



ORIGINAL PAPER

Endre Tót's Graphical Interventions in Public Space As Anti-Communist Subversion

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Abstract:

Endre Tót (1937) maintained his critical vision throughout both the communist and post-communist periods, using his works to challenge the totalitarian communist regime as a Central European and international artist. Due to the oppressive restrictions on artistic expression imposed by the socialist regime in Hungary, he was compelled to leave the country, relocating to West Germany in 1978.

Tót, renowned for his conceptual art practices developed in response to the totalitarian regimes, has constructed an ideological counter-language, particularly through his graphical interventions in public space. Humor played a significant role in his art, serving as a powerful critique against authoritarian systems and as an optimistic response to repression. His approach influenced many, including Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi, demonstrating how humor could be employed as a counter-language against communist regimes. In addition, Tót's works served as an artistic response to the oppressive censorship mechanisms of communist regime. Furthermore, his interventions, shaped by the graphic design aesthetics and text-based art he employed in his artistic practice, can be regarded not merely as a visual mode of expression but a subversive strategy against political authority. This study aims to examine how Tót constructed a distinct visual language in public space through typography, minimalism, and the use of text and language.

Through his interventions in public space, he transformed graphic design into an ideological tool. Thus, his approach to text as a graphic image enabled him to reshape text-based art into an experimental form within the urban landscape. This study will analyze Tót's aesthetic and typographic strategies in public space, examining how he intertwined graphic design language with political critique. Additionally, it will explore the role of his street actions in cultural transformation and investigate how his works evolved into a practice of resistance within conceptual and text-based art.

Keywords: *Endre Tót, public art, graphic design, text-based art, Dan Perjovschi*

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Introduction

“My Joys are a reflection of the dictatorial conditions of the 70s. With my absurd euphoria of joys I responded to the censorship, the closed world and the oppression that could be felt - although it worked with subtle tools and was almost invisible - in all areas of life.”

Endre Tót, 1993

In the second half of the 20th century, artists in Eastern Europe did more than produce aesthetic objects. They developed a language of artistic resistance against ideological oppression. Within this context, Hungarian artist Endre Tót emerged as a prominent figure by fusing conceptual art with graphic language, typography, and public interventions. In the face of the repressive policies of communist regimes, Tót's art became not only a form of creative expression but also a technique for coping with censorship and a method of artistic resistance. Beginning in the mid-1960s, he became one of the leading representatives of the Hungarian avant-garde conceptual art movement.

Tót's practice uses humor, irony, and text as tools of dissent, making individual existence visible while constructing a cultural, collective and aesthetic memory in public space. This paper aims to examine Endre Tót's graphic interventions in public space, focusing on works that include posters, text, typographic installations, and street-based actions. His artistic philosophy and artworks are analyzed separately under titles such as *Endre Tót: A Portrait, A Conceptual Wanderer: Displacement, Resistance, Identity, The Artistic Style of Endre Tót, Anti-Communist Discourse in Tót's Art*; his artistic practice is analyzed with different examples under subtitles such as *graphic interventions, public art, public performance*.

Importantly, Tót's artistic resistance was not confined to the communist period. His production continued after the fall of the regime, and in the post-communist era, he maintained the same critical stance, giving new meaning to his work in shifting political and social contexts. Thus, his artistic discourse represents a long-term struggle not only against communism but also against evolving forms of authoritarianism.

This study adopts a qualitative research method. Selected works of the artist are examined through a descriptive method and analytical approach, employing visual analysis, contextual interpretation, and discourse analysis. This methodological framework reveals the artist's critical engagement with urban space, public visibility, and systems of power, while also highlighting how graphic design can function as a potent political and expressive medium.

Endre Tót: A Portrait

As a leading voice of the Hungarian avant-garde, Endre Tót (b. 1937, Sümeg, Hungary) emerged as a key representative of international conceptualism and mail art practices. Endre Tót, one of the most original and defiant artists to have produced work

Endre Tót's Graphical Interventions in Public Space As Anti-Communist Subversion

under the repressive political atmosphere of Eastern Europe, developed an artistic practice that functioned both as a tool of individual and collective expression, and as a conceptual language that challenged the boundaries of political systems. Especially from the 1960s onward, he used art not merely as an aesthetic medium, but also as an ideological, political, and intellectual means of discourse.

