had become more sensitive towards critique and political content. István's and the other artists' experiences echo Adam's (2005) description that intermediaries are especially likely to be fearful in repressive contexts, and that such circumstances can lead to intermediaries calling for less denunciatory work. István would rather be less publicly visible than compromise with his artistic ideals. His experiences add to the idea that while it is still possible to protect one's autonomy in the Hungarian art field if you operate in the margins, there seem to be fewer possibilities to do so when you are more publicly visible, for example writing in a daily newspaper that reaches a bigger audience. Using Bourdieu's (1996) framework, a conclusion from this might be that in illiberal democracies, when artists from the autonomous pole, who are more prone to criticize the dominant ideologies, reaches

towards the heteronomous pole's mass audiences to affect change, the political power will experience this as a threat and restrict their agency in these channels. In turn, this might lead to less autonomy in the art field.

When I asked the artists about their experiences of artistic freedom, they often described the issue as ambivalent and double-sided. They explained how the government's actions and changes in the art field create a feeling of uncertainty. Judith stressed the ambiguity of artistic freedom, pointing at how, despite major changes and restrictions targeting liberal institutions (also affecting her work), there were still possibilities to work freely with art. What was troubling her was the difficulty of knowing where the limits went:

You don't know where the border is. You can do things, but then they are coming. The tax control or you will get a shitty article in a newspaper. Some writers were also really attacked in articles, also for what they look like. Not just for what they are writing about. Mostly against women of course. So it is a very difficult question. I cannot say a yes or a no. I would say yes [to artistic freedom is under pressure], but there are still things which you can do.

Judith further describes how liberal-leftist places and meeting points are constantly under attack by the government, in terms of being threatened with tax-controls if they do not close or sell their venues. The result is that such places are increasingly disappearing from the scene. While Judith describes an unpredictable situation for small left-liberal organizations, she seems to want to avoid being categorical in her description of artistic freedom. Even though she points at threatening actions by the government that creates insecure working conditions among artists, she still wants to highlight that the possibilities to work freely are still there and that somehow the artists are still engaged in creating independent, critical art.

Like Judith, Imre was also undecided when I asked him if he thought artistic freedom was under pressure. "Yes, it could be, but even if it's an abused democracy, it's still a democracy. So, we can do whatever we want, but we are risking the financial support from the government." Imre seemed eager to accentuate that artists in Hungary are still working based on ideals of autonomy despite serious indications that artistic freedom is compromised in Hungary. While the artists interpret their situation as partly free, similarly to Bourdieu, Butler (1998, p.251) distinguishes between direct and indirect censorship, stressing how it is indirect censorship that works most effectively as it operates in unspoken ways and creates

mechanisms of unspeakable discourses. Consequently, the situation and long-term consequences might be more severe than the artists experience it to be.

While the artists describe to be subject to such indirect censorship, the conservative narrative described by Kristof argues that there has existed a left liberal hegemony in the art field that has similarly worked to exclude conservative actors. Kristof describes that mechanism of selection in the Hungarian art field has been largely based on reputation-producing mechanisms, where left-liberal actors enforce positions based on peer support (Kristof, 2017). From this perspective, the idea of censorship as the indirect exclusion of individual voices and groups from a position of power can be descriptive of the time before the Orbán government too. But the artists in my study do not interpret the situation in this manner. The explanation for such differences in views can be seen in light of Sahín's (2009) depiction, that embedded in the idea of what constitutes censorship lies a definition of art. Censorship can be understood as a reflection of the concept of what art should be at a given historical period, or by specific groups, and the idea of what art should be determines how censorship is implemented. According to the liberal-leftist discourse where autonomous art is an ideal, the Orbán-regimes' actions are interpreted as censorship. While Orbán-loyalists, on the other hand, understand art as something that should be instrumental to the political system. The Orbán-loyalists' idea of censorship might be closer to Dugan's (1954, in Sahín, 2009, p.16), claim that "all art that actually is art needs no censorship," pointing at how that 'real art' is aligned with the dominant norms and morals in a society.

5.2.2 Exit artist

One million Hungarians have left Hungary since Fidesz came to power in 2010 (Szél, 2018). The interviewees claimed that many artists are among them and that the reason for their departure is the structural changes of the government. Two of the artists I interviewed, Judith and Gabor, said they left the country because of the political situation in Hungary. Judith describes the psychological effects of indirect censorship as a reason for her departure:

That was what made me crazy; you never know where the border is. You never know if your actions are too much and if you will lose future opportunities. If you can still do things. There is no recipe. So, it is really a moving thing. And it was too much, the financial aspect. On the other hand, I got a lot of invitations from abroad, and I was well paid. I mean, OK-paid. And I already saw a future there and knew that if I did this and this,

that and that would happen. In Hungary, it is not predictable like that. Or not always... It's free, but it is not free. You can do it, but you can't do it at the same time. So, that's a huge schizophrenia for me... I find it shit; I find it catastrophic. That is why I left the country. I couldn't get breath. I lost one job after the other, and I didn't want to live in fear.

Judith describes one reason for her departure to be the unpredictability of her situation. In this case, it seems like the government is succeeding in creating pressure on artists who are critical of them. It is, of course, not something the government will claim as their intention openly, but rather something experienced on the other end, by those affected by their policies. If we examine the situation using Hirschman's (1970) exit, voice, and loyalty framework, Dora initially used voice by being explicitly critical against the government in her work. Yet, she eventually experienced too much pressure and felt she had no other option but to choose exit. While she exited Hungary, she did not necessarily stop using voice. She described that she was still criticizing the government from abroad. Dora's considerations for her economic situation and personal wellbeing while also continuing to work autonomously in her art fits Banks (2010) more pragmatic idea of the autonomous artists, whom he describes as complex actors, concerned with both art and commercial necessities, as well as protecting their social obligations and personal health (Banks, 2010, p.263). Hirschman writes that actors are likely to choose exit when they do not see that using voice will be useful and bring about change (1970, p.77). Similarly, Gabor's and Dora's exits might be caused by a lack of faith in their ability to affect change from within, or at least due to their exhaustion with using voice. Both Gabor and Judith describe being explicitly critical towards the government and describe getting into trouble because of this. This might indicate that in illiberal democratic states such as Hungary, artists who are effective in using their voices, in terms of gaining attention, also run a higher risk of being forced to choose the exit option as a consequence.

Robert describes how, although there are no statistics to confirm it; he has a distinct sense that many young progressive artists have left since 2010:

I always come here by subway, and I can see the changes in people's faces. How good characters are missing more and more. Half generations, styles, or types of people. These progressive youngsters left the country in masses... you can feel this kind of *adyélszivás* (brain-drain). This kind of magnetism of this well working West-European culture. Of course, everybody is looking for possibilities, so I cannot feel any anger towards them. They should do that.

Robert's somewhat melancholic description bears witness of a feeling that the progressive art scene in Hungary has shrunk in terms of both size and character. Dora also describes that many of her colleagues and friends have disappeared from the Hungarian art scene; "The situation has changed so much and all these independent initiatives and groups and spaces and out there, basically like they are starving, or they closed shop, or they just disappeared or moved abroad." The artists thus describe that quite invisibly, the progressive art scene in Hungary is leaving due to a lack of opportunities and uncertainty. While Bourdieu (1996) emphasizes the importance of demographical changes for the emergence of autonomy in the literary field in France in the 19th century, the conditions for autonomy in the Hungarian art field seem to go in the opposite direction. If the artists' descriptions are true, the disappearance of progressive artists from the Hungarian art scene may lead to less autonomy in the art field, according to Bourdieu's theoretical framework.

On the background of Sapiro's (2003) claim that in times of political pressure, artists are prone to merge their charismatic ideals with social engagement, it is interesting that the artists in Hungary to a great extent seem to select the exit option when one might think that they would choose voice. But as Hirschman's model suggests, when actors have other options than to stay in a dissatisfactory situation, they tend to choose exit over voice. And especially in developed economies, actors are more likely to take a silent exit, due to having many other options of sustaining themselves (Hirschman, 1970, p.35). Additionally, the artists' choices to leave may be due to their commitment to staying autonomous and not aligning themselves with the conservative ideologies of the government. Choosing exit can represent a way to uphold their *individual* autonomy. Hirschman (1970) claims that due to the bias towards choosing exit when this is an available option, the exit alternative "tends to atrophy the development of the art of voice". Due to the international character of the art field, the exit option is available to many and it might undermine the effective use of voice in the Hungarian art field. The issue evokes the classic sociological problematics of the Tragedy of the Commons, showing how the individual rationality and needs of the artists might lead to a general decay of autonomy in the art field.

5.2.3 "You are Orbán" - peers self-censorship

The structural changes and pressure on the liberal art scene are also understood to bring about the effect of self-censorship. Wesner (2018), Adams (2005), and Rothenberg (2014) find that

under politically repressive times, artists tend to balance their artistic ideals and critique with consideration for potential repression by the government. The artists do not think that self-censorship is a problem in their art practice but instead describe it to be a problem among peers, and most importantly, among the people working with art that is dependent on state funding, including people working at art museums, galleries and theaters. These institutions are described to censor artistic work that they perceive to be explicitly political and risky, due to fear of political consequences. Julia describe several incidences where artworks have been taken down and censored by institutions due to intermediaries' anxieties. One was at the Ludwig Museum, Hungary's biggest museum for contemporary art, where the artist Janos Brukner, had an exhibition. Julia explain that the artwork consisted of a collective coloring book, where an image appeared on a white canvas at the end of the exhibition. The image was gradually depicting Victor Orbán's face with two clocks going backward, accompanied by the words: "this shall also end." Julia says that the museum workers reacted by removing the artwork:

Afterward, the reactions of the museum were: Oh my god, let's take it down. Even though it was just before closing, they wanted to take it down anyway. Which kind of shows how the system works, this self-censorship, which did not come from the artist, but the institution, you know, that: 'oh my god, what will happen if this and this person sees this, let's take it down.'

