Creating a Proletarian Avant-Garde: Changing Strategies of Journal Editors Returning to Hungary after Emigrating to Western Europe

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ABSTRACT

Research on European avant-garde periodicals often highlights their role in a transnational network characterized by non-hierarchical knowledge production. However, this perspective faces a challenge when examined in the context of East Central Europe. For example, studies reveal that journal editors returning from Western European emigration to Hungary between the two world wars, by departing from the cultural milieu of the core countries, found themselves excluded from transnational circulation. In contrast to both global and local analyses, my focus is on reinterpreting the history of Hungarian avant-garde periodicals between 1925 and 1928 as an adaptation to local circumstances. Specifically, I aim to explore the modes of production and ideologies available to avant-garde editors, notably Lajos Kassák and Aladár Tamás, who returned from Western Europe to reintegrate their journals into the Hungarian-speaking communities of the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Drawing on extensive archival sources, I trace the transformation of avant-garde journals, once integral to the transnational network, shifting their focus from a middle-class readership and/or an audience composed by fellow avant-garde editors to increasingly engage with local working-class readers. The central point of examination is the journal *365*, edited in both Vienna and Budapest. Furthermore, I undertake an analysis of closely affiliated companion journals, including *Ma* [Today], *Dokumentum*, *Uj Föld* [New World/New Ground], *100%*, and *Munka* [Work/Labour].

KEYWORDS

little magazines, avant-garde, *Ma*, *365*, *Dokumentum*, *Uj Föld*, *100%, Munka*

In examining the history of Hungarian avant-garde magazines in the 1920s, I depart from conventional narratives that categorize this process as one of integration into the transnational scene or isolation from international trends. Instead, I propose a reinterpretation, framing the history of these periodicals as an adaptive response to local circumstance. Specifically, I explore the positions adopted by avant-garde editors, including Lajos Kassák and Aladár Tamás, as well as the modes of production and ideologies available to them. Thus, I will uncover how editors, returning from Western emigration, endeavoured to reintegrate their journals into Hungarian-speaking communities within successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, while simultaneously trying to preserve their outlets' transnational character. As these periodicals were atypical in comparison to their Western counterparts, it is imperative to address several historiographical challenges before delving into historical analysis.

Introduction: Uncovering the Politics of Transnationality

In the realm of avant-garde studies worldwide, significant attention is directed towards the transnational networks forged by journals. This focus stems from avant-garde editors' transformation of fin-de-siècle literary and art journals, known as little magazines or *petites revues*, into genuine multimedia platforms.[1] These periodicals were revolutionary, mediating the transformation of various artistic disciplines, from new music to photomontage. Another focus of scholarly interest in the avant-garde press is the establishment of a multilingual network of contacts, especially in the years following World War One. This network provided entries to circulation from locations outside the traditional centres of modern art.

Recent studies caution against overemphasizing the presumed non-hierarchical functioning of this network. In reality, it did contain hierarchies and did not completely subvert the geopolitical order of centres and peripheries.[2] More often than not, avant-garde periodicals aimed to position themselves centrally on the international stage, rather than present themselves as equal nodes in a network. This ambition sometimes led to the exclusion or symbolic annexation of rivals.[3] Furthermore, the basic structure of global cultural production was not overridden by avant-garde publications, since they were edited primarily in core countries, and even in Eastern Europe, they were occasionally published in French or German. Although East–West emigrants were overrepresented on avant-garde publications' editorial staffs, movement in the opposite direction was scarce and information about editors returning from the West to Eastern

1 See: *L'Europe des revues (1880–1920). Estampes, photographies, illustrations*, ed. by Evanghélia Stead and Hélène Védrine (Paris: Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008); *L'Europe des revues II. (1860–1930). Réseaux et circulations des modèles*, ed. by Evanghélia Stead and Hélène Védrine (Paris: SUP, 2018); Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, 'General Introduction', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, vol. 1 Britain and Ireland, 1880–1955*, ed. by Brooker and Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–26.

2 Gábor Dobó, Aled Gruffydd Jones, Zsuzsa Török, and Merse Pál Szeredi, 'Periodicals beyond Hierarchies: Challenging Geopolitical and Social "Centres" and "Peripheries"', *Journal of European Periodical Studies,* 1 (2024), 1–7.

3 See on this: Gábor Dobó and Merse Pál Szeredi, 'Network Diagrams in Futurist and other Avant-Garde Magazines: Creating and Self-Positioning an Imaginary Community', in *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies*, ed. by Günter Berghaus et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 68–94; Hubert van den Berg, 'Lajos Kassák, The Viennese Edition of *MA* and the "International" of Avant-Garde Journals in the 1920s', in *Art in Action. Lajos Kassák's Avant-Garde Journals from* A Tett *to* Dokumentum *(1915–1927)*, ed. by Eszter Balázs, Edit Sasvári, Merse Pál Szeredi (Budapest: Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, Kassák Foundation, 2017), 9–32.

and Central Europe remains limited.[4] Investigating these figures encourages a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and complexities within early twentieth-century avant-garde networks.

The process of learning more about East-Central European avant-garde periodicals' local embeddedness poses a further challenge. Research on avant-garde journals is often undertaken from literary and art history perspectives, and therefore tends to concentrate on publications' content or the artist-editors associated with them. In contrast, I propose a broader analysis, extending beyond artworks and artists to encompass the socio-political ecosystem within which these journals were produced and circulated.[5] Imperatively, this analysis involves critically reassessing and utilizing historical knowledge about certain subaltern groups, including working-class people. This knowledge, which was documented in a fragmentary and biased manner under socialist dictatorships in Eastern Europe, remains crucial — even though accounts produced after World War Two were often distorted and manipulated, and were subsequently discredited following the regime change in 1989/1990.[6] While acknowledging the role of official historical narratives, which were aligned with party ideologies within dictatorships' ideological state apparatus,[7] it is essential to consider historical data on publications, along with memoirs of individuals described, in Gramscian terms, as the 'organic intellectuals' of the party system.[8] This approach provides a concrete foundation for discussions about interwar workers' culture.

Deviating from the East–West Trajectory

The points above raise a compelling question about the audiences envisioned by editors like Lajos Kassák, himself a central figure in the Hungarian avant-garde, upon their return to Hungary from emigration. Who were their intended readers? How did these editors, who initially targeted international audiences, tailor their publications for Hungarian readerships? Questions emerge around distribution strategies, Hungarian readers' reception, and the impact of periodicals' distribution channels on their structure and content. I seek to uncover the factors influencing the reception and integration of avant-garde ideas in East Central Europe, specifically in post-World War One Hungary.

I hypothesize that between 1925 and 1928, two intertwined processes unfolded. Upon returning to Hungary, avant-garde editors sought to adapt their experiences of the international avant-garde scene to that country's specific conditions. As they adapted, their journals underwent transformation. Initially aimed at middle-class audiences, they gradually shifted their focus, catering increasingly to working-class readers who were

4 This is counterbalanced by recent research. See for example *The Exile and Return of Writers from East-Central Europe. A Compendium*, ed. by John Neubauer and Borbála Zsuzsanna Török (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009) or the Ohio State University research group *Red Migrations: Marxism and Transnational Mobility after 1917*.

5 *The Routledge History Handbook of Central and Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, *vol. 3*, *Intellectual Horizons*, ed. by Włodzimierz Borodziej, Ferenc Laczó and Joachim von Puttkamer (London: Routledge, 2020).

6 I draw on the concept of 'print culture' developed in Ann L. Ardis, *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

7 See: Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (Notes towards an investigation)', in Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. by Ben Brewster (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 142–47, 166–76.