Between 1959 and 1965, Endre Tót (b. 1937), who currently lives and works in Berlin, pursued his studies in mural painting at the University of Applied Arts in Budapest. Tót's early artistic production was marked by lyrical, calligraphic compositions that aligned with the aesthetics of Informal Art; however, by the late 1960s, his visual language began to shift under the influence of Pop Art. "After Tót stopped painting, he turned to experimental forms of art, especially using language, photography, and mail art as conceptual sedition. The public soon noticed the attitude of criticism inherent in Tót's gestures, László Beke remembered, adding, "a talented painter suddenly gives up painting and he is only glad if he can draw 000" (Tumbas, 2014:31).

On the other hand, by the mid-1960s, a powerful wave of conceptual art was sweeping from Europe to the United States, driven by artists such as Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Joseph Beuys, John Baldessari, and Lawrence Weiner, who redefined art as a vehicle for ideas rather than objects. These pioneers integrated linguistic structures into their visual practices, laying the groundwork for what would become known as text-based conceptual art (Kozak, 2022: 108-109). This radical shift emphasized language, process, and dematerialization, challenging traditional aesthetics and authorship. In Eastern Europe, including Hungary, these developments resonated deeply - offering artists like Endre Tót a subversive framework to critique authoritarian regimes through immaterial, idea-driven practices. Hence, in 1971, he abandoned traditional painting altogether and, under the influence of Conceptual Art, began incorporating telegrams, postcards, posters, graffiti, banners, actions, films, and artist's books into his practice - shifting his focus to the exploration of core artistic concepts.

Having begun his artistic career in Soviet-controlled Hungary, Tót's experience under the communist censorship regime - where the boundaries of artistic expression were heavily restricted - played a defining role in shaping his artistic identity. This formative context not only positioned him as a prominent figure in Eastern European art but also established him as a pioneering voice in the international art scene. His global vision and his emigration to West Germany in 1978 further strengthened his artistic identity and enabled him to engage in significant dialogues with the wider art world.

In the midst of a repressive totalitarian regime marked by ideological censorship and Soviet control, everyday life in postwar Hungary - like much of Eastern Europe - was shaped by fear, loss, and state violence.

"Endre Tót was twelve in 1949, and 21 in 1958 when such events resoundingly established Hungary as a police state. He remembers: "my family experienced the 'arrival' of the Russians twice, lost everything twice; once in 1945 when the Red army took control of Hungary and then in 1956, when the soviet tanks crushed the Hungarian revolution." For the child and young adult during these periods of violence, Tót felt that "it [was] like an eternity." Then, in 1961, Tót's "eternity" became an infinity when his father died of leukemia at the age of 60. "I think his early death may have been caused by the dictatorship," Tót laments" (Tumbas, 2014:31).

One of the major turning points in his life was his emigration to West Germany in 1978. This new geography expanded the artist's intellectual and aesthetic horizon and enabled him to build bridges between Eastern European artists and contemporary movements in the West.

One of the most distinctive features of Tót's art is the conceptual connections he established with his contemporaries. He developed a shared perspective with other Eastern European artists, particularly through a critical stance toward the system. Similarly, the Fluxus movement in the United States, John Cage's ideas on silence, and Joseph Kosuth's conceptual language also resonate within Tót's artistic approach. However, Tót reinterpreted all these influences through a unique Eastern European practice, successfully producing his own artistic voice. His's approach also influenced many, including Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi.

The artist maintained his critical stance throughout both the communist and post-communist eras, employing his art to challenge authoritarian rule. Due to the oppressive restrictions on artistic expression imposed by the socialist government in Hungary, Tót's work increasingly embodied a form of conceptual resistance - rooted in humour, text, and symbolic minimalism.

A Conceptual Wanderer: Displacement, Resistance, Identity

The artist, who produced works throughout his life in cities such as Budapest, Genoa, Geneva, Amsterdam, Cologne, Berlin, New York, Vienna, São Paulo, and various other European cities, stands as one of the witnesses who documented historical transitions through his art. As a figure who experienced both the Eastern and Western blocs, he reflects the cultural and political shifts of his time through his artistic practice.