Julia emphasizes that it is not the artists who self-censor their work, but the institutions. She understands this as a consequence of the system, i.e. the politics of the Orbán government, and that institutions who are dependent on subsidies from the state react in fear. She describes another incident at Collegium Hungaricum in Vienna, where the work *See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil*, was taken down from the exhibition because it was perceived to have a political message. The art piece consisted of three pictures with the Hungarian flag, but in each picture, one of the colors in the flag was painted black. Right before the opening of the exhibition, the paintings were taken down by the gallery. Julia described the reactions of the gallery as a result of the mechanism of the political system:

I don't think that it would have ever come out. I don't think that Orbán has time for that. Maybe I'm wrong, but I think it's kind of how the system is built, that everyone is a little

afraid of losing their own position so they are making a hundred and ten percent effort to make sure nothing that could be critical appears.

Julia describes how the art field has increasingly started to be driven by a sense of fear disproportional to the actual threat that exists, and that art with any type of political message risks being censored. In a way, Julia describes a situation where a fear in the art field itself contributes to a shift towards the government's conservative ideology.

Dora, who has experience with working at state-run institutions, describes how intermediaries at institutions experienced pressure from politicians:

It's really about getting a phone call and then going to the office of the deputy mayor of Budapest and being told that a certain project or a certain text is not to their liking.

A: OK, so that happens?

Yes, of course. But it's not something that the audience would know. Because they say: "what you want to do is not something that we can support." And then it is the director's decision if he or she would select such a production next time. If she once again wishes to go to the office and have that conversation.

Dora describes the direct pressure that intermediaries experience from politicians as something that happens backstage, and how this is often invisible to the outside or audience. Her example points to the differences between artists' and intermediaries' positions and how intermediaries' proximity to the political system forces them to make choices that, in turn, will affect artists on the other end.

Judith has had firsthand experience with intermediaries who expressed concern about her critical approach in her art. She had previously worked at a magazine and the editor commented on how her art might have a bad influence on their work:

The chief editor told me: you have to take care a bit because your music videos are on YouTube, and you are criticizing the system, and this could have consequences for the magazine. And I said what? What are you talking about? Do you think that I am going to cut my voice?

Judith describes how her critique towards the government came in the way of other job possibilities and how the magazine was pushing her to be less critical. She also explained how her job in a kindergarten was compromised due to parents finding her music videos online. In this way Julia emphasized how other people around her were pushing her to go against her artistic ideals.

Imre describes self-censorship to be a widespread issue due to institutions' fear of repercussions, and he thinks that key happenings have worked as catalyzation for self-censorship:

There is a lot of examples of this kind of self-censorship. There was this theater piece where there was a change in the title. The original title was something like 'kiss my ass, our beloved leader', but this project wasn't about Orbán, it was about Ceausescu, but the theater said they needed to change the title because otherwise, they wouldn't get funding. They might have been frightened because there was an exhibition in Kassack museum because, after that, a lot of people were really reconsidering what they were going to do.

Imre describes how happenings such as the controversy around the exhibition at the Kassak Museum (mentioned in chapter 2) leads to a chain of self-censorship in the art field. He saw this as a problem even among his artist friends while he did not include himself as being subject to self-censorship.

Gabor understands the pressure on artistic freedom as the result of the government's actions, such as reorganizing subsidies and controlling the media. He even describes that the media has blacklists on artists and invents fake news about them. Nonetheless, he considered the inaction of his peers as the biggest threat to artistic freedom:

There is pressure, there is huge pressure, but I think the biggest problem is the weakness, the laziness, and the lies of the theater-makers. So, I think the root of the problem is in the professions and not in politics. Politics can be what they are, but if our reactions to it is nothing, if we just avoid the conflicts all the time, then it's somehow a natural consequence. The liberal theater leaders tell their company members: don't go to the demonstrations, please, because if your face will be in the media, then maybe we will be punished by the government. And this is the key to why we have this kind of regime among us.

Gabor also claims that his peers self-censor their art as a consequence of the unfamiliar terrain that the illiberal political system represents; he describes this as in between a dictatorship and a democracy:

In a dictatorship, it is easy. Since it's very difficult to express your opinions, you try to hide it. You have to be extremely brave. In a liberal democracy, it's like 'how can I fight if there is not a big pressure,' but if there *is* a big pressure, but it is still in a democracy, what then? (Gabor)

Further, Gabor describes how his use of voice has led to him lose his financial support from the state. He also lost his relations in the Hungarian art field:

After that, I realized that before I can fight this regime, I have to fight against people in my own profession. I can say Orbán is this and that, and it is a horrible regime, but inside the cultural institutions, I can say the same thing. So, it is not so easy to say, "we are absolutely ready for the democracy, but *there* is the dictator." The problem is that this dictator is there because we have no problem with it. So, at the end, before I left this country, my sentence was like: *You* are Orbán. How do *you* behave? And of course, they didn't understand, and for me, it was a big shock.

Gabor sees the threat to artistic autonomy as a product of mechanisms in the art field itself. Gabor explains how his explicit use of voice has driven his peers away, eventually causing him to lose his social relationships in the Hungarian art field. Gabor cares more about the lack of support from his peers than the pressure from the political sphere. The importance given to peers echoes art historian Bowness' (1989) ideas of the nature of recognition in the art field. Bowness defines four circles within the 'circles of recognition' in the art field, where the most significant aspect for achieving success in the art field is based on recognition among peers, followed by critics and curators, merchants and collectors, and finally the general public. Fine (2018) looks at changes in artists' identities as a consequence of institutional changes in the last 50 years. In this period, there has been a professionalization, or as Fine defines it, academicization of the art field (Fine, 2018, p.3). This has had consequences for artists' identities and self-understanding. He writes, "to be a 'serious' artist is to have a serious degree." It is important to understand that Fine writes about the American context. Still, the trend is also visible in Scandinavia with the development of PhDs in artistic fields, for

instance. Fine claims that artists are increasingly oriented towards each other, seeking confirmation from the field itself, and becoming a sort of ‘occupational community’ (Fine, 2018, p.2). Further, Bourdieu stresses that, in the restricted subfield, artists are oriented towards each other, seeking recognition among peer artists based on the internal logic of autonomous art (Gartman, 2002, p.258). If peer artists are the most important structures for reaching possibilities and affecting change in the art field, it makes sense that Gabor’s biggest worry is the lack of support from his peers. Still, Gabor seems to put social engagement and professional ethics exceptionally high and creates a sort of narrative of himself as the lonely protagonist in the art field, fighting to make other artists work more actively against the ideologies of the government. But Gabor’s one-sided characterization of his own art field as ‘infantile’ and populated by actors who are subjecting themselves to self-censorship in contrast to him, evokes Elster’s (2015, p.303) idea of the younger sibling syndrome, which points at the mechanism and tendency that people have to think of other people as less rational and capable of taking strategic choices than oneself. While Gabor might have valuable insight into problematic aspects in the theater field, he is tarring the whole field with the same brush. Contrary to his depictions, the Hungarian artists are described as socially engaged in terms of initiating demonstrations, protests, and boycotts by Inkei and Vaspál (2014).

The subject of self-censorship is multiplex and there seems to be a fine line (if any) between the self-censorship and that of tactical considerations. While the actors do not think they were engaged in self-censorship, they often seem to be in-between loyalty and voice. They criticize the government, but in marginal and calculated ways. Loyalty could be seen as the cause of self-censorship, in other words that a loyalty towards one’s country or work might lead to acceptance and a lack of using voice. Hirschman (1970) describes how actors’ loyalty towards entities such as states in decline can be understood as a consequence of the costs that an exit could represent.

Similarly to Banks’ (2010) description, the artists’ tactical considerations and use of both loyalty and voice can be seen as a type of ‘struggle from within’ the system, and considering the costs of exit, the artists seek to find opportunities for meaningful self-realization inside the limitations in the Hungarian art field instead. Hirschman (1970, p.78) describes that embedded in actors’ choices of loyalty lies the expectation that the situation will pass. Loyalty towards a declining country exists due to the idea that matters will eventually move in a more positive direction. This mentality was visible in Robert’s account:

In 2025 this recording will be ancient stuff. In very silly awful situations where you feel that you are going to kill someone, it helps to think that it will all be gone ones, There is this very nice sentence I think from the Hindi religion you know: ‘Ez is elmulik egyszer’ (this too shall pass).

Robert’s tactics and loyalty to the Hungarian nation seems to go in line with Hirschmann’s (1970) idea that loyalty involves “an enormous dose of reasoned calculation.” Thus, Roberts discrete use of voice seems to be embedded in the idea that circumstances in Hungary would eventually become better.

(Sahín, 2009, p.26) describes how self-censorship is such an elusive phenomenon that it is almost impossible to analyze, due to how artists themselves can be unconscious of applying self-censorship in their work. Dora elaborated on the balance of representing a critical and challenging voice in the art field, but simultaneously avoiding being attacked for being too publicly critical and visible:

I think that it is a very important question in the long run because if you wish to remain neutral, then it’s somehow not good enough. If we are true to our agenda, then sooner or later, we should do something that provokes a reaction, but then they [the Orbán-government’s actors] very easily can make it impossible for us to continue. So, there is this kind of very self-destructive psychological factor coded in the activity. If they don’t bother, then it’s like ‘hm, I am not sure.’ But I think it is still very important to speak to those people who are still here and who are feeling angry and discontent.