8 For example, from histories of reading to people's histories, several fields of research provide valuable perspectives for examining complex relational systems of cultural production (i.e. considering producers besides users).

also involved in their creation. Evidence of this shift is discernible in the publications' content, distribution methods, and reception strategies.[9]

Cultural Production in Focus: Repatriating the Ma Conglomerate from Vienna to Budapest

Many Hungarian artists and writers actively participated in the short-lived Hungarian Republic of Councils in 1919. Following the collapse of the Soviet-type regime, numerous individuals sought refuge in the sympathetic atmosphere of Vienna, labelled the 'Red' city because of its Social Democrat-led city council. During the early 1920s, the Hungarian emigrant community in Vienna hosted several avant-garde platforms.[10] Among the most resilient and influential was the journal *Ma*, edited by Kassák, first in Budapest (1916–19) and then in Vienna (1920–25). During the latter period, *Ma* catered predominantly to an international audience, comprising mainly of avant-garde editors. Through it, Kassák gained international visibility and even established a highly influential forum, albeit for a brief period. He quickly connected with journals representing new artists and emerging 'isms'. *Ma* was receptive to new trends, both adopting and significantly reinterpreting them; consequently, we can discuss the critical reinterpretation of movements including Dadaism, various forms of Constructivism, and Surrealism within the context of this periodical. In the early 1920s, as printing technology advanced, *Ma* featured experimental typography and numerous reproductions, and this striking visuality conveyed meaning in itself: it embodied the spirit of avant-garde art and the message of political radicalism. Paradoxically, between 1920 and 1926 Kassák was simultaneously a political émigré, living in dire conditions in Vienna, and a highly respected editor. *Ma* was sporadically smuggled into Hungary, where it was prohibited because of Kassák's political émigré status. But alongside the consolidation of the Hungarian counter-revolutionary system in the mid-1920s, a shift occurred. Kassák, like many other political emigrants, sought to return to Hungary, a factor that marked a turning point in *Ma*'s trajectory. The journal *365,* published in 1925 and edited in both Budapest and Vienna, became a tangible expression of this ambition to reintegrate into the Hungarian cultural landscape.[11]

9 This transformative process aligns with broader international trends observed in journals such as Czechoslovak *ReD* (1927–31), Soviet *LEF* (1923–25), and its successor, *Novy LEF* (1927–28), as well as the French *La Révolution surréaliste* (1924–29) and its subsequent iteration, *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (1930–33), among others. These publications, which focused initially on avant-garde art, gradually shifted their emphasis towards politics. Despite this trend however, the social embeddedness of such journals remains underexplored in avant-garde research. Furthermore, Eastern avant-garde periodicals have not been systematically collected by trendsetting Western museums, especially those directly concerned with left-wing political movements. See for example the recent acquisition and presentation by Museum of Modern Art of related material from the private collection of Merrill C. Berman. See: *Engineer, Agitator, Constructor. The Artist Reinvented, 1918–1939, The Merrill C. Berman Collection at MoMA*, ed. by Jodi Hauptman and Adrian Sudhalter (New York: MoMA, 2020).

10 See: Georg Vasold, 'Fine Arts', in *The Red Vienna Sourcebook*, ed. by Rob McFarland, Georg Spitaler, and Ingo Zechner (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2020), 445–47.

11 Recently, several studies have been published in English about Kassák's journals, with special emphasis on *Ma* and a cursory look at his other periodicals along with Hungarian émigré journals edited by others. For example: Oliver A. I. Botar, 'From the Avant-Garde to "Proletarian Art". The Émigré Hungarian Journals *Egység* and *Akasztott Ember*, 1922–23', *Art Journal*, 52 (1993), 34–45; Éva Forgács and Tyrus Miller, 'The Avant-Garde in Budapest and in Exile in Vienna', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines, vol. 3*, *Europe 1880–1940*, ed. by Peter Brooker, Andrew Thacker and Sascha Bru (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1128–56; *Art in Action. Lajos Kassák's Avant-Garde Journals from* A Tett *to* Dokumentum *(1915–1927)*, ed. by Eszter Balázs, Edit Sasvári, Merse Pál Szeredi (Budapest: Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, Kassák Foundation, 2017); Esther Levinger, *Constructivism in Central Europe: Painting, Typography, Photomontage* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022); Merse Pál Szeredi, 'Networking the International Avant-Garde: Lajos Kassák and His Magazine *Ma* in Budapest and Vienna', in *Magyar Modern: Hungarian Art in Berlin 1910–1933*, ed. by Ralf Burmeister, Thomas Köhler, László Baán, András Zwickl (Munich: Hirmer Verlag, 2022), 66–71, and several chapters in: *Cannibalizing the Canon: Dada Techniques in East-Central Europe*, ed. by Oliver A. I. Botar, Irina M. Denischenko, Gábor Dobó and Merse Pál Szeredi (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2024).

Before discussing *365*, I will briefly sketch the political and journalistic environment within which left-wing and avant-garde newspaper editors operated in mid-1920s Hungary. The post-war revolutions (the 'Aster revolution' in 1918 and a communist revolution in 1919) were followed by a series of counter-revolutionary and antisemitic atrocities carried out by paramilitary groups during the so-called 'white terror' (1919–21).[12] Meanwhile, an authoritarian, nationalist system was established under Admiral Miklós Horthy in 1920 and consolidated under Prime Minister István Bethlen (1921–31). Bethlen dealt with his political opponents on both the right and the left by suppressing them or engaging them in negotiations. In 1921, right-wing paramilitary organizations were disbanded and most of the white terrorists who belonged to them received amnesties. At the same time, Bethlen distanced himself from the left, constructing his image and politics in opposition to the 1919 Council Republic and the 'red emigration' of the 1920s: a movement involving both social democrats and communists. This shaped the journalistic environment in line with the common belief that the press was instrumental in inciting revolutions through its direct mobilizing influence on the 'masses'. Consequently, journalism was strictly controlled and left-wing publications were increasingly banned.[13] The political and publishing landscape was complicated, however. While distancing itself from the left, the Bethlen government recognized that it needed the support of the Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt (MSZDP, Social Democratic Party of Hungary) to regain stability following the economic and political crises of the early post-World War One era. Representing the interests and values of the MSZDP's mass member base, the social democratic daily *Népszava* [People's Voice, 1873–] and numerous trade union publications remained in print. The MSZDP's own politics were complex, moreover, for its leaders were more centrist than its base. Constantly struggling for its own legitimacy, the MSZDP sought continually to consolidate its internal left-wing opposition with ultra-left groups at its fringes, while keeping them within the Social Democratic conglomerate.[14]

In contrast to the MSZDP, the Communist Party and its activities were banned in post-revolutionary Hungary. Communists were persecuted by the state through the police and attempts were also made by Social Democrats to prevent communist infiltration into Social Democratic structures. This was not easy, because radical young trade unionists often became illegal communists, maintaining a double affiliation (a legal Social Democratic one and an illegal Communist one). After the fall of the 1919 Republic of Councils, the Party of Communists in Hungary (Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja, referred to hereon as KMP or Communist Party) was reorganized by communists who emigrated to Vienna, and it was not until 1925 that it began to regain its influence. During that year, a new, albeit short-lived, legal party was established in Hungary under the name Magyarországi Szocialista Munkáspárt (MSZMP, Socialist Labour Party of Hungary). It was formed by dissident left-wing social democrats, who

12 Béla Bodó, *The White Terror: Antisemitic and Political Violence in Hungary, 1919–1921* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

13 However, it did not involve prior restraint. A legal deposit requirement was established and the prosecutor's office monitored the periodicals that were already printed but, theoretically, not yet distributed. See: Balázs Sipos, 'Media and Politics in Hungary between the World Wars', in *Regimes and Transformations: Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by István Feitl, Balázs Sipos (Budapest: Napvilág, 2005), 195–226.