Endre Tót's artistic journey is woven with a condition of forced nomadism, drifting from one geography to another, from one city to the next. This multilayered journey - stretching from Budapest to Genoa, from Amsterdam to Cologne, from Berlin to New York, Geneva, and São Paulo - is not merely a physical relocation between cities. Rather, it is a historical and artistic narrative of resistance shaped by political oppression, censorship, and the struggle for freedom of expression. In this context, Tót's figure can be read as a contemporary reference to the cultural memory of the Wandering Jew myth. Just as that legendary figure symbolizes a timeless exile marked by displacement, marginalization, and the impossibility of settlement, Tót becomes an artist who is constantly compelled to reconstruct his place, sense of belonging, and language in the face of totalitarian regimes' exclusionary structures. This dynamic reflects what Jan Assmann describes in his theory of cultural memory: "The first tool of every memory technique is spatialization. It is not a coincidence that space plays a central role in the 'culture of remembrance' and in the techniques used to reinforce social and cultural memory. In fact, an entire geography can serve as a vehicle for cultural memory" (Assmann, 2022:68). Yet his nomadism is not passive. It transforms into an active aesthetic resistance through conceptual interventions in public space, public art, performances, and typographic actions that challenge the boundaries of the system. In this sense, Tót's art does not merely carry images from one place to another -it traces the path of a thought that knows no geographic boundaries.

Endre Tót's artistic and personal journey is not merely one of geographic mobility, but also a form of conceptual nomadism. The displacements he experienced due to political oppression, censorship, and ideological constraints evolved into an intellectual entanglement that aligns with the notion of the "Nomadic Artist." This condition signifies

Endre Tót's Graphical Interventions in Public Space As Anti-Communist Subversion

not only a transition between cities or spaces but also a form of liberation that transcends aesthetic, linguistic, and political boundaries.

However, much like the figure of the Wandering Jew from legend, Tót's movement is not a punishment, but rather an existential necessity transformed into resistance through the independent memory he carries. Constantly in motion yet never fully belonging anywhere, this figure becomes, in Tót's conceptual art practice, both an individual and political strategy.

The Artistic Style of Endre Tót

Endre Tót's artistic practice emerges not only as a creative endeavour but as a deeply ideological and political stance. Transitioning from lyrical, informalist painting to conceptual art by the late 1960s, Tót's shift was catalyzed by the socio-political constraints of the Hungarian socialist regime. The heavy censorship of the 1970s prompted him to abandon traditional media altogether and embrace the typewriter as a tool for visual and textual experimentation. This shift signaled a move towards an autonomous artistic existence - one that challenged totalitarian regimes through acts of visual resistance. "Tót - who until then had been confined to Soviet-controlled Hungary - had access to the entire world, thanks to a simple, rapid artistic practice that flew under the censor's radar. In this way, he came into contact with Ecart and began a significant exchange of letters with John Armleder" (MAMCO, 2022:1).

In this period, Tót expanded his conceptual language across disciplines, blending graphic aesthetic, typography, and performative gestures in public spaces. His interventions, often minimalist in form and radical in message, established a universal, translatable language of dissent. Through posters, telegrams, banners, street actions, and artists' books, he questioned the systems of power that defined art, identity, and meaning.

Central to his oeuvre are three conceptual motifs: "Nothing/Zero", "Rain", and "Gladness." These are not merely visual or textual motifs, but conceptual frameworks that define his critique of totalitarian ideologies. Nothing/Zero - or what he termed "Zeronism" - became a radical embrace of absence, silence, and erasure. Through visualizations of zeros repeated endlessly, typewritten, or painted on banners, postcards, and even stamped onto official documents, Tót transformed the void into a form of quiet resistance. The zero here is not empty; it is full of meaning, tension, and refusal. His deliberate repetition of zeros should be recognized as a conceptual method - one that exposes and confronts the negativity and authority of institutionalized socialism in Eastern Europe. The recurring use of the character '0' generated a paradoxical, almost absurd, sense of joy. This approach can be interpreted as an ironic happiness that underscores the absence of the prosperity promised by the political ideology.

