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The Hungarian “Activist” Group of Lajos Kassák in Viennese Emigration (1920–1926). Networks, Publicity and Reception

The Hungarian literary and artistic avant-garde is closely connected to three magazines 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 – most importantly on grounds of their adaptation of the most recent avant-garde tendencies and Kassák’s own theory of constructivism, i.e. the ‘Bildarchitektur’. On the other hand, a micro-historical analysis of their local context, the networks, the publicity and the reception of Kassák and his circles is not yet established. In my dissertation I research a central period of Kassák’s work – the six years’ long Viennese emigration after the fall of the Budapest Commune – and analyse the local context, the reception and publicity of avant-garde as well as the debates within and outside the ‘Activist’ circle 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 The main sources of my research are the unpublished correspondences of the artists, the formerly unprocessed archival sources of Kassák’s bequest as well as the contemporary critiques in the Budapest and Vienna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 magazines.

Lajos Kassák and his ‘Activist’ circle, as the most notorious protagonists of avant-garde and radical leftist ideology had a constant debate on the social status of abstract art during the early 1920s. Concerning either the expressionist messianism during the commune of 1919 or the utopistic constructivist *Weltanschauung* of the Vienna exile years, the views of Kassák was rejected and denounced as *l’art pour l’art* in political and artistic circles outside the borders of international avant-garde. This struggle for acceptance resulted in manifestos and articles on both sides in Budapest and Vienna. In my dissertation I examine the changes of Kassák’s political messianism and artistic utopia, focusing on the theories of ‘Bildarchitektur’ and its cultural and ideological context. Considering László Moholy-Nagy’s impressions of the *Glasarchitektur* of Paul Scheerbart, Sándor Bortnyik’s and Kassák’s translation of this concept into constructivist practice, drawing both from western and eastern influences in the magazine *MA* or Béla Uitz’s connections to Hans Tietze and the ‘Kineticism’ of Franz Cižek

as well as his answers to abstract art from the side of Proletkult I analyse the theory and sources of “Bildarchitektur” from a new approach – the point of view of contemporary debates between the Activists and the Austrian and Hungarian political and art world.