14 See: Balázs Trencsényi, Michal Kopeček, Luka Lisjak Gabrijelčič, Maria Falina and Mónika Baár, Maciej Janowski, *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe*, *vol. 2*, *Negotiating Modernity in the 'Short Twentieth Century' and Beyond, part 1: 1918–1968* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 121–22; *A magyar szociáldemokrácia kézikönyve*, ed. by Lajos Varga (Budapest: Napvilág, 1999); Zsolt K. Horváth, 'Szociáldemokrácia Magyarországon: politika, mozgalom, kultúra', *Új Egyenlőség* (5 November 2017), https://ujegyenloseg.hu/szocialdemokracia-magyarorszagon-politika-mozgalom-kultura/.

criticized the Social Democratic Party for their compromises with state power, and by illegal communists who used it as a cover organization. MSZMP served as the legal connection between avant-garde periodicals and the Hungarian Communist Party in Vienna. Due to the strict political controls imposed by the Bethlen government, Communists sought to appear in Hungary via avant-garde magazines. Their other tactics were riskier and included smuggling political material from abroad, printing Communist flyers or publications illegally in legal printing houses, or using underground, often movable, printing machines to distribute Communist material. The political police were, however, well-financed, widespread, and professional, and as a result these tactics were largely unsuccessful. Few people were reached with illegal publications, and participating Communists were often quickly apprehended. Using periodicals with artistic, including avant-garde, cultural, or social profiles (e.g. *Gondolat* [Thought, 1935–37]) as a cover was a more sustainable project. As the 1920s progressed, numerous avant-garde journals emerged in Hungary and their differences can be traced back to their political backgrounds. Generally speaking, Kassák's *Dokumentum* and *Munka* were close to the Social Democrats, while *Uj Föld* and *100%* had connections to the Communists — despite using the Social Democratic cultural infrastructure for practical and tactical reasons. In this regard, *365* was a watershed, as later on, its co-editors chose different directions.

It is worth noting that Kassák's relations with left-wing parties included conflicts, especially in the cultural scene. In the early 1920s, while in Vienna, Kassák issued various publications, literary and theoretical, reflecting on the role of the revolutionary and/or 'new' (avant-garde) artist during the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods. In these writings, authored between 1920 and 1925, he fiercely criticized both the Social Democrats and the Communists, urging the establishment of a new culture for the 'new people', a goal shared by several Austromarxists who influenced him. The conflict between the Communists and Kassák became insurmountable, but he retained a relationship with the Social Democrats, to whose environment he belonged. But although, from 1924, his poems and presentations featured often in Social Democratic cultural periodicals and platforms, the avant-garde was not favoured by most leading Hungarian Social Democrats or party members. This is where Jolán Simon, his partner, was pivotal. Kassák and Simon first met as factory workers in trade union environments;[15] she soon became an avant-garde performer, reciting avant-garde poems in a distinctive tone. Although working-class audiences often disliked her performances, they had a greater impact than printed poems hidden in the socialist press. Furthermore, from 1928, she led speaking choirs in trade union cultural organizations that merged avant-garde art with more traditional artistic forms, engaging and reaching relatively large audiences.

The publication of *365* marked a significant step in a multi-year effort by Kassák to orchestrate his return to Hungary, both in administrative and symbolic terms. Commencing in 1924, Kassák, alongside Simon — who moved freely between Budapest and Vienna using her maiden name (she had been married, but not to Kassák)[16] — worked actively towards facilitating his return. Their objective was to position Kassák as a central figure in the emerging Hungarian modernist literature and art scene. In the modernist realm, the natural manifestation of this ambition was the launch of one's own journal. While *365* was Kassák's first platform in Hungary since his emigration,

15 Kassák was a locksmith in various factories in Győr, Budapest, and Újpest between 1903 and 1907. They met at a trade union hall in Újpest (Újpesti Munkásotthon) — an industrial suburb separate from Budapest at the time.

16 Officially, Simon became divorced from her first husband only in 1922 (KM-an. 20/4, and 20/9, Kassák Museum Archive). Simon and Kassák began their relationship in 1909 and were married in 1928 (KM-an. 19/14, Kassák Museum Archive).

it was published through multiple intermediaries, a complex process made possible by the organizational efforts of Simon and its nominal Budapest editor, Aladár Tamás.

Consequently, *365*, printed in Budapest, was assembled somewhat ad hoc. Its content comprised theoretical texts and prints of artworks sent to Budapest from Vienna by Kassák, along with poems selected by Tamás, himself an emerging avant-garde poet. *365*'s unconventional editorial model was driven by the notion that it would be easier to reach the Hungarian public with a periodical published legally in Budapest, than one smuggled in illegally, like *Ma*. *365* was more than just a mutation of *Ma*, however. In many ways, it represents a pivotal crossroads in the history of the Hungarian avant-garde.[17] (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2)

Through trial and error, Simon and Tamás developed practical methods for distribution and networking. Although *365* was short-lived and could not be stabilized, these methods became foundational for both Kassák and Tamás in their subsequent publications. Initially, the editors re-evaluated financing and distribution models.[18] *365* targeted both emigrant avant-garde and middle-class Hungarian readers, and Simon played a pivotal role in attracting subscribers, engaging avant-garde and modernist poets and critics, utilizing subscription forms, and enlisting individuals, often journalists, to promote the periodical through 'communiqués' or brief reviews.[19] Distribution primarily occurred in cafés and bookshops in central Budapest with links to middle-class culture.[20] Although attempts were made to widen *365*'s reach through newsstand distribution, permission was denied by the state-owned General Supply and Transport Corporation, likely owing to Kassák's reputation. Consequently, *365* was predominantly distributed through the infrastructure of 'bourgeois culture', aligning with editorial announcements and meta-texts that positioned it at the autonomous pole of the literary field.[21] (Fig. 3)

Also significant is how Simon gradually asserted her agency and visibility through indispensable behind-the-scenes work for *365*. Initially serving as Kassák's ambassador in Budapest, she handled organizational and editing tasks, fulfilling his directives and negotiating on his behalf; increasingly, she engaged in Budapest's café and journalistic life. Thanks to the latter, described in her letters as work, she wove a denser network of connections with key figures in Budapest's cultural scene. She earned respect in these predominantly male circles, a notable achievement considering the largely patriarchal norms of that time. Besides this crucial, yet mainly invisible background work, Simon organized and participated in soirées relating to the journal, serving as a crucial medium, alongside the periodical, for promoting and interpreting avant-garde poetry in Hungary. (Fig. 4)

17 Only Tamás is listed as the editor in charge, and the editorial office's address is his downtown apartment on Zoltán Street. On the letterhead of *365* however, Kassák is listed as 'Direktor' besides Tamás.

18 The sources give a fairly accurate picture of the circulation and distribution of the periodical. In all, 500 copies of the first issue were produced, not a small number. See: Tamás Aladár, *Akkoriban szüntelen fújt a szél*, *vol. 1* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1976), 263. Jolán Simon distributed copies personally and to various booksellers, who struggled to sell them. See Jolán Simon's letter to Lajos Kassák on 3 July 1925. Kassák Museum Archive, inventory: KM-lev. 2063/59 (from henceforth: KM-lev.). See also: Jolán Simon's letter to Lajos Kassák, presumably on May 1925: KM-lev. 2063/73 and 2063/76. Other sources indicate several subscribers from Romania (KM-lev. 2063/59), and memoirs refer to a readership in the multi-ethnic region of the South-Eastern part of Czechoslovakia.

