

Wissen – Vermittlung – Moderne. Studien zu den ungarischen Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften um 1900.

Edited by Csongor Lőrincz.

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For some time now, the prefix ‘inter-’ has characterized the grammatical morphology of discourses on language, culture, and the relationship of scientific disciplines to one another. The fact that both migratory and purely medially transferred knowledge and traditions lead to interactions with receiving cultures, such as through syncretization or the formation of a hybrid result, gave rise to the research field of interculturality. The prefix ‘inter-’ is also connected with the phenomenon of multilingualism. This describes the coexistence of different languages in one and the same society, as well as their inter-existence in the form of language mixtures. Furthermore, lexis and reflections on liminality manifest themselves in a cross-disciplinary scientific ethos; interdisciplinarity has become the unchallenged custom of scientific work. The clear interest in hybridization and the crossing of thresholds is not least a response, both direct and indirect, to a changed world consciousness, a changed experience of the world. Globalization, all-encompassing commercialization, and the *New Media* are making the *Global Village* visibly smaller and narrower, as well as more complex and sometimes more complicated. Everything, even the most distant things, are continuously moving closer together—too close, as the ever more visible and louder eternal ‘yesterdays’ believe, who camouflage their reactionary ideas with the harmless-seeming vocabulary of ‘ethnopluralism.’

While the ‘inter-’ has only recently become an object of theoretical reflection within its historical background, its practice has determined world- and cultural history in unacknowledged ways from the very beginning. The best examples of this are the cultures of antiquity, such as those of Greece and Rome, which combined previous archives of knowledge and traditions of the entire Mediterranean region (as well as much besides) with their own and were only able to develop into

flourishing advanced civilizations because of this. The anthology *Wissen – Vermittlung – Moderne. Studien zu den ungarischen Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften um 1900*, edited by Csongor Lőrincz, admirably documents the way that Hungary in the era of the Habsburg Monarchy also belonged to those cultural spheres whose innovative power and intellectual authority owed much to the ‘inter-.’ The linguistic polyphony and cultural diversity of Hungary at that time had a constitutive effect on the orders of knowledge and discourses. The intellectual richness which flourished in the era before the ideological and political split into a communist East and a capitalist West is especially testified by the fact that, at the epochal threshold around 1900, cultural studies and the humanities in Hungary undertook expeditions into a theoretical terrain that was only re-entered and systematically mapped after the Second World War, especially in France and the Anglo-Saxon countries.

The blurb of the anthology tells the reader to expect nothing less than an “archaeology of European modernity.” This expectation is not at all disappointed. Each contribution meticulously excavates buried traditions; they uncover discourses that lie hidden under the rubble of the world wars and the communist dictatorship. The spectrum of topics covered ranges from the theory of the essay written by the young Georg Lukács, the cultural, literary and philosophical agenda of *Nyugat*—the central journalistic organ of Budapest modernism—, the systems theory of Béla Zalai and its transposition into aesthetic theory by Lajos Fülep, literary theory and literary historiography, the reactions of Hungarian classical studies to advancing medialization, Sándor Ferenczi’s psychoanalysis, and Béla Balázs’ film theory. All these discussions make clear that Budapest’s modernism was equal to the heights of the times in Vienna, Berlin, and Paris. Yet at the same time, and perhaps with greater theoretical vehemence than its counterparts, it produced perspectives that only re-appeared on the agenda of theory formation in the second half of the twentieth century. These also offer a rich reference to tradition for the most current tendencies in the humanities: the *Medial* and *Material Turns*, as well as *Visual Culture*, and recent attempts to rehabilitate a culture of presence, all engage with discourses from the Hungarian humanities and cultural studies before the collapse of the imperial and royal dual monarchy.

In a way, the first chapter performs the function of offering a second introduction. While Lőrincz in his preface elaborates the intercultural backdrop and interdisciplinary practice of the humanities and cultural studies in Hungary before the disintegration of the Habsburg multi-ethnic empire, Ernő Kulcsár Szabó sketches a portrait of the epochal threshold around the turn of the century. Anthropological modelling at a critical distance from rationalist systems of thought and the out-moded philosophy of the subject; a consciousness of time and history of the transitory and acceleration; radical claims to innovation and originality; the valorization

of *aisthesis* and the physical apparatus; an emphasis on contingency; the reserves against traditional notions of substantiality; techno-medial innovations such as film and ensuing reflections on the effects of mediality in general—all these aspects are part of the epochal profile to which the theoretical models discussed in the following chapters respond.

