

Merse Pál Szeredi

Eötvös Loránd University

First Encounters – The Spread of Russian Constructivism in the West and the Role of Émigré Hungarian Avant-Garde in Vienna (1919–1924)

(Diss.: Lajos Kassák in Viennese Emigration – Networks, Publicity and Reception (1920–1926))

Avant-garde in Hungary centred around three journals edited by Lajos Kassák – *A Tett* (The Action), *Ma* (Today) and *Dokumentum* (Document) – published between 1915 and 1927. Kassák's and the 'Activist' group's oeuvres are much researched in international context, however, there is still a lack of a micro-historical analysis of Kassák's local context, international network, as well as the publicity and reception of avant-garde in Hungary. In my dissertation entitled 'Lajos Kassák in Viennese Emigration – Networks, Publicity and Reception (1920–1926)' I research the six years long Viennese emigration of the 'Activist' group. I aim to establish an analysis of the local context, the publicity of and the debates around the avant-garde with the methods of periodical studies, 'histoire des intellectuels' and cultural transfers. The main sources of my research are the unpublished correspondences of the artists, the formerly unprocessed archival sources of Kassák's bequest as well as the contemporary critiques in the Budapest and Vienna avant-garde and popular newspapers and journals.

The proposed paper, examining the role of the émigré Hungarian avant-garde artists in the spread of knowledge on contemporary Russian art in the West during the early 1920s is a chapter of my dissertation. Although generally not represented in the main discourse of the art historical narrative on Constructivism, after comprehensive examination of the sources one can find that Vienna played a quite distinguished role in the cultural exchange between post-revolution Russian and Western avant-garde art. My purpose is to demonstrate the international relations and artistic exchange of the Viennese avant-garde including the former 'Activist' group led by Lajos Kassák – living in Viennese exile after the fall of the Hungarian Communist Republic – between 1919 and 1924. The analyses of the traces of artistic interactions could as well shed

light to the historical and ideological aspects of the early reception of Constructivism. The paper focuses on the radical change of artistic language of the Viennese avant-garde towards constructive abstraction in 1920, i.e. the theory of the *Bildarchitektur* of Lajos Kassák, László Moholy-Nagy and Sándor Bortnyik as well as the *Kinetism* of Franz Čížek and Erika Giovanna Klein. The possible ways of exchange – including exhibitions before and after the first official introduction of Constructivism in the *Galerie van Diemen* Berlin –, appearances of Russian art in contemporary publications and magazines – Kassák's *Ma* and Uitz's *Egység* (Unity) in particular – as well as the cases of personal interactions, reports of travels from and to Moscow and Vitebsk, including Konstantin Umansky and Béla Uitz will also be examined. The cultural exchange can be analysed on different levels with direct and indirect argumentation, all of which lead to the conclusion: one could speak not only about webs of artistic exchange but more 'first encounters' of the Western art with Constructivism in 1920s Vienna.