19 Subscription form for *365*: KM lev-2031/39.

20 Addressing a middle-class audience was then a matter of course for Simon, while for Tamás it was a source of concern. As Simon reported to Kassák about a *365* soirée in her letter after 3 April 1925: 'I told Tamás after the performance, when we looked at each other to see who had come and found that they were all people I knew, I said to him: – You see, Tamás, that's why we need to associate with people, ~~stupid people~~, petty bourgeois, half and full democrats and all sorts of other people. He acknowledged that I was right. But otherwise, he is struggling with this dilemma a lot.' – KM-lev. 2063/74. – Unless otherwise stated, all translations into English are by the author.

21 On how different social subsystems correspond to each other as 'structurally homologous' ambiences, see Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1979).

Fig. 1 Cover, *365*, 1 (1925). © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, KM 3588

Fig. 2 Cover, *365*, 2 (1925). © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, KM 2021.1.1

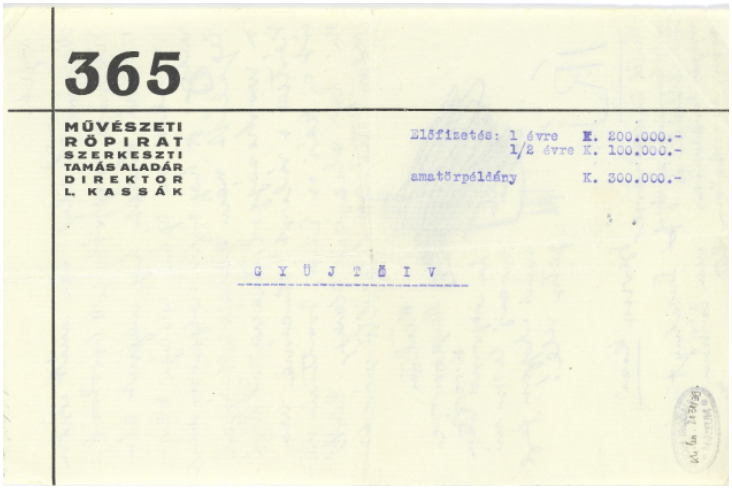

Fig. 3 Subscription form for *365* (1925). © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, KM lev-2031/39

Navigating Discourse: Explaining the Avant-Garde to a Local Audience

365 classifies as a 'synthetic' periodical, a category of avant-garde journal that, during the 1920s, promoted the synthesis of natural sciences, technology, mass culture, and modern art. While the title's exact origin remains obscure, it is associated with co-editor Aladár Tamás, who published under the pseudonym 'poet 365' ('365-ös költő' and '365er Dichter'), and it reflects the 'synthesis' of significant phenomena throughout each day of the year. Its numerical format positions it alongside avant-garde publications including Kassák and Andor Németh's *2×2* (1922, Vienna), *291* (1915–16, New York), and Francis Picabia's *391* (1917–24, New York). 'Synthesis' ('szintézis' as a noun, and 'szintetikus' or 'szintétikus' as an adjective) had been employed widely in Kassák's avant-garde periodicals as both a theoretical term and a buzzword from the mid 1910s.[22] However in 1922, the painter and photographer László Moholy-Nagy developed the concept further, in relation to his own periodicals, in an article that was not published until 1925. According to Moholy-Nagy, the term 'synthetische Zeitschrift' incorporates the features, aspirations, and theoretical foundations of a new, 'synthesized' type of magazine: a multimedia platform embracing a variety of expressive forms, including texts, film and play scripts, and musical scores. Importantly, it should exhibit multilingualism, featuring articles in national languages with summaries in major European languages. While Moholy-Nagy's text is normative rather than descriptive, and it articulates the perspective of an unexplained 'we', many avant-garde magazines of the mid-1920s fulfil what it outlines — despite the complaint, in a 1924 postscript to the aforementioned article, that many 'very beautiful' journals still adhere to a single 'ism'.[23]

22 See for example: Kassák Lajos, 'Szintétikus irodalom', *Ma*, 2 (1916), 18–21.

23 Scholars analyzing this publication argue that the text was indeed written in 1922. For more on 'synthesized' journals see: László Moholy-Nagy, 'Richtlinien für eine Synthetische [sic!] Zeitschrift', *Pásmo*, 7–8 (1925), 5. See also: Jindřich Toman, 'Permanent synthesis: László Moholy-Nagy's idea of a synthetic journal', in *Local Contexts / International Networks. Avant-Garde Journals in East-Central Europe*, ed. by Gábor Dobó and Merse Pál Szeredi (Budapest: Kassák Foundation, 2017), 25–50; Oliver A. I. Botar, *Sensing the Future: Moholy-Nagy, Media and the Arts* (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2014).

Fig. 4 Henrik Major, 'Simon Jolán, az első magyar dadaista előadó' ['Jolán Simon, the First Hungarian Dadaist Performer'], *365*, 1 (1925). © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, KM 3588

The producers of 365 made a concerted effort to engage actively with Hungarian cultural discourse and integrate the synthesized, avant-garde journal into the contexts it offered. The inaugural issue, edited between Vienna and Budapest and published in April 1925, endeavoured to bridge gaps between the international and Hungarian avant-garde realms. Its primary objective was to acquaint a Hungarian readership, assumed to be in isolation, with the latest avant-garde artistic developments, that is, with the format of a 'synthesized' journal. Inside, avant-garde poems were complemented by theoretical texts, which functioned as instructional guides, empowering readers to formulate reception strategies for avant-garde literature. At first glance, the second issue presented a strikingly different image, closely resembling both the appearance and content of Ma. In fact, it was essentially a Ma issue printed in Vienna, with the exception of the cover. Since Ma had been prohibited in Hungary during the 1920s,

it could only enter the country in disguise, occasionally sporting an alternative cover.[24] The second issue of 365, concurrently serving as the final issue of Ma, was printed in Vienna with two distinct covers: one for Ma and an 'adjusted' one for 365. Prompted by challenges faced by the first issue of 365, which struggled with distribution and, consequently, revenue, this approach was devised by Kassák, to the surprise of Tamás, who was astonished to learn of it after the fact.[25] That this was the final issue of 365 was not primarily due to tension arising from Kassák's arbitrary decision, but rather owing to ideological differences between the two co-editors, as we will explore. (Fig. 5)

The content of the second issue of *365* was heterogeneous, despite the prominent influence of co-editors Tamás and Kassák. As in the first issue, both poets contributed free-form poems characterized by associative elements, which depicted allegorical figures and personified natural forces, and evoked the narrative structure of fairy tales whilst eluding overall meaning. The influence of French Surrealism was evident, with contributors having direct connections to this movement. The poems and accompanying theoretical writing presented a stark contrast to a contemporary image of a bank guard and billboard, contributed by the German functionalist group in Breslau (Wrocław). No attempt was made to reconcile tensions between the magical, dream-like poetry and functionalist design; these were later addressed by Kassák's subsequent periodical *Dokumentum* (1926–27) and a group of theoretical texts associated with this journal.[26]

The incorporation of content by the Breslau functionalist group served a strategic purpose — not immediately apparent, as at the time, both the Breslau functionalists and Kassák journals were seeking to establish inter-peripheral links.[27] Within this context, there was keen interest in showcasing emerging artistic initiatives within the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, often with a local focus. In particular, *Das Junge Schlesien* [The Young Silesian] group, organized by the architect Günter Hirschel-Protsch, featured prominently in the *365/Ma* special issue, which presented their initiative as something akin to Bauhaus: a multifaceted endeavour centred around housing and modern urbanism, which involved various arts and crafts and embodied a new spirit of creativity. Many Young Silesians were active across multiple artistic disciplines; contributors to the special issue included artists and architects from Breslau, as well as those who began their careers there and later became established figures in the modernist scene. Aiming to gain transnational visibility by contributing to the issue, they included Hirschel-Protsch, who also published several poems under the pseudonym Hispro; Hans Leistikow, known for his stained-glass designs; and architects such as Fritz Behrendt, Max Berg, and Albrecht Jäger. On behalf of Kassák, the inclusion of these contributions was driven primarily by commercial considerations rather than artistic or aesthetic reasons. Sources indicate that the Breslau-based modernist architects and artists purchased several copies at full price in exchange for publication and subsequently redistributed them.[28]

24 It also entered the country with *Kortárs* (Contemporary). The decrees prohibiting *Ma*'s import and distribution were as follows: *Igazságügyi Közlöny*, 7 (1922), 375; *Belügyi Közlöny,* 34 (1922), 1533; 'M. kir. belügyminiszternek 195.700/1925. B. M. számú kör-rendelete. A kitiltott külföldi sajtótermékek jegyzéke', *Belügyi Közlöny*, 26 (1925), 553–63.