The analyses by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, István M. Féher, and Csaba Olay which follow Kulcsár Szabó's portrait of the epoch are grouped around the young Lukács' cultural critique, based on his philosophy of life, before his conversion to Marxism. A prominent role in this context is played by the study *The Soul and the Forms*, in which Lukács laid down his theory of the essay. Against the background of the distinction between a life which is every-day and socially distorted and one that is authentic, true and real, Lukács presents the essay as a text genre that at least grants a transitory breakthrough to authenticity and immediacy. At the same time, as Gumbrecht points out, it is precisely these characteristics that appear to some, both during Lukács' lifetime (such as Mihály Babits) and even today, as intellectually complacent, esoteric, and nebulous: in short, as an imposition on the reader. The rejection of the definitional, the floundering of meaning, constitutive openness, the rhizomatic presentation of a rhizomatic thought, the tendency towards *obscuritas*—all these characteristics of the essay in Lukács' understanding take on the function that he later attributed on a larger scale to the communist revolution. In the following chapters, Lőrincz and Hajnalka Halász examine the systems-theoretical concepts of Budapest modernism. Here, the focus is placed on Zalai's *General Theory of Systems* and its aesthetic-theoretical adaptation by Fülep. Lőrincz and Halász demonstrate that Zalai's interweaving of systems, language, and mediality anticipated later developments, such as in Niklas Luhmann's work, and that Zalai's work offers great opportunities for updating and connecting with contemporary issues.

In chapters eight to ten, Fehér, Ágnes Hansági and Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó focus on Hungarian literary historiography and literary theory at the beginning of the twentieth century. First, Fehér traces the conflict between literary history and aesthetics as it appears in Lukács' thought. While literary history is a national and cultural-political endeavor, aesthetics, in Lukács' view, aims at the autonomy of art, independence of time and place, wherein (re)substantialization tendencies become noticeable, which are secretly effective despite their radical claim to innovation in modernity and the emphasis on contingency and permanent transformation. Fehér's discussion of Lukács' conception of aesthetics is followed naturally by Hansági's analysis of Babits' distinction between literary history and literary theory. Here, the focus lies on an unauthorized text that has remained fragmentary, the *Theory of Literature*, which is based on Babits' lectures. Hansági's presentation of Babits' literary-theoretical résumés is succeeded by a discussion of Béla Fogarasi's reflections

on historiography. Fogarasi defines historiography not as a reconstructive activity, but as a constructive-interpretive one that involves two stages of work: selection and completion. Fogarasi's theory that historiography, and thus also literary historiography, is structured narratively and is the result of interpretation, endows it with a nobility that makes it a precursor of concepts which are encountered later in, among others, Hayden White and Reinhart Koselleck. In the following chapter, Zoltán Kulcsár-Szabó uses the examples of János Horváth and Theodor Thienemann to show that a substantial understanding of literature had already been abandoned in Habsburg-era Hungary in around 1900 in favor of an approach which prioritized the historical relativity of what is labelled as literature at a given point in time. This paradigm shift reveals the first efforts of literary studies to define its subject from its reception, from reading, and not from a quasi-Platonic, supra-temporal idea of literature. Writing is thereby assumed to be a prerequisite of literary consciousness, rather than a privilege reserved for a certain social class or the domain of a specific subject, such as theological, legal or administrative matters.

Kulcsár-Szabó's analysis of the reception and reflections on mediality in Horváth and Thienemann form the transition to the following contributions by Attila Simon and Tamás Demeter. They deal with the formation of mediological theories that respond to techno-medial innovations such as film and telecommunication systems. A decisive impulse for this came from ancient studies. Similarly to Gyula Hornyánszky's research into the ancient Greek public sphere and his insights into mass psychology, József Balogh's examination of the reception practice of reading aloud in antiquity and Károly Marót's investigation of orality as a condition for collective poetry demonstrate two main things. On the one hand, the study of antiquity in Hungary anticipates concepts that media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan, Eric A. Havelock, and Walter J. Ong have re-addressed only since the 1960s. On the other hand, the research of Hornyánszky, Balogh, and Marót shows how media do not just reproduce content in a neutral and unfiltered way, but also have a constitutive effect on meaning and form. As Demeter points out, the Hungarian academy's fine sensorium for media-theoretical questions is based on Central European linguistic pluralism and the special relevance that linguistic mediation and transmission had in the Habsburg dual monarchy.