Dora describes that even though she wishes her project to represent a form of critique towards the government, she does not want to undermine her work by being too visible. She rather wants to focus on working autonomously in a small scale, without political interference. This political navigation that Dora is engaged in could be understood as an example of self-censorship. But it can also be a tactical consideration that enables her and her colleagues to continue their type of autonomous art practice. Sahín (2009, p.27) stresses that self-censorship can be viewed as a form of reflexive process and a tactical resistance by the artists. Rather than acting in a way that they know would lead to censorship, the artists are regulating their work as a personalized act. Sapiro (2003) describes that in all authoritarian regimes, cultural producers develop strategies to resist political pressure. She likens this strategy of preventing

a unification or homogeneity in the cultural field with Bourdieu's concept of 'field effects'. This implies that there exists an internal logic in the field, which is to oppose dominant agents who "holds monopoly over the means of formal consecration" (Sapiro, 2003, p. 446). But Sapiro describes that the autonomy in the field under authoritarian leadership is low due to the antagonistic relationship between the "heretical" dissents and the "orthodox" dominant actors who "submit to the dominant ideology." The dissident artists, such as Dora, need to develop strategies of resistance to fight the dominant ideology (here understood as the government's ideology) rather than giving up their autonomy. Dora's strategic actions can be understood as an expression of 'field effects,' and as tactics to protect rather than compromise her autonomy.

In general, all the artists' descriptions of self-censorship are about other artists or institutions who censor artists' work. The fact that so few understand themselves as affected by self-censorship suggests a psychological mechanism where the actors are ceaselessly trying to give meaning to their actions inside the frame of their ideals of autonomy. Admitting to self-censorship might go against their ideas of their artistic identities. Like in the case of Dora, the artists can interpret their actions as tactical navigations that protect their autonomy, but it can also be a priori censorship that is difficult to realize. In Anna's account, the complexity of self-censorship became clear:

I am quite critical, but still, I get money from the state. Because as I told you, in this jury, there are people who appreciate my work. So, they will always give me, or they always gave me money when I asked for it. But it doesn't mean that I self-censor myself. I am very open about my opinion. I got in trouble because of this.

Later in the interview, Anna realizes that she might have self-censored her previous work due to close connections with Fidesz-friendly actors:

Well, now I am preparing for an exhibition in [X], which is a solo exhibition, and it is very stressful because it is a very risky topic. It is about female roles in the context of folk art and the folk revival movement... It's going to be very controversial and I think many people will get upset. So, now I am braver because now I am out of those circles [folk revival circles close to Fidesz]. I am not dependent on their opinions anymore... so I can be more open about... so yes, this is a kind of self-censorship.

Anna realizes, in the middle of a sentence, that, to some extent, she was self-censoring her work because of her former connection with Fidesz-sympathizers. This relates to Mead's idea of “the self as an ongoing conversation” (O’Brian, 2011, p. 241). When Anna is talking, she is also trying to figure out her own opinions and views on the subject, and her views are changeable and searching. The contradictory answers Anna gives indicate that the topic of self-censorship is something she struggles to come to terms with. As mentioned, Slaatta and Okstad (2014, p.7) put forward the idea that artists are truth-seeking people, but that artists still can subject themselves to self-censorship. The discrepancy between artist ideals such as being truth-seeking, and the possibility of subjecting one's work to self-censorship might make the topic difficult to address and admit being subject to.

5.3 The international dimension

In this section, I will present how the artists incorporate an international dimension into their understanding of their autonomy in the art field. International aspects of the artists’ lives were not a predefined topic in the thesis. It rather became apparent during the interviews that it is an aspect that cannot be left out, due to the international art fields essential role in the artists understanding of their autonomous positions. International exchange and collaboration are central features of the contemporary art scene in general. Zolberg (2015) claims that recent years of intensified internationalization calls for looking at the social processes in the art field beyond the national context. Rössel argues, in contrast with Zolberg, that means of globalization and international exchange must be understood as an old phenomenon rather than as recent characteristics of contemporary societies (Rössel, 2020, p.3). Russell finds that the critique of the social sciences’ use of methodological nationalism as partially misplaced. He stresses that even though the unit of observation in the social sciences often is the nation-state, this is not necessarily a unit of the analysis which takes the interconnectedness of societies into account (Rössel, 2020, p.3). This is descriptive of my study as well: even though my departing point has been Hungary, my analyses have been informed by the artists international experiences. The artists operate within a mix between these fields and these structures were often described as intertwined and affected by each other.

5.3.1 Relative international autonomy

Even though some of the artists in my study receive some funding from the Hungarian state, the majority are more dependent on international funding as an essential part of sustaining their work. Some of the international organizations that the artists are supported by, are Erste Stiftung, EEA and Norway Grants, Open society foundation, Summa Artium, Visegrad, UN democracy fund, and College Hungaricum Berlin. The artists can also be on international residency-programs for several months at the time. There are also special Hungarian and international programs for stage art, such as Aerowaves and DunaPart, that bring selected participants on international tours.

The artists often claim that national politics do not affect them due to a strong connection with the international art field and funding, and that they can always move to other cities such as Berlin or London, where there are more possibilities. But when artists apply for international financing that is nationally organized, such as the EEA and Norway Grants, the politics and actions of the Hungarian government may affect the possibility of getting such support. Dora lives in Hungary, but only applies and receives funding from international NGOs, among them were the EEA and Norway Grants and Open society foundation. The incident around the EEA and Norway Grants in 2014, and the police raid at the civil organization Ökotárs (as mentioned in chapter 2), directly influenced her possibilities of financing her upcoming projects. When the money was stopped by the Norwegian government and the Open society foundation, the grant that she had previously received for her art project was no longer available. This created a situation of uncertainty for her:

The Norwegian Civil Fund was not available and the Open society initiative at that time told us that even though the collaboration was great, now the situation is so severe here in Hungary that they closed lots of their activities... So, we lost. And this is also very important that even though you develop very good connections, because the Norwegians handled us like a flagship project. We were one of the most successful examples. They were showing us around like 'see this is what we did'. And with the Open Society they were really happy with the collaboration, but nevertheless, for the second edition [of her art project], none of these were available. So, we had to start from scratch.

Dora's reliance on international NGOs makes her vulnerable to their 'punishments' directed towards the state of Hungary. Even though Hungarian artists succeed in making themselves independent of state support, the example of Dora goes to show how international and national conditions are intertwined and affect each other. Unstable relations between the Hungarian state and NGOs create an insecure landscape for artists who are dependent on these types of subsidies, and they are often artists who wish to make art independent of the government's ideology.

Dora also stresses the importance of support from the local art field in order to gain international recognition: "I am convinced that becoming a part of the international scene is much more difficult without the local scene being to you help." Dora describes that international peer recognition is often dependent on national recognition in the art field, pointing at how local hierarchies even affect international hierarchies.

Often, international connections represent a chance to work autonomously with art. However, the artists' experiences abroad also pose a challenge to their ideas of artistic freedom. In the following, I will describe the tensions and experiences that the artists have in relation to the international art scene.

5.3.2 Double pressure and identity contingencies

The artists express that their work is affected by ideals, structures, and requirements related to international funding institutions and internationally supported NGOs. These experiences seem similar to how cultural institutions in any society employ specific criteria for allocating grants. But some of the international encounters that the artists describe are specific to the Hungarian political context. One of the most surprising aspects of the artists' experiences is that they felt an expectation by international intermediaries to be critical against the government and to be political in their work. Together with the findings related to the macro-political dimension, the artists' international experiences constitute what I define as a *double pressure*: (1) the pressure not to criticize the government within the Hungarian context, and (2) pressure within the international context to be political and critical against the government. The first type of pressure within the Hungarian context was elaborated on in the previous section. In the following, I will target the second type of pressure by international intermediaries.

The artists explain how the political situation in Hungary has gained a master status in the international art community's understanding of their identities. Judith describes how

foreign intermediaries or journalists expect her to be critical of the government. She stresses that there is no room for nuances:

Many times I am invited to conferences, and when there are these political issues there, you have this feeling that they want you to talk about Hungary like it is hell, and the prime minister is the demon. That everybody is shit, and everybody is evil. And it is just not true. You cannot do this black and white stuff. And I *hate* that, and it makes me really like *angry*. Because people are judging, and it is so easy to judge. ‘Yes, this is a small country and the good people already left and the ones that stayed they made deals with the government, and they are all bad people.’ *No*, it is not like that... And then sometimes people don’t like it when I say it. Because you know I got my money from the West and somehow there are also these issues that then you have to judge your country. I am judging my country, but I love my country too.

Since Judith gets her money from the West, she feels that there is an expectation by international peers and intermediaries on her to be exclusively dismissive of the situation in Hungary. Rather than thinking ‘in black and white,’ Judith emphasizes the nuances and complexity in terms of the situation in Hungary. Somehow, she feels the need to defend her country from the judgment of international peers and intermediaries.

Julia describes how hierarchies within the media force the issue of censorship to the forefront. In an interview with an artist, the journalist conducting the interview had little to say over the issues presented in the final article:

Even though the writer of that article wanted to address something else with the artist’s work, the editors totally changed the text and wanted to present the scandalous side of the issue of censorship in Hungary.

Julia describes how the political situation in Hungary has sparked interest in Hungarian artists from foreign intermediaries; an interest which is based on the information they can provide about the political situation rather than for their artistic ideas.

Imre describes an artist talk in Austria, where the interviewer was addressing questions about Hungarian politics rather than the artists own artistic ideas connected to the exhibition:

Artists are always asked: what about art financing, and what about Victor Orbán... They asked that kind of question to an artist who is doing non-political art, in an artist talk after a stone sculptures exhibition. The exhibition was about memory, it wasn't about politics, but they asked that kind of questions because the audience was interested in that.

Imre emphasizes that Hungarian artists are always asked about the political situation and describes a feeling that Hungarian artists are being framed within the current Hungarian political discourse.

Julia, who lives in Berlin, describes experiences with how international intermediaries and journalists treat artists and curators from Hungary. She explains how she found it problematic that an interviewer expected the artists in her art project to be critical towards the government:

I find it problematic from an artist's point of view, that if Hungarian artists work politically, whenever they are invited to present something in the West, the narrative of someone who is being suppressed by a dictatorship is mandatory. So, they actually don't have freedom. They are not neutral enough to be able to present whatever they want... People from the West have the privilege to make "neutral" art if they feel like it, right?