25 Tamás, pp. 275–77.

26 The will to document the contemporary world was a recurring theme in Kassák's work at that time: the subtitle of *365* was 'művészeti dokumentum' [artistic document]. The expression suggested an objective, quasi-scientific, observational, descriptive position from which to direct the reader's attention to the contemporary world, as per the characteristic strategy of synthesized journals.

27 Emanuel Modoc, *Internaționala periferiilor. Rețeaua avangardelor din Europa Centrală și de Est* (Bucharest: Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2020).

28 This is reported in: József Nádass, *Nehéz leltár*, *vol. 1* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1963), 366.

Fig. 5 Cover, *Ma*, 3–4 (1925). © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, KM 1680

Target Audience: Neither Middle Class nor Working Class

The dynamics of the final issue of *Ma/365* indicate that its aim was not to increase the visibility of the Silesian functionalist group, but of everything else that was featured: in particular, a new generation of poets, united around Kassák, who asserted themselves as representatives of 'true' avant-garde art and the periodical as the sole authentic forum for 'young people'.

Aladár Tamás, the co-editor of *365*, was among the young figures expected to embody the new artistic movement, a concept primarily constructed by Kassák in articles, poems, and special issues of *Ma*. Although he appeared to be the right fit for the role, his ideas about the relationship between politics and art diverged from Kassák's and they eventually grew apart. In his early twenties, Tamás regularly published poetry, poetry translations, and reviews in *Ma*; owing to his lack of involvement in the Hungarian Republic of Councils, and being therefore in possession of a passport, he was well-placed to act as an intermediary between the journal and various European cities. Moreover, his education and origins in the Parthian region (now in Romania) gave him first-hand knowledge of German, French, Italian, and Romanian avant-garde poetry. He also cultivated international contacts independently of Kassák — for instance, during his 1924 journey to Bucharest, he met Ion Vinea, who introduced him to his

compatriot and former colleague, the already famous Dadaist Tristan Tzara, who was working in Paris at the time. Between 1924 and 1925, he spent almost a year in Paris, regularly engaging with key figures of the emerging French Surrealism and translating their works.[29] (Fig. 6)

But although Tamás appeared a good fit for the role of Kassák's co-editor, their ideas about the relationship between politics and art diverged. When Tamás took up the role, he assumed that the avant-garde's subversion of conventional politics and communist ideology were two sides of the same coin: revolutionary poetry and revolutionary politics were mutually interchangeable. As he recalled in his memoirs, 'every avant-garde poet is also a communist'.[30] Kassák did not share this belief. When *365* was published, Kassák and Jolán Simon probably did not know that Tamás was gravitating towards the Communist Party, which he finally joined in early 1926. The co-editors' disagreement over the function of avant-garde art was certainly the cause of their estrangement, not the editorial trickery around the last issue of *365/Ma* described above. Ideological difference, moreover, led them to envision different readerships for *365*. Both were demotivated by the realization that the magazine could no longer reach a middle-class audience (Simon was only able to sell fifteen copies of the first issue through booksellers, not counting the artist bookshop Mentor), and the avant-garde could not yet connect with workers. Kassák and Tamás sought to experiment with diverging strategies for reaching them.

Creating an Audience through Avant-Garde Journals: The Illegal Communist Approach (*Uj Föld* and *100%*)

365 was, therefore, a starting point for different, sometimes intersecting paths towards workers' culture. After 365, Kassák and Tamás embarked on new projects, which sought to connect with different political parties and readerships. The Budapest avant-garde group, criticized by Kassák in the last issue of 365/Ma, soon formed the Uj Föld [New World/New Ground] group with Tamás.[31] This group aimed to fuse avant-garde art, revolutionary politics, and workers' culture. In 1927 a journal of the same name appeared, which reported to the Communist Party and had an illegal editorial board in addition to an operative one.[32] The structure and orientation of Uj Föld were strikingly like Dokumentum, published by Kassák after 365. However, while Kassák aimed to develop a Hungarian version of Surrealism and present various functionalist movements, Tamás hoped through Uj Föld to reach an audience of workers and create

29 We can get an idea of this from his later autobiographical novel: Tamás, pp. 245–50.

30 Tamás, p. 249.

31 In the 1920s, Hungarian orthography was not standardized, and not all typesetters employed certain accented vowel letters. For example, 'új' (new) was written in *Uj Föld* both with an accentuated 'ú' as it is today and without, as seen on the title page of the magazine. In the article, I will adhere to the journal's original orthography.

32 Its title ambiguously referred to three possible interpretations: to a new political or cultural landscape; to the Americas, with many publications enthusiastically reporting on new technological achievements often associated with the US as a prototype for a new society; or to a 'new world' envisioned as a future communist society. Its subtitle ('az új szellem eredményei irodalom, művészet, zene, tudomány, film, színház, technika és ipar alkotásaiban' – 'the achievements of the new spirit in literature, art, music, science, film, theatre, technology, and industry creations') emphasizes the first potential interpretation, while the editorial in the inaugural issue subtly suggests the context of Americanization. The illegal Communist Party's backing indicates the third interpretation. The title's complexity is underscored in an article by theatre theoretist and actor Ödön Palasovszky, one of the group's central figures, which stated that 'az Uj Föld azokat a haladó művészeti törekvéseket ismertette, melyek a forrongó Európa és Amerika új arcélét mutatták' ('Uj Föld introduced those progressive artistic endeavours that revealed the new face of turbulent Europe and America'). Ödön Palasovszky, 'Front', *Színház és Film*, 1 (1931), 1–9 (p. 2).