In his Rain works, Tót developed a visual language composed entirely of falling vertical marks, resembling rainfall. These marks - sometimes generated through repetitive typewriting, sometimes painted - evoke a metaphorical cleansing, a longing for freedom, or perhaps an infinite cycle of internal exile. Rain, in Tót's hands, becomes a poetic form of endurance under authoritarian rule.

His Gladness series, initiated with phrases "I am glad if..." or "I am glad if I can..." (1971) is steeped in humour and irony. A serious of work that consists of numerous sentences starting with these phrases. Perhaps, no artist has been as persistently and firmly 'glad' as Endre Tót, who filled his works with zeros or stamped them with the phrase, 'I am glad if I...' According to Tót, "Tót's so-called "Joys" or "Gladnesses" were

humorous parodies of the culture of optimism, articulated via a long-term series of actions and artworks” (Palais de Tokyo, 2025). These statements, often juxtaposed with mundane or absurd actions, foreground the limitations imposed on personal agency and expression in a regime where joy was monitored, sanctioned, and politicized. Here, gladness becomes a radical declaration - the assertion of inner freedom in the face of external repression.

Some notable instances of the iconic ‘I am glad if...’ phrase include:

***I AM GLAD IF I CAN HOLD THIS IN MY HAND.
I AM GLAD IF I CAN ADVERTISE ON POSTERS.
I AM GLAD IF I CAN STARE AT THE WALL.
I AM GLAD IF I WRITE IN THE CORNER.
I AM SO GLAD IF I CAN LOOK AT YOU.***

Tót is not merely a dissident artist; he is a conceptual thinker who turned visual language into a means of ideological negotiation. Humour, irony, and wordplay in his work do not serve as mere stylistic elements - they function as rhetorical devices that subvert the normative logic of political systems. Alongside concepts like humor and irony, Tót also employed minimalism, repetition, and emptiness. These concepts served as both a critical stance and a conceptual strategy against the pressures of the communist regimes. His “presence” as an artist becomes itself a political act - an autonomous, resistant, and persistent existence in defiance of authoritarian regimes.

One of the most compelling aspects of Tót’s conceptual art is his use of humour as a form of subversion. His ironic slogans - such as those beginning with “I am glad...” - employ a deliberately absurd tone to mock the forced optimism and artificial language of dictatorial regimes. Beneath the surface of cheerfulness lies a biting critique of state propaganda, censorship, and the suppression of individuality. Humour becomes a mask for survival, a coded language of dissent, and a conceptual strategy that transforms personal frustration into collective reflection. In this way, Tót’s humour is never merely comic; it is profoundly political.

Endre Tót’s approach also influenced many artists, including Romanian artist Dan Perjovschi, demonstrating how humour can serve as a counter-language and a tool of anti-communist resistance in the post-communist era. Perjovschi, following Tót’s conceptual approach to art and his textual actions, reflected his social critiques through ironic, humorous and absurd language in his work. According to Gott (2017:4), “So too is Perjovschi and other members of his generation who have been using their art to encourage debate about the direction Romanian culture and politics should be taking in the post-Communist era. His drawings are wonderfully witty, but there is no disguising the fact that his humour is brandished as a political weapon.”