Julia describes how Hungarian artists are captured in a discourse of being suppressed in a dictatorship and that the agency of Hungarian artists is compromised. She contrasts the treatment of Hungarian artists with how Western artists are framed as 'just artists'; they are 'neutral' artists, and as such, they are not subjected to preexisting expectations on their work.

Imre also thinks that making political art is expected when Hungarian artists go abroad: "So, [making political theater] is expected of Hungarian artists and I think artists who are based in Western Europe they can do more things than that to get recognition." Further, Imre compares how Hungarian artists are expected to work politically in their art with how African or Asian artists are stereotyped in the West:

It's a little bit like what we studied at university about the artist from for example Africa or Asia. They are always expected to make work that addresses their culture. Like that kind of culture that the Western curator can recognize as African or Asian and they can think that it's good because they are working with their traditions. And

this political stuff is *our* tradition now, so we [Hungarian artists] have to work with politics.

Even though Imre and other artists infuse their artistic work with politics, they do not want this to be expected from the outside. The artists distinguish themselves from Western artists, indicating that for Eastern-European artists, there is a clear sense of being ‘othered’ when entering a Western-European space. These experiences resonate with Steel’s (2011) concept of identity constituencies, which can be defined as a process where parts of your identity can bring about stereotypical expectations on your behavior, and that this can be interpreted as both positive and negative by the actors (Steel, 2011, p.68). While Steel uses the concept to describe stereotypical expectations on Afro-American people, I find it useful in the Hungarian artists’ descriptions of stereotypical expectations to their work as well. The expectations put on Hungarian artists to work politically are interpreted as a negative identity contingency by the artists. It feels degrading to be evaluated based on national origin rather than being treated on equal terms in the international art scene.

Sometimes the artists also experience that the Hungarian political discourse influenced the audiences’ or intermediaries’ interpretation of the artwork itself. Sandor has experienced at first-hand how a part of his artwork was mistakenly understood as a critique against the government:

We have a scene where we are crushing citrus fruits like lemon and orange. Anything that yellow, orange, and red, and it was really funny because people saw it as a sign of Fidesz⁵, but it wasn’t. It was just a part of our visual language. Smashing the oranges was something else for us, but because there was a lot of orange colors there, some people that attended asked, ‘was it a critique?’

The audience’s immediate interpretation that the orange was a criticism of Fidesz is an example of how the political situation in Hungary is at the forefront of people’s consciousness; this might ‘high jack’ the audience’s interpretation of artists’ work. It shows how art that is not critical may still be interpreted within the political discourse.

Alternatively, identity contingencies can be viewed positively and help actors achieve particular possibilities. Anna describes this kind of positive stereotyping:

⁵ Both the color orange and the citrus fruit are commonly understood as the symbol of Fidesz.

When I was applying for doctoral studies in Vienna, I asked for help from a friend who is more familiar with that scene, and he said: yes, just write that you are against the government. So, it sells to be critical against the government, because it is interesting, and everybody knows about it.

These types of experiences with positive identity contingencies echo Adams' (2005) concept of 'solidarity market.' Artists can advance for making politically infused art in repressive contexts due to the fact that international intermediaries' wish to support such art because it falls in line with their ideas of supporting liberal democratic ideals. Hungarian artists who work politically are equally being 'positively' stereotyped. Imre, for instance, understands that dealing with political issues in Hungary can represent a structure of possibility. He has experienced keen interest from prestigious international festivals on his recent piece, and he thinks that the show became popular because it was directly targeting current political issues:

This piece is kind of famous in the theater scene in Europe. It was in Spiel Art in Munich, and some other important festivals which is kind of a big deal. I think this is because Victor Orbán's head is in out theater piece.... There is a lot of good artists in Hungary who are not political, but who I think are great, and they don't get that kind of attention.

Although Imre and other artists describe the political situation as potentially leading to opportunities for Hungarian artists who engaged in political and critical art, this is not talked about as something positive or prestigious by the artists, but rather as problematic and as limiting their freedom to work on whatever topic they wish. Thus, while identity contingencies can have a positive dimension, overall, they are seen more negatively, due to strong commitments to their ideals and artistic autonomy.

Their understanding of being 'othered' and separate from the Western norm show how the international art field involves ideas of hierarchies based on distinctions between the West and the East. The artists' resistance towards such 'othering' can be understood inside Bourdieu's field theory (Bourdieu, 1984), as it can be seen as an expression of the artists' struggle for positions and autonomy in the overarching international art field. To be supported based on one's national identity goes against more general artistic ideals, and can be interpreted as less reputable.

5.4 The artistic dimension

In this section, I will present how the artists constitute their ideas of artistic autonomy internally in the artistic context. A central question in this regard will be how the artists deal with extra aesthetic phenomena in their art; in this case, the political situation inflicted by the Orbán-regime.

According to Bourdieu (1996), the way to understand the degree of autonomy in a field is by looking at how the field incorporates external phenomena. Bourdieu uses the concept of *refraction effects* to describe a process where autonomy in a field is considered high if external phenomena are translated, inverted and interpreted by agents according to the logic and beliefs in the field (Bourdieu, 1996; Hilgers and Mangez, 2014). When refraction effects in the field are high, the actors tend to see the world through “a prism constructed in the field” (Hilgers and Mangez, 2014, p.7). Thus, looking at the way the artists implement political issues in their art can give indications about the autonomy in the Hungarian art field. In the following, I will discuss the artists’ depictions of social engagement in their art, artists’ roles in the polarized political climate, social engagement as an inner drive, and the conservative shift in the art field.

5.4.1 Social engagement as social distinction among peers

A pressing matter in artists’ accounts of their aesthetic work is how ideals of autonomy merge with social engagement. In times of political change or pressure, charismatic artist roles have been viewed to merge with social engagement (Wesner, 2018). Nagy (2015) claims that since 2010, Hungarian artists have become increasingly socially engaged and that artists are creating work that addresses current political issues. This tendency is also visible among the artists in my study. Many of the informants describe working politically with themes that reflect issues of the current political debates such as nationalism, folk art, democracy, and rising illiberal tendencies. However, I found that the specific way in which outside phenomenon of politics is implemented is an essential source of distinction. They differentiate their way of working with politics (complex, broad, and abstract) with the way conservative, and ‘other’ peer artists work (narrow, naïve, and traditional).

Dora describes the recent years of working with art projects in opposition to the government, and depicts how peer artists lack an understanding of her approach to social engagement:

What people understood to be political was a very narrow and passive understanding of the word. What was political in the Hungarian art scene was if you talked about the Academy of the Hungarian Art's, the ministry, if you talked about that you were critical. We [her organization] decided early on that we were not doing this. If we had our fifteen minutes of fame, we wanted to speak about *us*, what *we* were doing, about what defines a good artist. This is what we wanted to use the attention for.

Dora describes that even people who are her political allies lack an understanding of what should be the basis of selection in the art field. She further sharply criticizes how during the period after 2010, peer artists have been doing the same thing as the government has done by the establishment of the MMA: basing selection on party political basis rather than aesthetic criteria. Dora dismisses these tendencies and thinks that professional standards should go before political ideology. She wishes to distinguish qualitatively between good and bad art and put professionalism first, reinforcing the importance of artistic autonomy over the political sphere.

Julia, who has experience with both the German and Hungarian art contexts, emphasizes working abstractly rather than explicitly with politics and highlights that artists should be able to choose their topics freely:

Political is also not only defined by actual politics. We were actually more interested in something more abstract. And not because we are afraid of what will happen in the event, but we left it open, what political means.... It's not necessarily politics of today. It can also be the politics of viewing a theater show.

Julia describes how working more openly and abstractly on political issues goes more in line with her and her colleagues' preferences in art. The way Julia and Dora distinguish their tastes from other groups evoke Bourdieu's understanding of the significance of taste in the art field (Bourdieu, 1984). He sees taste as a form of capital and in linkage with symbolic status and mechanisms of reproducing status hierarchies. Using Bourdieu's logic, taste becomes a "[...]badge of social honor or scorn, signaling to influential groups that some tastes (and their

bearers) are more acceptable than others.” (Zolberg, 2015, p.905). Rather than being an expression of a purely personal matter, taste can be understood as describing the artist’s “cultural baggage,” or “a relatively durable structured behavioral orientation” (Zolberg, 2015, p.904) that gives clues of dominant cultural structures. The artists’ interest in complexity, abstraction, innovation, and a broad understanding of political engagement can therefore be seen as an expression of dominant cultural taste in their social context and in line with Bourdieu’s concept of refraction effects.

Gabor distinguished himself from the other artists in the research material due to his orientation towards activism in his art. In his view, the political situation in Hungary has called for more direct political engagement in the arts. He understood other artists’ more subtle approaches to social engagement as an expression of fear of repression. What most artists described as artistic autonomy, and Bourdieu describes as refraction effects, Gabor describes as self-censorship:

They don't call it self-censorship they call it our special freedom. So, they explain their lack of engagement by saying, ‘it was my decision not to vocalize something because I didn't want to.’ You know, somehow, it is very crazy.

The way Gabor separates himself from ‘everyone’ and what he sees as the dominant discourse in the field is similar to Becker’s description of the Maverick Artist (Becker, 1984), as he seems to be driven by idealism and accepts risking failure and rejection from his field.