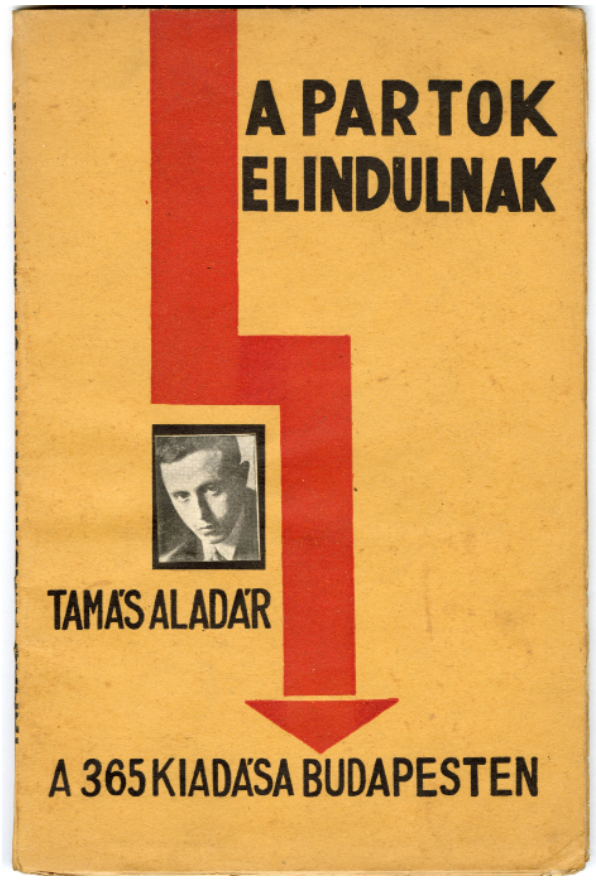

Fig. 6 Aladár Tamás, *A partok elindulnak* (Budapest: 365, 1925). © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, KM 3591

a legal platform for the illegal Communist Party in Hungary. Tamás had sought to disseminate 365 through workers' cultural networks, although these were, at that time, among organized private sector or office workers rather than the symbolically charged industrial workforce. Tamás later recalled that he began to train reciters to perform at party events.[33] Overall, neither 365 nor Uj Föld proved to be an appropriate medium for reaching working-class people. 'We don't understand', his comrades repeatedly told a disappointed Tamás about both publications.[34] (Fig. 7)

Owing to the gap between *Uj Föld*'s format and its target audience, Tamás launched *100%* (1927–30): a publication, edited by Marxist philosopher György Lukács, that became the first legal periodical of the illegal Communist Party in Hungary.[35] Tamás, who was involved in illegal communist work while still wrestling with his avant-garde poetic ambitions, received an envelope from Vienna every month starting

33 Tamás, p. 269.

34 For example, Tamás, pp. 253–54, p. 271.

35 György Lukács, the actual editor, wrote clearly to the official editor, Aladár Tamás, about the target audience and the question of legality: 'the readership of the journal will consist partly of young, left-leaning intellectuals and partly of workers interested in cultural issues. Therefore, each article must be written in a way that an intelligent worker can understand. On the other hand, however, for reasons of legality, we must, for the time being, be careful not to give the periodical an explicitly working-class character. Questions of workers' culture will of course also arise, but especially at first, they must not dominate the magazine.' – Rónai [György Lukács?] to Lippay [Aladár Tamás?] on 2 August 1927, PIL, fond 878, group 8, custody unit 182, 3–5.

from the summer of 1927. These envelopes, posted by 'Father' to the 'Poet', contained manuscripts for the next issue of the 'Budapest Burse'. The avant-garde traits of the conspiratorially edited *100%* reflected Tamás's aesthetic preferences and served to keep the journal beneath the radar of the political police. Although Lukács had no enthusiasm for the avant-garde, this editorial strategy was workable in the period immediately preceding the Stalinization of the Comintern's art policy, which was characterized by a relative diversity in which the avant-garde, proletkult, and various realisms were all given a voice.[36]

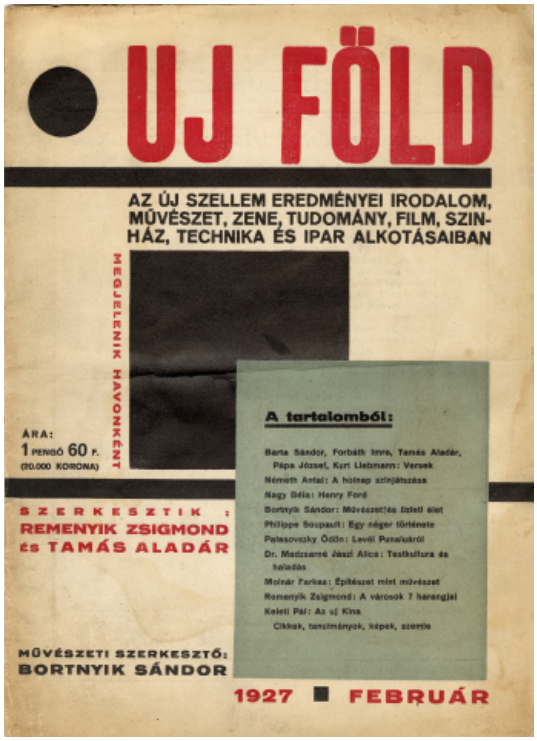

Fig. 7 Zsigmond Remenyik and Aladár Tamás, *Uj Föld* (February 1927). © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, KM 3588

Although *100%* did not share avant-garde 'synthesized' magazines' structure, it was visually and thematically similar to these publications. Synthetic periodicals were organized associatively and metaphorically, to showcase diverse contemporary realities in ways that served to both diagnose the present and imagine alternative futures. Accordingly, the crisis phenomena of contemporary capitalism and the achievements of modernization were presented in a dialectical way — 'documented', in the terminology of the time — a duality that was conveyed through the dynamics of sometimes oneiric and sometimes functionalist works. Conversely, *100%* prescribed an analogy–metonymic reading, wherein the contributions explored topics of interest to the current party line. For example, 'primitive' poems were published in a manner similar to 'synthesized' periodicals, but were to be interpreted within an extremely narrow field of meaning. According to a letter from 'Father' in Vienna, they had to evoke in the reader the theme of colonial oppression, associated, in turn, with the oppressive regime in Hungary.

36 As Aladár Tamás recalled, 'Its title had an avant-garde flavour, and not all comrades liked it. Especially Comrade György Lukács wanted to change it at all costs', Memoirs of Comrade Tamás Aladár (Szikra Publishing house), 26 October 1950, PIL, fond 867. f1/ t-25.

This coded speech was made understandable through collective interpretive practices.[37] Tamás and his colleagues built an ecosystem around *100%*, ensuring that it did not abandon its working-class readers to a middle-class, individualistic, contemplative reading practice. Speaking choirs — a collective performance of poems, including avant-garde works — played a key role in community building and developing a shared interpretive strategy. Within this milieu, the press and performative practices were strongly interdependent: journals printed meta-texts on speaking choirs and performative choral texts, and the early 1930s saw the publication of periodicals dedicated to the subject (e.g. *Munkáskórus* [Workers' Choir, 1933], *Kórusművészet* [Choir Art, 1933]).[38] Moreover, periodicals were consistently prominent within choirs themselves. The *Munka* and *100%* choirs performed holding issues of these journals, along with *Typographia* (the outlet of the typesetters' and typographers' trade union, 1868–) or *Népszava* (the daily newspaper of the social democrats). Besides choirs, joint excursions and trade union seminars created interpretative communities founded on orality, performativity, and collectivity,[39] reminiscent of premodern reception techniques, promoting the acquisition of a specific set of cultural codes.[40] (Fig. 8, Fig. 9, Fig. 10)

Furthermore, a feedback system built into the process of editing enhanced *100%*'s accessibility for working-class readers. Editorial correspondence shows that Lukács, whose father was a successful investment banker, and Tamás, a private employee, realized the necessity of 'mak[ing] the journal more working-class' following complaints from working-class readers about the sixth issue. Regular discussion evenings were, therefore, organized after the release of each issue, with a view to 'deepening and politicizing the relationship between the journal and the distribution apparatus'. During these events, Tamás aimed to 'provoke as wide a debate as possible' among *100%*'s 'worker friends' by presenting a keynote address written by Communist Party leaders.[41] These occasions were reflected in the publication itself through so-called workers' letters and discussions. It is evident that the process of bridging class and cultural differences between editors and readers was not driven by democratizing or emancipating politics, but rather by the need to indoctrinate readers. This is demonstrated not only by the editorial process but also by the choice of topics for the debates, which followed the current party line.