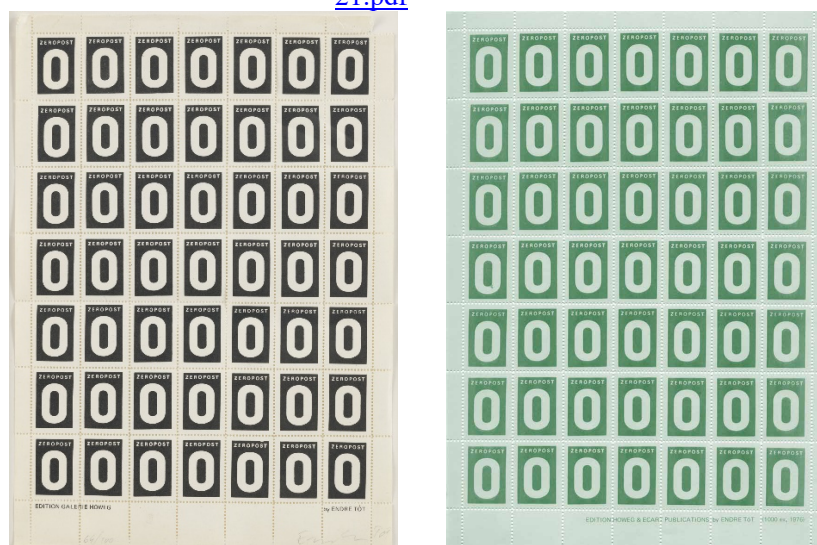
Thus, the interventions of both Tót and Perjovschi - spanning the communist and post-communist eras - became powerful tools to challenge the language and propaganda machinery of authoritarian regimes. By merging conceptual art, visual poetry, and graphic strategies, Tót constructs an intellectual and aesthetic terrain where meaning is destabilized, authority is questioned, and subjectivity reclaimed. His artistic style, therefore, should be understood not only within the lineage of conceptualism, but also as part of a broader cultural struggle for freedom of expression under oppressive systems.

Graphical Interventions: As is clear in Tót's works, the artist embraced graphic language together with his conceptual approach. Using posters, billboards, and printed materials, he exhibited these phrases in streets, exhibition venues, and public spaces. Through his text-based works and typographic strategies, he blurred the boundaries between art, design, and public space, shaping a distinctive visual aesthetic.

In works such as the Zero and Gladness series, Tót employs minimal yet potent typographic arrangements to evoke emotional complexity from a single concept: "Zero (0)." The repetition of this symbol - often enlarged, decontextualized, or humorously integrated into text-transforms absence into presence, and neutrality into intensity. By appropriating the visual tropes of printed matter - postcards, books, invitations, mail art, bureaucratic forms - he subverts institutional language and reclaims public communication as a poetic and critical space. His use of large stenciled zeros, prints, and typewritten repetitions operates not only as visual gestures but as political acts, subtly resisting authoritarian regimes in a loud visual grammar.

Figure 1. Endre Tót, Zeropost, 1974. https://www.salleprincipale.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/endre-tot_katalog_2018_12_18.pdf

Figure 2. Endre Tót, Zeropost Stamps (green), 1976, Ecart Archive. https://monoskop.org/images/2/2f/Endre_T%C3%B3t_Gladness_and_Rain_2021.pdf



"In the early 1970s when Tót for sick painting for more text-based works he adopted the zero as his emblem and he called this his zero tendency and in the late 60s early 70s there were many zeros there was the year zero, zero grupa the idea of a kind of a null that was simultaneously a new beginning for Tót I think it's interesting that he acknowledges right from the beginning that zero is not really zero and that nothing is never nothing and sort of alludes to zero's mathematical significance as an

absence but also as a kind of endless multiplier kind of a pointing towards endless numerical value” (Johnston, 2021).

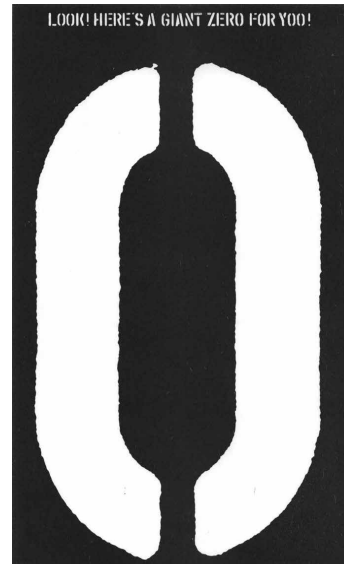
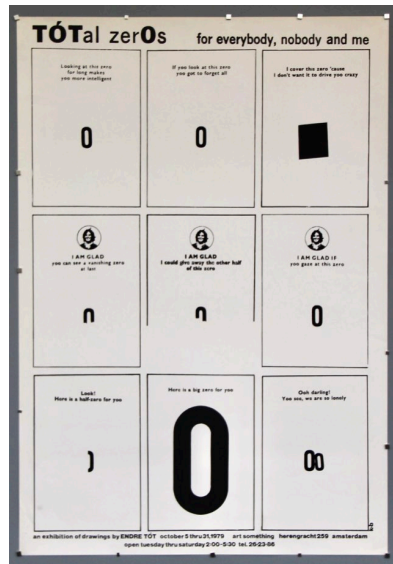
Figure 3. Endre Tot, Total Zeros for everybody, nobody and me, 1979.