Overall, the artists’ descriptions and perspectives give an image of four main groups in the Hungarian art field: (1) the autonomous and a-political, (2) the autonomous socially engaged, (3) the political activist, and (4) the conservative-conformist artists. This stratification is similar to Stodolsky’s (2011) historical description of the art field as consisting of a repeated stratification of three groups, which are: the “official,” (conservative-conformist artists) the “unofficial,” (the political activist artist) and the “non-aligned” (the autonomous socially engaged and autonomous a-political) intelligentsia. He claims that his model describes how the autonomous pole, or in his term, the ‘non-aligned,’ often seek to distinguish themselves from the center of the art field (from the socially engaged dissident artists and the conformist artists). The autonomous pole’s strategies are an expression of what Bourdieu calls the logic of distinction (Bourdieu, 1984), i.e. the idea that the autonomous artists’ choices of working with or without ideology reflect their effort to differentiate themselves and rise above the majority. Thus, the logic of distinction indicates that the autonomous artists will

distinguish themselves from the majority, independently of the majority's relation to the political sphere. The autonomous non-aligned artists that were overrepresented in my material, can equally be seen to struggle to uphold the aesthetics of autonomy, contrasting themselves with the conservative and the political activist artists. The artists who work more explicitly political, like Gabor, interpret their political engagement as merging with autonomous ideals. In Sapiro's (2014) study of the literary field in France during WWII, she writes that authors lost their autonomy overnight as a consequence of the occupation. The result was that the autonomous writers, previously engaged in language and formal subjects in their writing, were the ones that became the most nationally oriented and were involved in the resistance against the Germans. The heteronomous writers, who were more engaged in popular and commercial writing and initially more nationally oriented, were more inclined to accept the occupation. While drawing parallels to the Hungarian situation is complicated, similarities can be drawn based on the loss of autonomy. Even though the Hungarian artists, like in Sapiro's findings, distinguish between good and bad ways of including politics in their art in times where the art field loses its independence, it seems to be the autonomous, progressive artists who engage in resistance against such threats.

5.4.2 Artistic ideals beyond political polarization

The artists in my study tend to see their roles as someone who go beyond the polarized political climate in Hungary. Although Anna claims to be engaged with the current political discourse, she distances herself from the logic of dichotomous politics. She wants to exceed the existing cultural battles:

I don't want to play by the rules of this two-sided discourse. I would like to make something which goes above it or bridges it. So I was looking for something which was not nationalistic and still draws inspiration from folk art... and this was the political part, that as I told you, now folk art, folk dance, folk music, the folk revival movement is associated with nationalism and it is not by accident. Also, now the state uses it for propaganda purposes.... So, there is this kultur kampf, which is explicit, and I wanted to create something which exceeds this dichotomy or the logic of this divisive strategy.

Anna sees her political engagement as something that goes beyond the political reality and its polarizing discourse. She includes themes such as nationalism and folk art that increasingly has been associated with the government's ideology but claims to do this in a fundamentally different way.

Maria also distances herself from the polarized political climate in Hungarian society and thinks that art should be less political and represent something outside of politics:

I think what Hungary needs, is less politics. In a way, it's very polarized the whole society. If I want to make a political statement through my artwork, what will happen? People will come, mostly people I know, so they will agree with what they see. So, it would not be open any minds.... If I make something more neutral and not that clear politically, then maybe more people can relate to it, and then they can sit on the same side in the audience.

Maria does not seem to believe in art as a political tool. She anticipates that people's mentality runs too deep and that a theater piece will never be able to bring about political change. Maria's lack of belief in the effectiveness of political artwork evokes the idea of the exhaustion of the "artistic critique" (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Oakley 2009), pinpointing the modern neglect of the possibility of living authentic lives under capitalism.

István also expresses resentment towards the polarized political climate in the art field. Still, he emphasizes that the polarization makes people categorical and unwilling to realize or admit that the politics of the Orbán government also bring about positive elements:

While the happenings such as with the MMA were bad, there were a lot of other things that was really good. There was financial support that was given to initiatives in the Hungarian art field that were really worth supporting. But you can't really talk about this the way that I am talking about this now, because either you dismiss the whole thing, or you think that everything is great.

István directs critique against the art field's inability to consider nuances and break with categorical thinking. He values complexity and distances himself from taking part in a polarizing discourse.

Thus, a clear ideal of the artists, and in turn, their social context, is to represent something beyond the logic of party politics and polarizing discourses. It seems that their

belief in the aesthetic importance of inverting the dichotomous party-political discourse was reciprocal to their approach to the outside political world. This alignment mirrors Hilgers and Mangez (2014, p. 7) idea of the autonomous art field as viewing the outside world through an internally constructed prism.

5.4.3 Pressure from Hungarian peer artists

Imre describes that the political atmosphere in Hungary has led to increased pressure from peer artists to engage politically. He describes how, during a discussion with a colleague, he realized how this could limit artistic autonomy and that he has to an increasing degree come to see the importance of making art outside of the political discourse:

She said she is from a background where the freedom to do anything was very limited. And she said it's really important to have freedom of choice. For her, in this kind of climate where everybody is supposed to do something with politics, it is experienced as limiting the freedom of her as an artist.

Judith also describes a pressure peer artists in Hungary to engage politically from:

In this reading, there was another Hungarian writer next to me, a well-established man... he has a job, he has a family, he has a house. Everything that I don't have. And then he said: "you people have to go back to Hungary rather than doing things here." And I was telling him [ironically], "yes, that sounds really easy." I am still working for my country from outside. If I get support, I would go back home, but it's not so easy. If I don't get food, I am not coming. If I don't get a bed, I am not coming. There is this pressure that you have to save the country, doing something on your own like a Jean D'arc. I mean, hey (laughing).

Judith's depiction illustrates a clash between different views in the Hungarian art field, constituted by a tension between the choices of exit and voice. Judith distances herself from Hungarian peers who expect artists to work in political spheres no matter the consequences. She describes these expectations as unrealistic and stresses the practicalities and limitations of her use of voice. Her pragmatic considerations echo Mangset's (2004, p. 254-255) idea of

strategic realism, implying that while artists are committed to charismatic visions, they also base their choices on costs and benefits.

5.4.4 Social responsibility as a genuine interest

When the artists talk about engaging socially in their work, they emphasize that this required a genuine interest, which they do not expect everyone to have. Anna values art that encompass a politic context, but views social engagement as something based on an inner drive:

I think everybody benefits from those products or artworks that are made with real enthusiasm. So, I think that if someone is not involved in politics, then they shouldn't do it. I feel bad if my artwork isn't political, or I don't shed light on the context. I am really irritated by artworks which are just 'there.' I am politically driven. Not political in the classical sense. But I am OK with people who just paint, that is fine. I don't blame them for that. They would look quite silly if they started to do some activist work.

Anna distances herself from people who create non-political art, but also from people who make political art in a 'classical' sense and more conventionally political. But she also understands political engagement as based on an inner drive, something inherent or at least genuine, and she thinks that this drive is needed to work politically the way that she does.

Sandor makes a clear distinction between his political engagement and his artistic work and does not identify with working socially in his art:

There is always this question of: 'yes, art is good, but what does it do for society?' and I always try to put that aside. Because for some people, it comes naturally or organically, or they have some motivation, but I don't have this need to save the world and help people.... I just like to move. So, ten years ago, I knew that if I put myself on stage honestly and share my experience, that it will trigger other people as well.

Sandor looks at his role in the context of his personal life story. Since he started with dance late in life and is not considered a professional, he feels he can be an inspiration for others. In a way then, Sandor understands his role as a naïve artist (Becker, 1984), but is nevertheless

one who has gained status and recognition among his peers. Sandor describes that for an artist to work politically, a distinct motivation or an inner drive, what he called genuine interest is necessary. In a way, this charismatic belief that social engagement is inherent works to excuse a lack of working politically.

But Sandor does not think his work is utterly devoid of social engagement, he thinks of politics in his art more comprehensively:

It will radiate. And if this radiation is just this much, then it will attract a few people, but if the radiation is bigger, then it will attract more people. I didn't want to be socially engaged, because I enjoy what I am doing, but for me, it's also clear that different people have different motivations. I see how people, for example, make independent theater here and how they shifted towards doing more socially inclusive stuff. I felt this tendency actually after I came back, after 2010.

It seems significant for Sandor that his work affects others, and that he relates to some kind of political dimension, but outside of a distinguished socially engaged framework. Sandor separates himself from people in the art field who according to him has shifted course after 2010, away from doing independent art and towards doing more socially inclusive art. He seems to understand this as tendentious behavior. In doing so, he underlines how autonomy in art is an ideal, focusing on more long-term commitments or interests rather than political trends. Sandor's ideas about social engagement fits with the ideas of Oakley (2009) and Banks (2010). Rather than thinking of their work as representing successful social resistance in society, artists' engage with art as an expression of their quest for meaning. Making art is a "way of enhancing reflective self-understanding that might, or might not, prelude to social action" (Oakley, 2009, p.288). Sandor's, as well as other artists' laid-back attitudes to social engagement, might be an expression of this type of modern trend to focus on reflective self-understanding rather than believing in their ability to affect social change.

Even though he seems to distance himself from people who engage directly in current political matters in their art, Sandor is more apologetic or sympathetic towards artists who show a genuine interest. He concludes that working politically in art is an ambiguous matter:

The art field is always about trying to sense what is going on as a topic in the world and for me, it's always a double sword because you can be genuinely interested in that, but you can also try to sense what is currently hip.

Sandor finds that social engagement can represent a pitfall if the artists' interest is interpreted as tendentious and opportunistic. Sandor thinks it can be difficult for the artist herself to be aware of motives in choosing to work on political topics. Sandor is pointing at what he understands as a difficult balance for artists in the current political landscape in Hungary, but which also represent more fundamental issues in the art scene: that artists need to fulfill their role of being in contact with the social context, as well as staying true to their ideals of autonomy, here understood as "genuine interests". Prince (2016, p.94) describes how social engagement has always represented an ambiguous matter and caused tension between different groups in the art field. While such tension is visible among groups in the Hungarian art field as well, Sandor's depiction also stipulates that the same conflict and debate can operate within the artist herself.

5.4.5 Change in the Hungarian art field

The patterns of taste, values, and attitudes in the cultural sector have been described to differ considerably from those of the rest of the population, in that they are substantially more liberal and left-wing (O'Brien et al., 2018, p.2). The artists in my study's liberal political views support this claim. However, a survey on the political affiliation of the cultural elite in Hungary shows how the left-liberal elite has shrunk from 47 % to 40 % between 2009 and 2018 (Elite surveys, Center for Social Sciences HAS, 2018). The right-wing identified cultural elite has risen from 29 % to 34 % during the same period. This indicates a shift in elite positions in the art field.

