November, 1995

Art and Shock Therapy

Ruthann Godollei, Macalester College

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/ruthann_godollei/2/
Budapest: Bringing it all back home to Mac

When they returned to Macalester after their three-week seminar in Budapest, each of the 12 participants wrote a short personal reflection about the experience, discussing how it had affected his or her thinking, work and pedagogy. All of these essays will be published in the journal Macalester International, along with the seminar papers given by European scholars.

Here and on the following pages are brief excerpts from five of the Macalester essays.

Lessons from Hungarian television by Clay Steinman

Many experiences of the seminar will undoubtedly find their way into the courses I teach, but perhaps the most important involved what I was able to learn about Hungarian television.

For my students in Introduction to Mass Communication, the Hungarian cultural channel offers a model of broadcasting different from U.S. commercial networks dependent on advertising, as well as from PBS, mostly dependent on corporate sponsorship, and from local PBS stations, dependent on the tastes of local elites. Even more than PBS, the Hungarian cultural channel aims programming at discrete audiences (such as the young, retired people or farmers). This produces programming that is designed to be attractive to audiences who are interested in the arts. (This is not niche programming: aiming a show at farmers is not the same, for example, as aiming it at what I believe is the best in U.S. television.)

The experience of being with such bright and articulate colleagues from Macalester also gave me a better sense of what is available to us at the College and provided an informative discussion that while the content around rigorous questioning of assumptions remains questionable and supportive, the environment was particularly worthwhile, allowing me to test new ideas derived from the faculty the major issues of the end of the 20th century — the explosion of globalization processes, the triumph of democracy and capitalism, and the rise of new ethnicities and cultures — as they take place in different regions of the world.

The impact of the seminars on faculty research and knowledge, and ultimately on the Macalester curriculum, will not be known for several years," Sutherland said. "But I expect it to have a major role in the internationalization of the curriculum."

Michael Monahan is director of Macalester’s International Center, which is responsible both for study abroad and international student affairs at Macalester. He has a particular academic interest in questions of ethnic conflict and cultural identity.

Art and ‘shock therapy’ by Ruthann Godollei

Many times during our faculty seminar in Budapest, I heard the phrase “shock therapy” used in the context of a rapid changeover to a free market economy. I had heard this term in previous visits to Central Europe. The term “shock therapy” is now used so frequently with no apparent reference, I have become alarmed at its implications. Why should a discredited medical/psychological practice from the “West” be used to define the form of this economic transition? What are the consequences in terms of the human spirit to social body thus treated?

The art in Central Europe may be one of the few sites for healing: recalling one’s humanity in the wake of brutal treatment. I was informed him that his work was “too philosophical” and that people worry that people want to support the arts against violence. In his apartment in Budapest, painter Istvan Koteles is crafting beautiful, transcendent modern versions of angels, citing a Hungarian proverb: “If you associate with angels, you will be like an angel; if you associate with devils, you will be a devil.” A potential gallery dealer recently informed him that his work was “too philosophical” and therefore unmarketable. I see four major factors now working against the survival of the arts in the wake of economic shock therapy: (A) An enormous Western pressure to trivialize and suspect art and cultural workers. (B) Economic reality; art as “extra” in the face of survival issues. Contrary to the notion that art is the “social body that can transcend conflict and cultural identity.

Why should a discredited medical/psychological practice from the “West” be used to define the form of this economic transition?”

— Ruthann Godollei

Clay Steinman

I was exposed to views about the former Yugoslavia that have led me to see U.S. news coverage as tragically oversimplified. Not only will this help me teach analyzing the news with more sophistication but it has also already whetted my appetite for doing more with Hungarian and Czech movies in my film courses and bringing more international films to the Macalester community.

The countries of Central Europe can provide the new generation of students an ideal place for study abroad. The countries of Central Europe can provide the new generation of students an ideal place for study abroad. The countries of Central Europe can provide the new generation of students an ideal place for study abroad. The countries of Central Europe can provide the new generation of students an ideal place for study abroad.

Macalester faculty met in Budapest, painter Istvan Koteles is crafting beautiful, transcendent modern versions of angels, citing a Hungarian proverb: “If you associate with angels, you will be like an angel; if you associate with devils, you will be a devil.” A potential gallery dealer recently informed him that his work was “too philosophical” and therefore unmarketable. I see four major factors now working against the survival of the arts in the wake of economic shock therapy: (A) An enormous Western pressure to trivialize and suspect art and cultural workers. (B) Economic reality; art as “extra” in the face of survival issues. Contrary to the notion that art is the “social body that can transcend conflict and cultural identity.

Why should a discredited medical/psychological practice from the “West” be used to define the form of this economic transition?”

— Ruthann Godollei

Clay Steinman
bad conditions. There are minimal necessities needed to make artworks including time, enough to eat, some materials. There are sheer physical limitations on the artists I met to work extra jobs and still find time and energy to create. (C) Market pressure to make stuff that sells instead of saying what you think needs to be said. Pseudo-authentic folk art for tourists currently crams the markets. (D) Both the regional audience and many artists don’t want to remember the pain of recent events, preferring a “get on with it” approach. Failure to explore the Communist legacy as well as to actively critique its replacement through the arts will leave a vacuum of expression which light entertainment or pseudo-Western art fashions won’t address.

The German artist Joseph Beuys once strung up a motto behind one of his Aktionismus performance art productions. It read, “To change the art, you must change the man.” An artist deeply committed to humane values, he saw political justice and economic justice as inextricably tied together.

Ruthann Godollei, assistant professor of art, teaches printmaking, 2-D design and women in art. This year, her monoprints on the subject of domestic violence were displayed at the Peninsula Fine Arts Center in Newport News, Va.

Becoming a better student by David Chioni Moore

I WILL CLOSE my reflections with a pedagogical note, by returning to a theme I raised earlier in this essay: that of the value of knowing one’s ignorance.

At Macalester I am one of a few professors whose primary departmental commitment is not to a traditionally constituted discipline but to International Studies itself. And in this role I teach, at both introductory and senior-seminar levels, courses specifically in this thing called International Studies.

But what should I teach? It is of course tempting to try to “cover the whole world” — to do a week on this, a week on that, and hopefully in the end to have taught one’s students a thing or two about the planet. And initially, when I left for Budapest, at least one small part of me said, “Ah, David, you’ve been to 40 countries and here come another five. Now when students come to you and say, ‘Professor Moore, what about the situation in country X?’, there’ll be five more nations on which I can opine with some authority.”

But the lesson, I am happy to report, has been quite the opposite. Put into Budapest I returned to the role of student: an active, engaged, indeed aggressive student, but a student nonetheless. And in that brief return to student status I rediscovered a valuable lesson about my role as teacher: that I don’t know all that much; or, put another way, that mostly what I’ve learned to do as a scholar is to manage my ignorance somewhat better than my students. What I should teach, then, is not so much a knowledge-dump or fact-collection, but rather a way of questioning, a way of making certain that when my students-of-the-world receive their Macalester diplomas, they become, like me, not ex- but better worldly students.

Hungarian artist István Kőteles, second from left, hosts visitors from Macalester in his studio-apartment. They include Dan Keyser, left, Clay Steinman, center, and Ruthann Godollei, who took this photo. The others are Israel Velázquez, second from right, a Cuban artist who lives in Budapest, and Éva Szendrényi, a free-lance designer and technical director in Hungary and Europe. She came to Macalester last spring to give a lecture to theater students and meet with faculty members who were going to Budapest.