<https://www.deappel.nl/en/archive/graphic-materials/15302-endre-tot-total-zeros>

Figure 4. Endre Tót, Look! Here's a giant zero for yoo! (offset printed postcard),

1974, f Ecart Archive, MAMCO Geneva.

https://monoskop.org/images/2/2f/Endre_T%C3%B3t_Gladness_and_Rain_2021.pdf



In Tót's works, graphic language is not merely an aesthetic choice but a deliberate vehicle for conceptual content. The clear and direct nature of typography becomes a tool for conveying layered messages. Elements specific to graphic design - such as typefaces, font sizes, spacing, and repetition - are consciously employed to establish a powerful and immediate communication with the viewer. In this sense, Tót creates an aesthetic that operates both visually and intellectually; he transforms everyday visual communication formats - posters, invitations, street texts - into artistic language, turning public space into an alternative exhibition site. His practice merges the formal clarity of graphic design with the conceptual depth of art, generating a hybrid visual language.

Figure 5. Endre Tót, Zero-Demo, Oxford 1991.

Figure 6. Endre Tót, Zero Demo, Berlin, 1980, 1996, Photo by Herta Paraschin.

https://monoskop.org/images/2/2f/Endre_T%C3%B3t_Gladness_and_Rain_2021.pdf



Technically, Tót's approach is marked by a minimalist, reproducible, and deliberately impersonal aesthetic. Working with typewriters, rubber stamps, Xerox machines, telegrams, and street posters, he employed tools associated with bureaucracy to undermine the very mechanisms of control and surveillance. In doing so, he redefined what constitutes an artwork, shifting the focus from object to idea, from studio to street, and from aesthetic contemplation to political critique.

Public Art: Public space is where revolutions and public actions begin; everything starts and ends there.

In Endre Tót's artistic practice, public space is not merely a physical setting but a battleground of ideas, ideologies, and individual expression. His public interventions transform urban spaces into platforms of poetic resistance and conceptual irony. Rooted in the tradition of the lone protestor, Tót often staged one-person actions - wearing posters around his neck or silently displaying banners in public squares. In cities like Berlin and Amsterdam, his Gladness series extended onto construction sites, building façades, benches, and billboards, turning the ordinary into a stage for conceptual disruption. Public space, often seen as the arena where authority exerts control or where revolutions ignite, becomes for Tót a canvas for autonomous expression. His actions - neither monumental nor invasive - echo the gestures of everyday life, yet are charged with layered political meaning. By merging conceptual art with ephemeral street interventions, Tót reclaims public space as a site for alternative narratives, challenging the visual and ideological codes imposed by totalitarian regimes.

Figure 7. Endre Tót, Gladness Series, I am always glad if I come to the end of a sentence, Berlin, 1979. <https://artpool.hu/Tot/3.html>



Tót's public actions often emerge as modest yet radical gestures - posters, banners, walks, or silent acts - that re-inscribe the political nature of visibility in public space. Especially in cities like Berlin, a site layered with histories of division, surveillance, and liberation, his works resonate with themes of uprising, transformation, and transnational memory. Public space, for Tót, is not neutral - it is historically charged, ideologically coded, and always in flux. By intervening in these spaces with minimalist, textual, and graffiti-inspired aesthetics, he reclaims the right to speak, to appear, and to exist against the silencing mechanisms of communist regimes. His art honors the street not as a place of spectacle but as a site of potential revolution - an open agora where private thought meets collective memory and poetic resistance.

Figure 8. Endre Tót, Gladness Series, outdoor texts Amsterdam, 1980-2021. https://www.mathiasguentner.com/en/kuenstler_in/endre-tot/arbeiten/4957/#image



The fall of the Berlin Wall was not only a political turning point, but also a powerful public action that marked the collapse of communism. In this context, Endre Tót's writing directly on the Berlin Wall becomes both a symbolic and physical intervention. By inscribing his voice onto the surface of a fallen regime, Tót transforms a historical monument into a space of personal and artistic expression. "In 1979, he wrote to the Berlin Wall: 'I would be happy if I could write something on the other side of the

Wall". The public action took place during his first visit to West Berlin as part of a DAAD scholarship. He chose subtle and humorous signs of resistance, using the power of words and texts and their ability to act as a switch in the minds of their readers" (Galerie Güntner, 2022:1).