37 As Aladár Tamás recalled, 'during the three years of *100%*'s existence, from September 1927 to July 1930, thirty issues were published, 2800 copies each. Its readership was very wide. We didn't collect individual subscribers, we sent the journal to mining areas, workers' cultural associations, etc.', Memoirs of Comrade Tamás Aladár (Szikra Publishing house), 26 October 1950, PIL, fond 867. f1/ t-25.

38 The scene is mapped by Dávid Szolláth, *A kommunista aszketizmus esztétikája* (Budapest: Balassi, 2011), 191–99.

39 For an examination of the different ways of reading of different classes in a broader historical context, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984).

40 An idea of the link between the organisation of community life and the distribution of the journal can be seen in the following contemporary letter, which also highlights the centralized and professionalized way in which *100%* was operating: 'I thought that [...] free lectures would serve as a ticket for the journal. So, if you want to come in, you have to buy the magazine. [...] It is beneficial because we make propaganda directly in front of 200–250 people who will inevitably (if they have already bought it) read our journal, even though three quarters of them would not have picked it up for years. I expect that we always give 2–3 such lectures in various party organisations in connection with the publication of the journal, so that we go everywhere during the winter without exception.' – PIL, fond 878, group 8, custody unit 183, p. 12.

41 PIL, fond 878, group 8, custody unit 183, p. 21.

Redirecting an Avant-Garde Periodical towards Trade Union Milieus: The Case of Kassák's *Munka*

In contrast to Tamás, a white-collar employee who sought to introduce class consciousness to the working masses from the outside, Kassák and Simon came from working-class, trade union backgrounds. Nevertheless, Kassák struggled to engage this demographic, perhaps because, in Simon's words, his writing was 'considered too complicated by the workers'.[42] When he returned to Hungary in 1926, he found that the audience he anticipated for his new avant-garde magazines did not materialize; his 1927 lecture on the journal *Dokumentum* attracted only one attendee.[43] These experiences probably made him realize that he would need to create an audience for his publications, preferably in collaboration with the individuals he sought to engage; so, with Simon's help, he established the Munka Circle, a community organised around the periodical of the same title in 1928. Although the hierarchical power relations associated with the presence of a charismatic central figure[44] — Kassák — were a feature of this group, its structure was more open and emancipatory than the *100%* conglomerate, which was structured from the top down. (Fig. 11, Fig 12, Fig. 13)

The Munka Circle aimed to create a socialist and, according to some participants, revolutionary counterculture attracting students and young workers. The group's theoreticians, who included Kassák and the poet Pál Justus,[45] believed that, during the 'low-tide of the revolution',[46] class struggle shifted to the domain of culture. Notably, this idea resonated with Gramscian or Lukácsian thought, but emerged independently of the former and in opposition to the latter, Gramsci being already imprisoned in Italy and Lukács being locked in longstanding debate with Kassák. Members of the Munka Circle, moreover, had direct contact with another central figure of Western Marxism, Karl Korsch, who was then based in Berlin.[47] The Munka Circle believed that direct political action was not feasible due to the disintegration of left-wing political parties after World War One and repressive state control that hindered revolutionary political engagement. It is noteworthy that Kassák's return to Hungary was authorized on the condition that he would not participate in any political activities upon his return. Therefore, the group focused on culture, albeit a highly politicized version of this, knowing that the judiciary determined which cultural activities should be deemed subversive political activity. This led to almost continuous lawsuits against Kassák throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, as well as brief imprisonments.[48]

42 '[Cikked] itt a munkások túl magasnak tartják.' Jolán Simon's letter to Lajos Kassák, after April 1925: KM-lev. 2063/40.

43 Zoltán Zelk, 'Egyember-látta matiné', *Élet és Irodalom* (31 January 1970), 4.

44 Matthew Philpotts, 'The Role of the Periodical Editor: Literary Journals and Editorial Habitus Author(s)', *The Modern Language Review*, 1 (2012), 39–64.

45 Pál Justus was born in 1905 in Pécs (then part of the Kingdom of Hungary). He studied humanities in Bologna and Paris and joined the MSZDP in 1925. From 1927, he was active in the left-wing press. In 1928, he joined the Munka circle, and from 1929, he was a contributor to the periodical *Munka*. However, he was expelled from both in 1930 due to political disagreements.

46 The expression was widely used in the Marxist tradition to describe post-revolutionary situations. The following discusses Pál Justus' related theory: Zsolt K. Horváth, 'Találkozás egy fiatalemberrel. Radnóti Sándor: A forradalom apálya és egy marxista forradalomelmélet [1971]. (Justus Pál: A szocializmus útja, 1945)', in *Filozófus a műteremben*, ed. by Bálint Somlyó, and Katalin Teller (Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, 2016), 17–24.

47 Péter Konok, 'A „Munka-kör" politikai, szellemi hátországa', *Múltunk*, 1 (2004), 245–57; Zsolt K. Horváth, *Mérei Ferenc. Peremhelyzet és a remény szocializmusa (1909–1945), vol. 1* (Budapest: Korall, 2021), 137–208.

48 See the criminal procedures related to Kassák in the Budapest City Archives (hereafter BFL): BFL – VII.5.c – 13079 – 1926.

Fig. 8 The *100%* Choir and their related publication, late 1920s. © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, KM-F-81.242

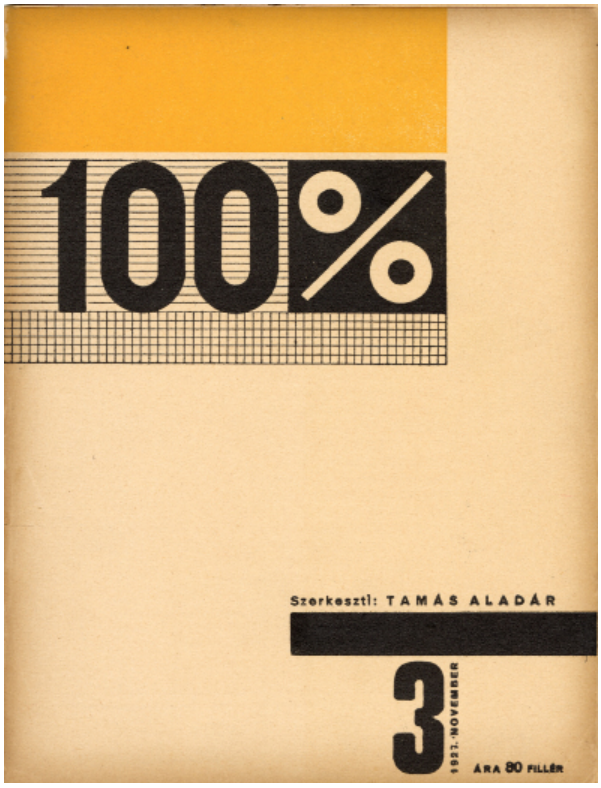

Fig. 9 Aladár Tamás, *100%*, 3 (1927). © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, uncatalogued

