

**Hock, Beáta. 2013. *Gendered Artistic Positions and Social Voices - Politics, Cinema and the Visual Arts in State-Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungary*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag. 284 pp. illus.**

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With the arrival of the Third Wave Feminism and postcolonial theory in the 1980s, the "politics of location" (Adrienne Rich, "Notes Toward a Politics of Location," *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985*; New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1994) and contextualized knowledge took the central stage in feminist scholarly dialogue. As of the early 1990s Central and Eastern European scholars have joined the ongoing struggle to challenge the universalizing tendencies of Western feminist thought; Beáta Hock's book, *Gendered Artistic Positions and Social Voices - Politics, Cinema, and the Visual Arts in State-Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungary*, joins the effort to keep gender as a valuable analytical category while moving away from essentialist assumptions about women's experiences and needs across the world. The more specific goal of this monograph is to find value in feminist art theories as applied to the local(ized) context of Hungarian visual culture. Hock outlines her scholarly objective as threefold: to look at representations of women in Hungarian film and visual arts, to explore the feminist potentials in the works of several Hungarian women artists, and "to probe the applicability of the theses of feminist film and art theory for the analysis of Hungarian cinema and visual art scenes" in both the Socialist and the Post-Socialist time periods (13).

The interdisciplinary nature of Hock's study is beyond any question, as she devotes equal attention to film, photography, painting and performance art. Her research methodology also includes but is not limited to original archival research, oral history interviews, textual and theoretical analyses, quantitative surveys and literary reviews. Last but not least, her study covers a wide historical period that ranges from 1945 to the 2000s attempting to uncover not only feminist art during the State-Socialist period but also the ways in which female artists and women's representations have adapted during the transition to the Post-Socialist era in Hungary. As an interesting side-note, Hock uses the non-capitalized version of the first person pronoun "I" throughout her book, thus making a 1980s Third Wave Feminist Movement style political statement about resistance and subjectivity through language (for a similar case see, for instance, feminist writer Gloria Jean Watkins's use of "bell hooks" for her pen name).

The first part of the book consists of three chapters presenting key concepts and theories in feminist scholarship that Hock plans to examine in the context of Hungarian visual art. Her purpose is to formulate a theoretical perspective that moves away from Western-centered feminist knowledge and offer a localized, gender-sensitive reading of Hungarian cinema and contemporary art. Chapters One and Two briefly introduce key concepts such as "woman" as a



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political category, "representation," "subjectivity," and "interdisciplinarity" in order to set up a theoretical framework for her own study. In Chapter Three the author briefly summarizes the relationship between Western and non-Western feminism through a "center" and "periphery" discussion dynamics. Hock's goal is to dismantle such dichotomies and offer an alternative methodology of reading Hungarian visual arts. Thus, her work can be positioned within the larger scholarly scope of the Third Wave Feminism that seeks to decolonize previous French-Anglo-American feminist thinking (for similar attempts in this direction, see the works of Uma Narayan, Sandra Harding, Martha Nussbaum, Gayatri Spivak, Kaja Silverman, etc.). The essentialist tendencies in Western European and North American feminist works have been criticized by many Central-Eastern European scholars since the early 1990s (e.g. Susan Gal, Katherine Verdery, Anna Wessely, Elizabeth/Erzsébet Báthory, Nanette Funk, Ewa Mazierska, Maria Todorova, Dina Iordanova, Joanna Regulska). Hock contributes to these discussions by focusing on the interrelations between the intensely local, national culture in Hungary and the fundamentally transnational and universal nature of feminism.

The first two chapters of Part II outline the history of the emerging feminist scholarship about Eastern and Central Europe as well as women's position in Hungarian political and civil life, education, economy, legislation and political rhetoric in the Socialist and Post-Socialist era. Hock admits that her account offers only a "rudimentary picture" (80) of the social changes and ideological discourses attached to these issues; indeed, the information in these chapters is compressed to a degree that makes it hardly informative. For instance, Hock describes the complex issue of the "double burden" that women had to face under the Socialist State in mere four pages and without any explicit connection to the subject of Hungarian art. Her evaluation of the transition period between the two regimes is also fairly obvious: the emancipation project under State-Socialism was only partly successful, and although in the 1990s initial Post-Socialist period "a wider range of gender role constructions became available" (73), these options were still undermined by persistent inequalities and new challenges that women continued to face.