Public Performance: Endre Tót's public performances blur the boundaries between individual expression and collective resistance. Often walking alone through urban spaces - carrying signs, posters, or flags - Tót transforms ordinary acts like walking or holding an object into powerful aesthetic and political gestures. He took performance art beyond traditional settings and into public space. Unlike traditional stage-based performance, his interventions unfold in the unpredictability of the urban environment, where everyday life and political reality intersect. These actions simultaneously operate on an individual and collective level, reclaiming urban space not only as a site of personal expression but also as a platform for dissent. In totalitarian regimes, the mere presence of a dissenting body in public becomes a subversive act. Tót's visibility - his willingness to be seen, read, and questioned - becomes a form of soft but persistent resistance. Through these performative acts, he critiques the ideological control of space and language, reminding viewers that public visibility is not neutral but deeply political.

Whether wandering the streets of Berlin, Amsterdam, or Budapest, he inserts his body into public space as both a message and a question. These solitary or group actions - such as wearing posters that declare "I am glad if I can draw a line" or waving a flag in the wind - evoke images of protest, celebration, and existential irony. His presence itself becomes a living artwork, challenging the function of public space under oppressive regimes while reclaiming it for free expression. By moving from city to city, square to square, he enacts a nomadic resistance - one where the artist's body, movement, and visibility are central tools of communication. In this way, Tót's public performances not only subvert authoritarian control over public visibility but also open space for poetic and political meaning to emerge within the everyday.

For instance, Tót's public performance practice is captured in the photograph where he walks through a busy city street wearing a placard that reads, "I am glad if this can hang on my neck." This simple yet profoundly ironic gesture transforms the everyday act of walking into a silent demonstration. The message, carried quite literally on his body, acts as both a declaration and a provocation - subverting the language of political slogans and propaganda through a tone of absurd, almost cheerful compliance. In totalitarian or post-totalitarian urban settings, where visual language and public space are often tools of authority and control, Tót reclaims the street as a platform for personal expression and dissent. His act, performed alone amidst crowds, underscores the power of the individual body in public space, turning anonymity into visibility and silence into critique. The absurdity of being "glad" to carry such a message exposes the performative nature of power and obedience, destabilizing their symbolic hold through minimal, poetic resistance.

Figure 9. Endre Tót Galadness Series, I am glad if this can hang on my neck, (with the help of the Ecart Performance Group), action on June 11 or 12, 1976, on the occasion of the exhibition TÓTaJOYS, Ecart Gallery, Geneva.



Another of his conceptual interventions - most notably the flag performance “I am glad if the Berlin wind blows my flag” - activates the urban landscape as a performative and symbolic field. Tót waved his flag in front of buildings at different locations in Berlin and captured these moments in photographs. In this act, the artist’s solitary figure standing in the wind with a flag evokes a powerful counter-image to authoritarian demonstrations of control and conformity. The flag, historically associated with conquest, victory, or national identity, is reframed here as a poetic signifier of freedom, democratic longing, and personal autonomy. The act subtly echoes iconic wartime photographs such as Joe Rosenthal’s “Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima” (1945) and Yevgeny Khaldei’s “Raising a Flag over the Reichstag” (1945), but reverses their militaristic symbolism by featuring a single figure performing a peaceful, artistic gesture in the city. Here, as an artist, Tót’s act represents the waving of the idea of a free and democratic regime; the flag is anonymous, yet it also evokes the image of an artistic victory.

Figure 10. Endre Tót, Gladness Series, I am glad if the Berlin wind blows my flag, West-Berlin 1979, photography: Herta Paraschin.