Bourdieu (1996) understands that taste is a source of symbolic distinction between groups that reproduce status hierarchies in the art field. Changes in the structure of the art field involves transformation in the structure of the socially hierarchical nature of taste (Bourdieu, 1996). Bourdieu describes change in the art field as slow processes and as consequences of the internal logic in the field. Still, he also describes the greatest external threat to the art fields autonomy to be the influence of the economic field and marketization (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 345-347). This might be the most apt source of challenge to the art field in a liberal democratic context, as Kleppe's (2018) findings suggest. In the Hungarian context, the influence of the political sphere seems to be of greater importance and especially challenging for autonomous or progressive artists. Using Becker's typology (Becker, 1984), the Integrated Professional Artists and the innovative and risky Maverick Artists are

considered to have hegemony in the art field in liberal democracies. In illiberal democratic Hungary, the positions of the conformist Folk Artists seem to be on the rise, due to the political changes. Fligstein and McAdam (2012) find that changes in fields are often the result of crisis and external shocks that can suddenly alter the existing power relations in a field fundamentally, leading to a reorganization of positions and resources.

However, Kristof (2017) describes that while the Orbán government has been successful in replacing the cultural elite in the art field as well as creating parallel institutions, she describes these changes as caused by a displacement of positional elites alone. While new elite actors in the cultural field are politically loyal to the government, aesthetic preferences are cut across political preferences. When these right-wing elite actors are operating inside the art context, they apply the logic of the artistic sphere rather than the political (Kristof, 2017, p.310). Kristof argues that substantial change in terms of shifting aesthetic ideals in the art field is more challenging to attain than positional change. Kristof's findings give support to the idea that the Hungarian art field is successful in protecting its autonomy against political influence. Cultural capital is still the most essential currency with which to establish reputational positions, i.e. positions based on credibility in the art field (Kristof, 2017). The artists in my study nevertheless give another perspective on the situation; they believe that new elite actors in the field are influencing what art is credited and shown in cultural institutions, and that these elites actively create more room for art that holds conservative tastes and ideologies.

The artists in my study contrast themselves with 'conservative artists', whom they understand to be favored by the Orbán government. The artists draw symbolic boundaries between their art and the art of conservative artists, whom they often consider as less professional, and lacking critical aspirations. Anna describes how the right-wing intellectuals in the art field are publicly gloating about their advancements in the cultural field: "There is a big kultur kampf, and they are very explicit about: 'now the time is ours, and now *we* have the money, *we* have the power, so the liberals just' (waving her arm), we kick you out from everywhere, and now we are in power and now it is our turn." Anna also contrasts the ideals of 'conservative artists' who got subsidies from the government with her own ideals and approaches in art:

They are not really involved in the discourse which I am involved in, they are not openly critical, they are pretty conservative in a technical sense, also regarding their topics. It's like very provincial art. Not risky, nothing... The recipients of this

scholarship, I know them, and I see that they were not really involved in the young artists' association. Young curators do not invite them. They paint big pictures and they don't even paint pictures which are easily salable abroad. So, you know, 'conservative art'. It's strange.

Anna describes these conservative artists as less innovative and more limited in their understanding of art than herself. Somehow, she also defines them outside of the art discourse, by saying that conservative art is strange and irrelevant to the international art market.

Imre separates himself from the conservative folk artists by describing their approach to art as fundamentally different than his own:

The conservative artists are dealing with folk art in an old-fashioned way. Its conservative-nationalist folk art and they deal with Hungarian mythology in a really strange way. I am also working with Hungarian mythology, but they are not critical because they really believe in those myths that say the Hungarians are superior to other countries. And they believe in really crazy stuff.

Imre describes how he is also working with the same kinds of themes as some conservative artists, but that his approach is critical and innovative, while "they" actually believe in these myths.

While the artists direct critique towards these conservative tendencies, which they understand to be unprofessional and strange, Robert, a critic and cultural worker, shows how conventional approaches were symptomatic of the time before 2010 as well:

It is not only this stupidity of the Orbán government. The Orbán government they just removed somehow the main points. This refers to the questions of taste.... In the last ten years you can see how the taste changed. We cannot have really modern statues, for example, in wide public spaces. Old fashioned things you know, figures, sometimes horrific stuff, in the style of the mid-19th century, half amateur sculptures. On the other side, I feel somehow a kind of by chance policy. Sometimes it's surrounded by mistakes and errors, not only this level of bad tasted decisions. This kind of loose, not really attentive stuff, and by mistake they support something good, something important. It's just like roulette, I feel.

Robert views the conservative cultural actors as unprofessional, old-fashioned, but also clumsy. He thinks that sometimes good things happen because of the conservatives are so incapable and amateurish. By defining them as amateurs, Robert, as well as the other artists, present their own artistic approaches as superior.

Heinich (2012) as well as Bourdieu (1996), highlights the increased role of art intermediaries in the middle of the 20th century, and he sees it as a consequence of the increased autonomization of the art field. The idea is that the distance between artists and the general public grew with the autonomization of the art field. Because of this, the integrating role of intermediaries became important for artists to reach their audiences (Heinich, 2012, p. 699). Accordingly, the ideals and aesthetic preferences of intermediaries are important because it affects what artists are selected and given financial support and recognition. The influence of intermediaries is visible in Anna's description of her funding situation. Even though Anna receives funding from the state, she considers herself to be an artist who makes "risky" and critical art. She explains that some intermediaries are still favoring her type of work, but she understands this situation as temporary and changing. Anna thinks that her kind of critical art might soon be in lack of funding opportunities, due to the reorganizing of the scholarships under the governments MMA:

I got money from the state as a doctoral student. So, it is also important. I got a scholarship from the state three times, so this is my last year, and they provided me with pretty good money every month.... So, I am funded by the state (laughs). Which is fine because the jury [selecting recipients of the scholarship] is mostly OK. Now it will probably change, and maybe they just quit giving money through this jury.

She thinks it is important to add that even if she has a critical approach in her art, she has still been supported by the state in the last three years. She thinks this can be explained by the intermediaries' tastes and preferences. She described how the intermediaries are changing from applying peer-reviewing that has favoured her type of work that was in line with the art fields' criteria, to implementing the government's ideology through the MMA. The way Anna comments on her receiving money from the state as "fine" because "the jury is mostly OK", shows how artists make judgments of what constitutes 'dirty' and 'clean' money. She understand it to be acceptable to receive money from the state as long as the money wasn't 'contaminated' with their ideology, and as long as the arm's-length principle was still intact.

Anna understands the situation as only temporarily beneficial for her, and she describes the jury who favoured her work as lagging behind the developments of the Orbán government. She thinks that in the future, conservative, folk art-based work that go more in line with the ideology of the government, will be favored over critical or risky art. In this way, Anna describes how the gatekeepers in the art field are in flux and that the possibilities for artists like her are worsening.

Dora describes how the government claims MMA as a self-governing institution but with no understanding of good artistic taste:

The government likes to speak about the academy (MMA) as a good example of a self-governing in the art scene. Because within the organization, they *are* very free to kind of elect their peers and their leaders and the methods they are working on. Still, it is a really conservative group of old artists who basically operate and think outside of the paradigm of contemporary art. What *they* think is art is not what we mean to be contemporary art. So, it's really funny. The actual scene of contemporary art is not a part of this at all. What they do is like religious paintings of Madonna or whatever. So, it is totally irrelevant.

Dora describes that even though many vital gatekeeper-positions in the art field are now held by right-wing actors who support the government's politics, they are given autonomy to apply their aesthetic preferences. In contrast to Kristof's (2017) findings that it is difficult to affect the inner logic of the art field and artistic taste through positional change, Dora describes these actors' preferences as based on conservative criteria and outside of contemporary art-discourse. The artists' accounts show how no art field can be immune to persistent political pressure, and that an increased political involvement will likely bring about substantial change in the long run. The artists' accounts support Adam's idea that political art changes in tandem with changes in society because artists populate important positions and they adjust their work "according to what the intermediary wants" (Adams, 2005, p.554).

Dora describes how she quit her curatorial job at a large state-run cultural institution and started working on her independent project because of a reorganization. She feared she could no longer rely on having colleagues whom she trusted on a professional level. If she had continued the job, she would have risked her reputation in the art field:

When that team kind of dispersed and this new director started working, I felt that I just didn't want to take the risk of inviting people to work in [X museum] and then have a total failure. Like then, obviously, it's you who fails and lose the trust of colleagues or artists. Starting [her art project] was a way to create a platform where we could keep on working according to our terms.

By quitting her job and working independently, Dora avoids the risk of 'contaminating' her work and reputation with the government's ideology and low status in her national and international art network. Also, she signals that her professional ethics are more important than financial security. The way Dora prioritizes artistic ideals evokes what Bourdieu describes this as the art fields 'interest in disinterestedness' and the logic of 'reversed economy' (Bourdieu, 1983, p.321), and which signals how artist ideals go above economic ideals. Dora's approach fits perfectly well with the idea that the art field is driven by symbolic rather than economic capital (Svensson, 2015). The artists distinguish themselves from conservative aesthetic ideals and reinforce their aesthetic preferences as objectively representing better taste.

5.4.6 Autonomous ideals creates freedom from pressure

The artists' understanding of their autonomy is also constituted through their specific motivations for making art. In a way, their ideals of working autonomously with art have liberated them from pressure and reinforced their autonomous positions. Although Imre subscribes to working with art that is directly critical of the government, he describes a lack of pressure. He explains this by stating that compromising with his ideals is not an option and that he always has had other ways of supporting himself: "I don't [experience pressure]. Living from art is not the easiest thing, so I felt that if I have to compromise, I don't want to do it because I have some other skills like carpentry, or I really like to do digital typesetting." Because Imre understands working with art as already a risky career choice, and something he values for aesthetic rather than economic criteria, it would not make sense for him to compromise with his work.