In the book's third and fourth parts the reader finally arrives at the main dilemma of Hock's entire investigation about whether it is possible to talk about "feminist art [in Hungary] without a feminist audiences" (170) and largely without self-declared feminist artists. Hock dedicates the third part of her book (consisting of Chapter Eight through Eleven) to studying women artists and female representations in Hungarian film. Chapter Eight is a general introduction to feminist film theory (mentioning works by scholars such as Teresa de Lauretis, Laura Mulvey, Claire Johnston and Annette Kuhn), and it also gives a limited review of the existing English language scholarship about Hungarian cinema based on works by Dina Iordanova, John Cunningham and Catherine Portuges. This chapter is clearly overambitious in its attempt to outline major trends in feminist film criticism as well as in Eastern European film studies while also offering a brief history of Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungarian film production -- all in fifteen pages. What follows is a four pages long chapter on women's role in the Hungarian film industry over a fifty year time period supplying statistical data on the number of women who worked as film makers, but without much elaboration on who these women were, why and in what ways they emerged, or how they relate to feminist political agenda. Chapter Ten then provides the reader with a brief description of some major Hungarian women directors from both the Socialist and Post-Socialist period. Hock's argument is that neither the gender of the

director nor the nature of women's representation can be an accurate measurement of feminist concerns in Hungarian cinema; while her point is not new, it is certainly well demonstrated in the book. Relying on English language sources mostly, the last chapter in this section, and number eleven overall, gives the reader a somewhat random compilation of movies that, according to Hock, hold great potential for feminist interpretation.

Hock's scholarly background in avant-garde performance art and action art becomes obvious in the book's fourth part (consisting of Chapters Twelve, Thirteen, and Fourteen), in which she reveals that she has worked as a curator on several important public art exhibitions (e.g. *Agents and Provocateurs* in Hungary in 2009 and in Germany in 2010, co-curated with Franciska Zólyom) and has also served as an editor for the art journals *Praesens: Central European Contemporary Art Review* and *ARTmargins: Art – Curating – Media – Politics – Transition*). This part clearly reflects Hock's intimate familiarity with the history and scholarship of Hungarian visual and performance art. Chapter Thirteen, for instance, relies on new archival research as well as on substantial secondary scholarship (mostly by Hungarian art critics and theorists) to discuss feminist agenda in the work of several little-known female Hungarian performance artists from the 1960s and 1970s (amongst them are Orsolya Drodzik, Dóra Mauer, Judit Kele, and Katalin Ladik). Chapter Fourteen benefits from Hock's personal relationships with many women artists with whom she was able to conduct in-depth interviews or use oral history materials to make the case that feminist art in Hungary stems from the act of interpretation rather than from the artist's political engagement. These two chapters are most informative and successful in terms of disclosing the particular tensions underlying artistic expression, feminist agenda and women's political identifications in Hungary.

Although Hock's claim that in Hungary "the articulation of feminist concerns in cultural work or in social activism is not always and necessarily tied to a conscious feminist identification" (34) is not necessarily pioneering, her work of proving this claim stands on solid empirical and theoretical ground. Hock promises to move beyond simply criticizing Western feminist thought to the construction of a set of "new frameworks and methodologies" (39) that will help us understand feminist art in Hungary. It is somewhat surprising that this allegedly "new" framework relies mostly on the well-established *écriture féminine* [French: feminine writing] theory and that Hock ultimately connects the Hungarian artistic feminist agenda to open texts and gendered interpretations, or, in other words, to "the art of reception" (43), rather than to self-conscious political practices, which is a well-based theoretical move of the 1970s-1980s Postmodernism.

*Gendered Artistic Positions and Social Voices: Politics, Cinema, and the Visual Arts in State-Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungary* is based on Hock's doctoral dissertation completed at the Central European University (CEU) at Budapest in 2008. As many such dissertations, it is extremely ambitious in its temporal and thematic scope, as it promises to offer a historical, cultural, theoretical, and methodological analysis that "re-inscribes the national in research" (14) over a fifty-year time-period of radical political, social and economic changes. The danger in such a wide range of inquiry is that although scholars of Eastern Europe and of feminist theory will agree with Hock's argument, the first three parts of her book offer them little in terms of a new analytical framework that decolonizes Western feminist theory and film scholarship. At the same time, readers who are new to the subject will get an abridged version of a very complex set

of ideological and aesthetic questions related to how Central-Eastern European art fits into a larger feminist political frame. Luckily, the book comes to life so to speak in its fourth part, where Hock's scholarly expertise produces a pioneering study of women's performance and conceptual art in Hungary. Expanding this project into a full length monograph would add a much-needed voice to an already heterogeneous space in contemporary feminist film and art theory by offering a contextualized interpretation of Central and Eastern European women's art. Finally, the extensive bibliography at the end of the book is an excellent source list for those interested in the history and criticism of Hungarian visual art.