<https://mailartists.wordpress.com/2023/09/10/if-the-berlin-wind-blows-my-flag/>



Anti-Communist Discourse in Tót's Art

Endre Tót's artistic stance does not rely on direct confrontation or didactic slogans; rather, it functions through a conceptual dismantling of authoritarian narratives. In his work, dissent is not declared but performed - through text, repetition, minimalism, and humorous gladness. Under a communist regime that controlled not only speech but also emotion and expression, Tót's embrace of emptiness and exaggerated joy was, in itself, an act of ideological sabotage. "Tót's conceptual interventions into the political and cultural landscape of socialist Hungary were not meant for, and certainly had no place in, official museums, but instead functioned as ways to render tangible the artist's resistance to sequestration in the East and his insistence on not being forgotten or made to disappear. In order to assert his presence, Tót mailed postcards and telegrams all over the world; he stamped his body; he carried posters in demonstration; he existed" (Tumbas, 2014: 33-34).

Tót reframed absence as presence: the zero, the void, and the banal sentence became tools to unmask the absurdity of a system that stifled subjectivity. His discourse was not one of outrage but of displacement - he displaced language, symbols, and meaning from their official contexts and rendered them useless for propaganda. This subversion unfolded within the mechanisms of bureaucracy, media, and everyday visual culture - and most crucially, within public space, where totalitarian systems sought to assert their most pervasive control.

Moreover, his art can be read as a response to the psychological dimension of life under communism. Instead of presenting trauma or censorship in explicit form, he aestheticized alienation and normalized absurdity. The hyper-repetitive sentences such as "I am glad if..." perform a satire of the state's attempt to regulate affect and thought. In this sense, Tót did not only reject ideological content - he attacked the format and infrastructure of ideological communication itself. "Tót's conceptualism encountered the very clear discrepancy between ideology and political practice in a country where artists fought against conservative and limiting art regulations and where surveillance and incarceration were real threats" (Tumbas, 2014: 32).

His interventions across borders - from Hungary to Germany, the Netherlands to the England - illustrate a diasporic resistance, one that escapes national containment. By spreading his message across postcards, mail art, street walls, and exhibition spaces, he activated a decentralized network of meaning production that bypassed official institutions and censorship. His practice thus foreshadows many contemporary forms of artistic activism: elusive, poetic, mobile, and deeply situated in the everyday.

Tót's aesthetic resistance was not limited solely to the oppressive communist regime. His artistic production continued after the systemic transformations in Eastern Europe, preserving the same critical stance and gaining renewed significance within new contexts during the post-communist period. Observing how art functioned in the aftermath of revolution - how censorship was reshaped and how the individual's place in public space evolved - Tót constructed a critical memory of this transitional era through his works. Therefore, his practice represents a long-term discourse not only against communism but also against authoritarianism in its various forms. This continuous attitude makes Tót not only a significant figure of his own era but also an important voice in contemporary critical art.

Ultimately, Tót's anti-communist discourse does not resemble a manifesto - it is quiet, fragmented, and ironic. But in that fragmentation lies its radicality: he offers no new ideology, only the persistent refusal to conform. He does not replace one message

with another; he reclaims space for uncertainty, ambiguity, and the personal. That, perhaps, is the most enduring resistance of all.

Conclusion

Endre Tót, using conceptual strategies, merged language, text, and graphic tools such as typography and posters to create powerful visual interventions in public space. These actions transformed the urban environment into a site of critical engagement, where humor, irony, and visual minimalism disrupted the symbolic order of totalitarian regimes.

Rather than confronting authoritarianism through direct denunciation, Tót employed the absurd, the banal, and the poetic to destabilize the ideological language of communist propaganda. His text-based works and typographic interventions functioned as subtle yet persistent counter-languages - resistance tools operating within and against the bureaucratic and visual apparatus of control.

Importantly, this artistic resistance was not confined to the communist period. Following the collapse of the regime, Tót continued to intervene in urban space, reflecting on the evolving nature of censorship, authority, and visibility. His work in the post-communist era preserved a critical stance while adapting to new political realities, thereby constructing a living memory of resistance and transformation.

Ultimately, Tót's practice redefined the expressive and political potential of both graphic design and public performance. His interventions show how art - especially when it activates public space through language - can become a sustained form of ideological resistance and social reflection across historical thresholds.

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