Janos also explains that he does not experience pressure on his artistic freedom because his motivations for doing art is not related to the financial gains:

In our field, where we don't really have a lot of support, we still do whatever we want to do. I don't find anybody, including myself, to start from a compromise. 'Oh, I cannot do that because I will get punished for it.' No, we are punished anyway. Relying on cultural support means that you are in a difficult position anyhow, so it doesn't matter really what you do.

Like Imre and Janos, many of the artists claim to have other career options, and they would rather quit working as artists than bargain with their ideals. Their lack of pressure seems to reflect their specific motivation for doing art. Using quite a vertiginous logic, the artists' commitments with autonomous ideals itself contributes to their lack of experience of pressure.

6 Conclusions

This thesis has aimed to fill a gap within the sociology of art tradition that has focused on the topic of artistic autonomy. Previous research has mainly looked at Western liberal democratic contexts and issues relevant to such political systems, in which the effect of increased marketization in the art field has been a central question. The economic system may be the most important external influence on the field of art in a liberal democratic context. Yet, the recent developments of authoritative political regimes around Europe make a case for the increased significance of the political sphere. This thesis has contributed with empirical evidence about the historically significant political developments in Hungary, and has deepened the existing sphere of knowledge about artistic autonomy in an emerging illiberal democratic Eastern European context. While Hungary has been characterized as a special or extreme example of a government centralizing power in a European context, these tendencies will be relevant for other countries as well. The recent years of focus on the cultural sphere by the Orbán-regime bears witness to how the role of culture is perceived as an important tool for reinforcing political power. The experiences of the artists presented in this thesis points to how successful the government has been in trying to make the cultural field increasingly reflect their political ideology. Becker (1984) argues that there will perhaps always be a small cultural elite operating in the margins in a society, and which authorities will not concern itself with. Unless they choose to use voice (Hirschman, 1970), in matters where they influence public affairs, and therefore represent a threat to the regime.

The overarching question in this thesis has been how the political changes in Hungary have affected Hungarian artists in their work. The simple answer to that question is that it has affected them in different ways. A striking feature of the artists depictions is how the idea of constricted freedom is always directed towards other actors and institutions in the field. The artists describe a discrepancy between the general situation and their own personal experiences as well as individual differences among their peer artists. The main narrative is that artistic freedom is under great threat in Hungary, but individually, artists still stress their ability to operate autonomously.

The independent contemporary art scene in Hungary is described as slowly dispersing due to increased attacks such as cuts in subsidies, reorganization in favor of conservative ideals, and other subtle ways in which the government make it extremely difficult for progressive artists to continue their work. Artistic autonomy is described as severely

compromised due to the states neglect of the arm's-length principle and peer reviewing. None of the artists have experience with direct censorship but described the government's use of indirect censorship or "structural censorship" to push out critical and progressive voices from the art scene. Examples of this are found in: financial cuts to progressive and critical artists, reorganization of subsidies under political control, tax-controls intended to shut down left liberal associations and venues, media harassment, black lists, fake news about artists, and a general exclusion from public visibility. The artists describe wide-spread self-censorship in the art field, and that they have experiences with intermediaries who encourage them to hold back their critiques of the regime. The independent art scene is described to have gone through a dramatic decrease in active participants; peer artists and friends have left the country. Two of the artists in my material are among them. A state of anxiety arises among the artists and I find that the illiberal democratic context represents a culture of uncertainty. This illustrates the success of the government's (and intermediaries') attempts to deter critical voices. Those within the field itself are unable to protect their peers. These factors indicate that the degree of autonomy in the Hungarian art scene is on a decline. In contrast with Kristof's findings (2017) the artists describe how the process of selection within the Hungarian art field is increasingly based on political criteria, rather than aesthetic. New government employed intermediaries are perceived to favor artists who conform to conservative taste patterns, and thus that the political changes is affecting aesthetic changes in the art field as well.

The main narrative among the artists in my material is that they individually are able to maintain their artistic autonomy despite the pressure they are under. Their accounts show that the connection between politics and art is not analogous, but constitutes a complex relationship mediated through different levels. Based on the research question: How do the artists constitute their ideas of artistic autonomy in Hungary's illiberal democracy?, I have shown that the artists constitute their artistic autonomy based on four main dimensions which are (1) the dimension of social background and life situation, (2) the macro-political dimension, (3) the international dimension and (4) the artistic dimension.

Firstly, the artists describe that their privileged social background, life situation (as well as own choices) enable them to work autonomously on their art, despite political pressure. They contrast their privileged positions with the majority in the art field. The artists also see their privileged backgrounds as reasons for why they can make ethical choices, boycott governmental institutions, and stay true to their artistic ideals, while other artists might not. Here, I find that the role of cultural capital is seldom talked about by the artists and that

ethical considerations must be understood as based on social values that can cut across economic class background.

Secondly, the artists describe the macro-political situation as indirectly affecting their working conditions. They describe how they and the independent art scene in general is subject to indirect, or a priori censorship (Bourdieu and Thompson, 1991), as they describe being increasingly excluded from important and influential arenas in the art field. The indirect censorship is described to transform the art field into a political minefield. While the government's actions can be described as indirect censorship, I stress that the issue of censorship needs to be understood as including a definition of what art is and what its role is in a society. According to the liberal view of the artists in my thesis, art should have an autonomous position in society, while the view of the Orbán government is that art's role is to be instrumental to and mirror the political system. Thus, using the logic of standpoint theory (Borland, 2020), the experiences of the artists need to be understood on the basis of their social positions, political experiences and perspectives that stand in opposition to the perspectives of the conservative pole.

The artists understand self-censorship as affecting peer artists and intermediaries rather than themselves. When they describe how they shape their work to avoid governmental interference, they interpret their decisions as a way of protecting their autonomy. Due to the strong pressure from the government, to be an autonomous artist in Hungary's illiberal democracy involves balancing artistic ideals and survival, in line with Mangset's (2004, p. 254-255) idea of artists combining artistic ideals with a strategic realism. While the artists express that they do not experience pressure personally, their description of how they navigate in the art scene shows a more complicated picture where the border between tactical considerations and self-censorship seem blurred. The artists' interpretation that they are engaged in tactical navigation rather than self-censorship can point towards the discrepancy between autonomous ideals and being subject to self-censorship.

Thirdly, international connections create possibilities for operating more independently from the government. By applying for funding through international NGOs, both inside and outside Hungary, the artists can continue their own art practice on their own terms. Still, national and international politics are sometimes intertwined, as with the case involving the EEA and Norway grant and the Open Society Foundation. The political situation in Hungary is described to have a master status in the international society's understanding of Hungarian artists. This leads to identity contingencies where international intermediaries as well as peer artists expect Hungarian artists to produce works that are

political and critical of the government. They describe these stereotypical expectations as limiting their artistic autonomy. These pressures—both national and international—culminate in what I call a double pressure. The artists are both affected by: (1) the pressure from the Hungarian government and intermediaries to not criticize the government and to subject themselves to self-censorship, and (2) the pressure from international intermediaries (and peer artists) to be political and critical against the government.

Fourth, the political situation affects the artists in their artistic work. While some exclude working on political topics, many include topics from the political sphere, such as nationalism, folk art and Hungarian history in their work. They describe to work with such issues beyond the logic of the political sphere, transforming and inverting such topics to problematize, complexify and criticize political processes. Thus, the artists' approach to external political topics in their art can be understood as going through a process of refraction, which Bourdieu (1996) defines as the process of transforming external phenomena on the basis of the beliefs and logic internal to the field itself. When refraction effects in a field is high, so is the degree of autonomy in the field. I have shown that the political sphere has increasingly gained influence into the aesthetic sphere since the artists are increasingly socially engaged in their art due to political pressure. Using Bourdieu's framework, this indicates that the autonomy in the art field might be decreasing. Relative autonomy can still be said to exist due to how refraction effects are perceptible in the artists approach to social engagement. The artists are split between those who are oriented towards more direct political activism in their work, and those who strive to translate political questions into the logic of the art field.

Thus, the conclusion might be that there still exists relative autonomy in the Hungarian art field, but that this autonomy is increasingly threatened by the political sphere. Positional changes in the field, where conservative art is favored over independent and progressive art, are described as increasingly affecting the artists chances. In contrast with previous findings by Kristof (2017a) that aesthetic criteria cut across political criteria in the Hungarian art field, the artists describe how aesthetic criteria are increasingly defined by the conservative ideology of the government. The issue of quality in art has always represented a source of conflict and tension in different historical periods in the art field, independently of the types of political regime in a country. But the distinct struggle between a clear conservative versus a liberal stance such as can be seen in the Hungarian context stands out in terms of its polarized character and for the conservative poles increased favorable position in the field.

My findings illustrate that in order to gain substantial knowledge of how artistic autonomy is constituted in society, these four dimensions: social background and life situation, macro-political circumstances, international connections as well as artist's aesthetic ideals, need to be included in the analysis. I have touched upon some of the connections between these four dimensions such as how the artists' experience that their aesthetic preferences of working politically (artistic dimension) give them possibilities abroad (international dimension), which is a consequence of international intermediaries interest in the current political situation in Hungary (macro-political dimension). Still, further research would benefit from expanded inquiry into how these four dimensions are interrelated.

All four of these dimensions illustrate the significant role that artistic autonomy played in the artists' self-understanding and interpretation of their roles and choices. By using the exit, voice, and loyalty model (Hirschman, 1970), I have shown how the artists in practice have three main options when faced with political pressure and animosities in the art field. They can choose to exit, which would mean to stop working as artists or leave Hungary for possibilities abroad. They can stay and use voice to protest and try to better their situations. Lastly, they can show loyalty towards the government and adjust to the national ideologies. The artists in my material are primarily split between choosing the voice and exit option. What enables the artists to use voice in the Hungarian art field is a privileged social background, life situation and choices, international network, aesthetic ideals, and professional ethics, according to the artists own accounts. My findings show that the artists who stay and use voice often operate on the verge between voice and loyalty, they are careful not to use voice in a way that could risk their possibility to work. Thus, they are loyal to the Hungarian state while also being loyal to the Hungarian art field by not choosing the exit option. Similarly, to Banks' (2010, p.263) idea, these artists can be said to struggle from within the system and fight to uphold their autonomy inside the limitations that the political system represents. In many ways, it is the loyalty aspect that is the most important in the daily lives of Hungarian artists. Due to the political pressure from the government, the artists are increasingly forced to deal with moral choices.