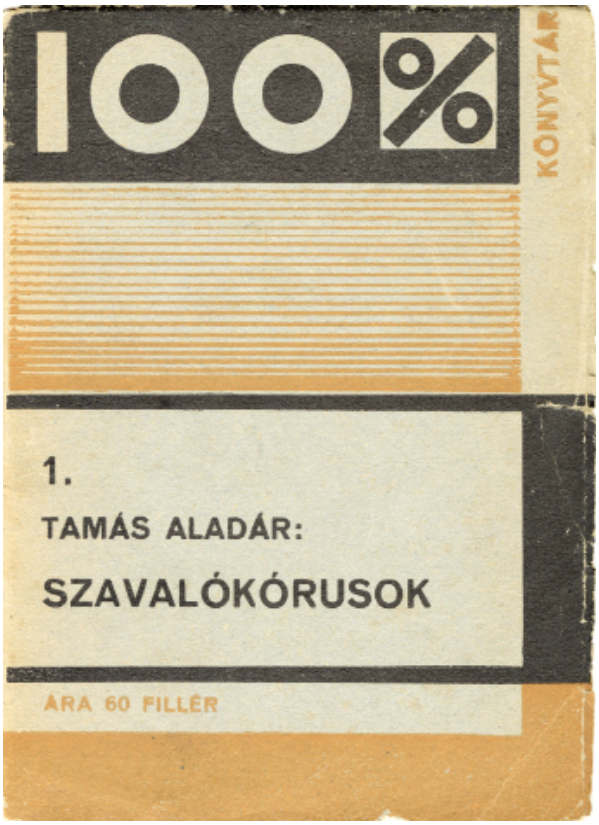

Fig. 10 Aladár Tamás, *Szavalókórusok* (Budapest: *100%*, 1928). © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, KM-2021.355.1

Kassák and members of the Munka Circle emphasized the importance of education in shaping a new proletarian counterculture. They rejected bourgeois high modernism and popular culture, both of which had infiltrated pre-World War One workers' culture. According to the Munka Circle, a new culture must be developed from scratch — an 'emerging' culture rather than a 'residual' one, in Raymond Williams' terminology.[49] Within the Munka Circle, this cultural development was intertwined with education, conceived as collective self-formation, open-ended debates, and cultural practices such as sports, rambling, painting, and photography. Culture, in the Munka Circle's view, encompassed a broad spectrum that also included discussions about free love, in contrast to the corrupting institution of bourgeois marriage that drew from Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*.[50]

Discussions within the Munka Circle were documented and analysed in *Munka*. Initially, the magazine inherited an avant-garde visual style from Kassák's previous publications, as well as his interest in avant-garde art; reproductions featured during *Munka*'s first year were probably gathered by Kassák during his time in Vienna. *Munka*'s most significant departure from Kassák's earlier journals lies in its increasing focus on the social sciences, its incorporation of cutting-edge techniques for visualizing statistics, and its interest in foreign politics. Notably, the journal pioneered coverage in Hungary of Italian fascism. This expansion of content coincided with a narrowing of space for art and literature. However, during *Munka*'s initial period, between 1928 and 1930,

49 Raymond Williams, 'The Analysis of Culture', in Williams, *Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), 41–71.

50 Zsolt K. Horváth, *Mérei Ferenc*, pp. 162–170.

Fig. 11 Lajos Kassák, *Dokumentum*, 4 (1927). © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, KM 1945

Fig. 12 The Munka Choir and their related publication in Göd (Hungary), ca. 1930.© MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, KM-F-81.34

Fig. 13 Lajos Kassák, *Munka*, 4 (1929). © MNMKK–Petőfi Literary Museum–Kassák Museum, uncatalogued

some of the most prominent emerging painters (such as Lajos Vajda, Dezső Korniss, and György Kepes) and poets (including Kassák himself, István Vas, Gyula Illyés, and Zoltán Zelk) were actively involved.

Munka's speaking choir was pivotal in this milieu. Within the Munka Circle, it was led by Jolán Simon, who wrote an article about it, her only known publication, for the periodical. Another field of interest was 'szociofotó' — social photography — a unique form of participatory and documentary photography portraying working-class reality from working-class perspectives. Instead of aestheticizing or sensationalizing the misery of subaltern classes, as the mainstream media often did, 'szociofotó' practitioners within the Munka Circle used the camera as a 'weapon' in the class struggle, echoing an approach found in publications like the Berlin-based *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*. Notable figures in this photographic movement included Lajos Lengyel, Ferenc Haár, and Sándor (Gönci) Frühof. Endre Friedmann, who later achieved fame as the photographer Robert Capa, also began his career within the Munka Circle.

The Munka Circle underwent multiple reorganizations, driven by internal and external dynamics. Internally, there were theoretical debates on issues like free love and the Soviet Union. While Kassák disagreed with the former and was, at least initially, sympathetic towards the latter, young radicals centred around Justus opposed him on both issues. Social and psychological tensions — described by eyewitnesses using the framework of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, in which 'sons' rebel against the 'father' figure (Kassák) — also contributed to the circle's disintegration.[51] Externally, conflicts

51 István Vas, *Nehéz szerelem* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1972), 569, 860.

intensified between the communist *100%* circle and the predominantly anti-Stalinist Munka Circle. In 1933, speaking choirs, which had become powerful tools of agitation in left-wing circles, were banned. This prohibition significantly impacted the Munka Circle, whose choir played a central role. In 1934, the circle was disbanded by authorities. The *Munka* journal continued to be published until 1939, however, when press laws were further tightened.

Estimates of the Munka Circle's size vary, with eyewitnesses suggesting anything from 60 to a few hundred members. Police reports, often exaggerating the threat posed by left-wing groups, tended to inflate these figures. Personally distributed by members of the Munka Circle, *Munka* reached a much wider audience than Kassák's other publications. Subscription forms indicate a diverse readership, including intellectual and economic elites, and working-class individuals. It is likely that the working-class readership was larger than these forms suggest, as *Munka* was available in trade union halls where dozens, if not hundreds, of people could access each copy,[52] a perception supported by interviews with working-class individuals who encountered the journal in these settings.[53]

Conclusions

Throughout this diachronic investigation, I have addressed how avant-garde journal editors including Lajos Kassák and Aladár Tamás, upon returning to Budapest in the mid-1920s, endeavoured to transform their international relationships. Specifically, I have explored how they transitioned from their position in the international avant-garde magazine network, which had symbolic significance but attracted few readers, to targeting a domestic audience, extending beyond elite cultural groups. Despite the initial plan for *365* to be an international avant-garde journal, it evolved into a publication aimed at the Hungarian middle-class public and Hungarian émigré groups. In less than three years, both Kassák and Tamás shifted their focus with *Munka* and *100%*, respectively. These post-avant-garde publications, blending elements of workers' culture with the avant-garde, primarily catered to working-class audiences.

While both journals maintained an international profile, the inclusion of foreign material served a purpose that distinguished them from their avant-garde predecessors. While avant-garde publications sought to convey a synthesis of contemporary reality and art, post-avant-garde publications aimed to inform, shape, and mobilize domestic, ideally working-class, readers with significant foreign material. Moreover, whereas avant-garde journals contained features in multiple languages, post-avant-garde periodicals tended to be monolingual. While *Ma* was written mostly in Hungarian with sporadic texts in German or French, it also released international special issues using German, French, and even Italian. *Dokumentum* included some French and German texts but was mostly Hungarian, and *Munka* was exclusively Hungarian. Communist-backed or affiliated journals, such as *Uj Föld* and *100%*, also used Hungarian to reach a wide working-class audience that, by then, was mostly-Hungarian speaking in Hungary.

In focusing on the imagined and actual readership of journals, my analysis delved into under-explored topics, including working-class readers of avant-garde publications. Examining *Ma*, *365*, *Uj Föld*, *Dokumentum*, *100%*, and *Munka* as a continuum, my emphasis was not on how former émigrés lost their positions in the international

52 Subscription form of the *Munka* journal, KM-an. 16.

53 *Búvópatakok: a két világháború közötti baloldali folyóiratok szerkesztőinek, munkatársainak emlékezései*, ed. by József M. Pásztor (Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum–Népművelési Propaganda Iroda, 1976), 78–80.

journal network, but on their success in creating forums that increasingly adapted to conditions within Hungary.

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