In the next chapter, Péter Szirák turns to István Hajnal's research into the history of writing. While Hornyánszky, Balogh, and Marót investigated the effects of orality and literateness on meaning and aesthetic form by looking to ancient literature, Hajnal examined the socially (trans)forming power of the medium. In particular, he focused on the correlation between the emergence of writing as a system of recording and archiving and the increased complexity of social organization in Europe between the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance period. According to

Hajnal, the expansion of literacy in this time promoted not only trade, legal practice, and educational institutions, but also technologization. The contributions by Robert Smid, Tamás Lénárt and Izabella Füzi can also be grouped together thematically as contributions to the history of technology. In the first of these discussions Smid reconstructs Ferenczi's theory, with frequent cross-reference to Sigmund Freud, that the history of technology, phylogenesis and ontogenesis intertwine through the psychological mechanisms of projection and introjection. The other two chapters focus on Balázs' reflections on the new visual medium of film, which he expounded in his programmatic essay *The Visible Man* from 1924 (among others). Lénárt shows that Balázs saw a second age of orality dawning with film, which he associated with a new visual understanding and experience of the world. This new experience was envisioned to produce effects of immediacy and presence in contrast to the literate standpoint on the world. Füzi continues this discussion of Balázs in a similar vein, taking as her starting point the phenomenon of contemporary mass protests. This leads her to examine the historicization of the category 'mass' as a political actor and finally to question Balázs' and Siegfried Kracauer's film theory of an aesthetics of the masses and its connection to a dialectic between the individual and the collective.

In general, the anthology paints a nuanced picture of the responses of the humanities and cultural studies in Hungary to modernity, its caesurae, transformations, and radical innovations. References and influences from other countries are clearly elaborated by the contributors: Wilhelm Dilthey, Gustave Le Bon, Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson, Georg Simmel, and Max Weber—to name but a few—as well as the programs of Viennese, Berlin, and Parisian modernism were all appreciated with close attention by the Hungarian academy and intelligentsia. However, these contributions also show clearly that Budapest's modernism was not simply an epigonal offshoot of the other cultural metropolises of modernism, but that its almost explosive production of knowledge and discourses had their own individual features. Much of what systems theory, media theory, and literary studies discussed decades later, and which is often attributed to French post-structuralism and Anglo-Saxon research as intellectual property, was already anticipated by the Hungarian humanities and cultural studies at the beginning of the twentieth century. This innovative power and creativity were the result of being situated in a milieu of linguistic and cultural polyphony. Through its investigation, Lőrincz's anthology thus also provides a prime example of the value of interculturality and pushes back against current nationalistic tendencies and identitarian chimeras. Furthermore, Lőrincz's "archaeology of European modernity" uncovers a body of tradition that has been partly buried or forgotten due to the global political and ideological upheavals and that is partly unknown, especially in the Western academy. The volume shows how this tradition offers methodological and conceptual possibilities for connecting to

current theory-building, just as Gumbrecht, for example, can refer to Lukács' vitalistic theory of the essay to promote a culture of presence.

Nyugat [The West]: this title was given to the central journalistic organ of Budapest modernism. In a critical allusion to István Széchenyi's work *People of the East*, as well as to the topos of *translatio artis* that has circulated since antiquity, Ignotus, one of the editors, made the following note on the first page of the first volume of *Nyugat* in 1908: "The sun and humanity and history are on their way from East to West. [...] The people of the East are also on this road, and if they walk it, they walk under the same sun, they are part of the same humanity, shapers of the same history as the greatest nations." This programmatic statement may be guilty of a degree of striking exaggeration, but it does not do justice to the intellectual situation around 1900. The Hungarian humanities and cultural studies belong to neither the East nor the West, but are the product of a central European cultural space whose identity is based on a multi-dimensional 'inter-'