What leads artists in Hungary to respond to the political situation with the exit choice? The findings indicate that artists who initially and most vigorously use voice are the ones who eventually exhaust their capacities, experience too much pressure, and see no other option than to move abroad. In an authoritarian or illiberal democracy, then, actors who use voice in the most radical ways are also the ones who are more likely to exit. On the flip-side, artists who have a high degree of autonomy in their work due to a developed international network,

for instance, might be the ones who dare to be more explicitly critical and use voice. While people who do not leave the country, but stay in-between the voice and loyalty option, might not see exit as an available or attractive option.

Hirschman mainly uses the concepts of exit, voice, and loyalty in the context of a workplace. In the case of artists, there is no designated workplace; many are freelancers and work independently, or perhaps as entrepreneurs. Thus, I find that their sources of reference are more fluid and split between the Hungarian state, the Hungarian art field, the international art field, and their professional ethics (artistic autonomy). Based on these different sources of references, I find that what the artists are exiting from, using their voice for, and show loyalty to, can take multiple forms. The artists' source of reference is where they direct their loyalty towards and therefore their loyalty determines their choices of either exit or voice. I find that while the artists differ in their choice of voice and exit, and that some direct loyalty to the Hungarian state and art field and some do not, all the artists are first and foremost dedicated to working autonomously with art. Rather than showing loyalty to the Hungarian art field or the state, they are foremost committed to ideals of artistic autonomy.

The findings in this thesis give support to previous research that has found that ideals of artistic autonomy persist during significant political transformations, and that political and social engagement can merge with charismatic ideals in times of political repression. The artists' accounts show that their social engagement has increased during the Orbán-government's reign, and that there exists a struggle for distinction about aesthetic taste inside the realm of socially engaged art. In accordance with Bourdieu's framework, the fact that the struggles between groups in the field appear to be extensive and that their descriptions of aesthetic ideals fit with the idea of refraction effects (Bourdieu, 1996), gives support to the idea that autonomy in the Hungarian art field still persists. However, the artists describe the situation as worsening and that conservative aesthetic preferences are increasingly influential. Orbán's ideals for the cultural and art field do not yet seem to have reached his 'ideal state', and it remains to be seen how things will unfold ahead.

On the basis of the artists' depictions that art intermediaries are the ones who experience most pressure in terms of their obligations towards politicians, a suggestion for further research is to look into how the intermediaries experience their double position: between their obligations to the politicians and to the art field. This will broaden the understanding of social mechanisms influence how self-censorship operates and affects artistic freedom. Further, it would be beneficial to gain more understanding of the standpoints

of the so called conservative artists and describe different perspectives on the developments in the art field, beyond the left-liberal art discourse.

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All references listed in this thesis have been reported.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

Introduction

This interview is for my master thesis that I will write during the fall of 2019 and finish in May 2020. I am a student at the sociology department at the University of Oslo in Norway. I also have a background within performing arts, but I don't have that much knowledge about the scene in Hungary. I am interested in how the political changes in Hungary have effected artist and how artists in Hungary think about their position in society with the political changes that have been going on. One often thinks about artistic work as a non-politicized field, and that artistic freedom is something that is to be protected in a liberal democracy. But since Hungary, with Orbán has gotten more and more the reputation of wanting to become more of an Illiberal democracy, how is this affecting artistic freedom?

My thesis is about how the political changes in Hungary the last years, since Fidesz came to power, and how this has manifested itself in cultural politics and how changes within the political landscape in general and within the cultural field have effected artists situation in Hungary. In this interview, I am interested in your experiences as an artist. I am curious about your views, how you see the art scene in Hungary in general, about the art that you do and how you see your role as an artist in the current political climate and how you think the political changes have affected you and the art scene in Hungary. I will secure your anonymity by not writing sensitive information, names, or other personal things that can reveal your identity. If there is something you don't want to answer, or that you particularly want me to not include in the interview, please let me know. Is there anything you would like to ask about my project or this interview before we begin?

Opening questions/background:

1. Could to tell me a bit about yourself, your background, where you grew up, and your parents occupation?
2. How did you start working within the arts?
3. What kind of art do you work with?
4. Can you describe what you are working on now? Or a recent work you made?
5. Have you been working mostly in Hungary or would you say you work more internationally?
6. Why do you think you have pursued a career within the arts?

7. What is it about art that you like or is important to you?

Questions about the art scene in Hungary

1. Could you tell me about how you see the art scene in Hungary today? How would you describe it? What kind of groups are there and what kinds of artist are there within the scene?
2. How would you define your self as an artist, where would you place your self in the art scene in Hungary?
3. What kind of role do you think that independent art has had in Hungary? And has this changed with the Orbán regime?
4. I as a critic often find my self being careful about how I express my self, partly to spear the feelings of the artists, but also to be careful not to offend institutions etc. and I live in a so called liberal democracy where a more plural culture is encouraged. How is this for you? Do you experience any sort of self modifying when you do art in relation to politics?
5. How do you experience freedom of speech in Hungary at the moment as an artist?
6. What do you think about a description of Hungary as a place where artistic independence is under threat?

Questions about politics in art

1. Do you consider your self to be a politically engaged artist?
2. What are your views on the political changes in Hungary the last years and how do your think this has effected your art or situation as an artist?
3. Has this effected what kind of art you make?
4. Has it effected your situation as an artist, like financially or in terms of opportunities?
5. Do you think that artists have a special responsibility to be engaged with what goes on in society and politics?
6. What kind of experiences have you had working internationally in relation to the political developments in Hungary? (question added after first interview)
7. According to you, what is the role of an artist? In general and in Hungary.

Finishing questions

18. Is there anything you think I should have asked that I didn't ask concerning the art field and changes in the current political landscape in Hungary?

Appendix 2: Request to participate in study



UiO

Andrea Csaszi Rygh
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Do you want to participate in the research project: "Artistic freedom in an illiberal democracy"?

My name is Andrea Csaszi Rygh and I am a master student in sociology at the University of Oslo. I want to ask if you would like to participate in a masterproject where the aim is to gain knowledge about Hungarian artists and their views on their conditions within the current political landscape in Hungary. In this circular I am giving you information about the purpose of this project and what your participation will mean.

Purpose

This project is my master thesis that I will write during the fall of 2019 and finish in May 2020 as a student at the sociology department at the University of Oslo in Norway. I am interested in how the political changes in Hungary have affected artists and how artists in Hungary think about their artistic work and position within the field. One often thinks about artistic work as a non-politicized field, and that artistic freedom is something that is to be protected in a liberal democracy. But since Hungary in the last years with the Fidesz government has been describing itself as more of an illiberal democracy, how does artistic freedom manifest itself in this context?

My research question is:

How does Hungarian artist talk about their work, their art and position within the cultural field in Hungary, in light of the political situation?

I am interested in your experiences as an artist, about your views, how you see the art scene in Hungary in general, about the art that you do and how you see your role as an artist in the current political climate. I also seek to understand how the political changes have affected you and the art scene in Hungary. I will conduct about 15 personal interviews with Hungarian artists to get knowledge about their conditions and views.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The University of Oslo is responsible for the project.

Why have you been asked to participate?

I wanted to interview about 15 freelance artists that are Hungarian and who live and work in Hungary within the independent scene. I wanted to interview artists from different fields to gain a general understanding across the art fields.

What will it entail for you to participate?

If you choose to participate in this project it will mean that you participate in an in depth interview. It will take approximately 1–1,5 hour. You can choose when and where the interview should be conducted (in your home, a café, at your workplace or a public place).

The interview will consist of questions concerning your background, your artistic work, your views on the art scene in Hungary and on artistic freedom under the Fidesz-government. The interview will be recorded and I might take notes during the interview.

It is voluntary to participate

It is voluntary to participate in the project. If you choose to participate you are at any time free to withdraw your consent without giving any reason. All information about you will then be anonymized. It will not have any negative consequences for you if you do not wish to participate or if you later choose to withdraw your self from the project.

Your privacy – how we store and use your information

We will only use information about you for the purposes we have told you about in this circular. We will treat the information confidentially and in coherence with personal privacy regulations.

The people who will have access are limited to me and my supervisor at the University of Oslo. Your name and contact information will be replaced with a code that will be saved in a separate name list, separated from other data. The interview will be encrypted when stored. I will not publish any information that can make you identifiable in the publication.

What happens to the information about you when I finish the research project?

According to the plans the project will finish around 30.05.2020.

When the project has finished personal information and recordings will be anonymized.

Your rights

As long as you can be identified in the data material you have the right to:

- get access to what personal information is registered about you
- have personal information about you be corrected
- have personal information about you be deleted
- get a copy of personal information about you (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the data protection officer or the Data Protection Authority about the treatment of your personal information.

What gives us the right to treat personal information about you?

We treat information about you based on your consent.

On commission by the University of Oslo, NSD - Norwegian center for research data AS has evaluated that the treatment of personal information in this project is in coherence with the rules for privacy data protection.

Where can I find out more?

If you have any questions about this research project or if you wish to use your rights please contact:

- University of Oslo, Grete Brochmann (supervisor), on email (grete.brochmann@sosgeo.uio.no) or phone: +47-22858336. Or me, Andrea Csaszni Rygh, on email (andrery@student.sv.uio.no) or phone: +47 93401885
 - Our Data Protection Official: [Maren Magnus Voll](#), on email (personvernombud@uio.no) NSD – Norsk center for research data AS, on email (personvertjenester@nsd.no) or phone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Kind regards

Project supervisor
Grete Brochmann

Student
Andrea Csaszni Rygh