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THE EARLY WORKS OF ARNOLD HAUSER – A READER

The present issue delivers a range of new material that casts a different light on Arnold Hauser's (1892-1978) development in the history and theory of art. It is committed to the idea that Hauser's early works bear witness not only to his Budapest apprenticeship with Georg Lukács and to his close friendship with Karl Mannheim but, partly, also to his later (and relatively well-known) insights into the social embeddedness of art and literature.

A great deal of the texts published here were written between 1911 and 1913 for a daily newspaper of Hauser's hometown, Temesvár (now the Romanian city of Timişoara). Hauser functioned as the Budapest correspondent on matters of arts and literature, before even making personal contact with Lukács and his entourage in the difficult context of the First World War. This collection of articles provides a mixed corpus of daily art criticism and philosophical essays underpinning the hypothesis that Hauser joined the anti-impressionist (as it is generally conceived) movement of Hungarian intellectuals, who were interested in the meaning of art and not in the problems of the artists. This set of texts documents the first steps of a knowledgeable protagonist of the movement for "exploring art", "art in research" ("kutató művészet"), and which fought fiercely against "accommodating art"[1] built mostly on a series of externalities. The origins of Hauser's later idea, that a balanced theory of art should draw on different sources of knowledge (psychological, logical, and sociological), can easily be traced back to these years of his academic formation. Hauser started the quest to uncover the social contribution to art as a student and journalist, laid it aside in his 1918 Hungarian doctoral work on the possibilities of systematizing art theories and, finally, caught it up two decades later in his Vienna period - but still way before his breakthrough with the *Social History of Art*. From these Viennese years we publish a section of his first important sociological essay on basic characters depicted in movies of the 1930s. In it, Hauser combines notable skills for social analysis with his sense for the problem of meaning and interpretation in art theory. This constellation makes him less a historian of art than a sociologically informed philosopher inquiring into how art theory is possible, and into where sociologists or aesthetes go beyond their fields of expertise.

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[1] See here the article on the exhibition of Adolf Fényes. Both expressions were borrowed from an earlier self-affirmation of the painter Károly Kernstok that found its way to one of Georg Lukács's then-contemporary essays in critical art theory.

Again, we can also account for a slightly revisited picture of Hungarian intellectual history of the last century. Taking cues from Hauser's still unprocessed manuscripts and from other documents in various Austrian and Hungarian archives, we can argue that the community giving a decisive impetus to the young Hauser was much more a spiritual incubator than a clear-cut formation of progressive intelligentsia. This community used to be referred to as the Sunday Circle, but the narrative about its shared general outlook was forged mainly a few decades after it ceased to exist. The efforts to reconstruct the worldview of the Sunday Circle, in spite of producing excellent markers for analysis, might cloud our vision by leaving out various relevant layers of interpretation. Describing how they generally saw the world brings us closer to understanding their epistemological preferences, but we will misinterpret the members of the circle as proponents of a common methodology. If anything could be seen in this circle it was the stunning proximity of concurrent or even contradictory ideas, and not a particular mood in which to contemplate things. It was probably here that Hauser experienced that learned ideas are sociologically bound. But these sociological elements pertain to a more general setting: none of a scholar's ideas and theories can perpetuate unless they are widely received and discussed.

Mannheim and Hauser in parallel learnt the lesson of how the abundance of social relations facilitates the dissemination of ideas and how isolated minds are unable to reflect on the complicated structures of understanding. This applies mutatis mutandis to large portions of the history of art. They do not only reflect a certain form of social embeddedness, but also a long history of how artworks resonate with different meanings and in different communities. The same could be said about the 20th century reception of Hauser himself. His works were widely received as long as they meaningfully resonated with a general array of problems that arose in the theorizing of art. They did not reflect on the issues of commissioning, making, and interpreting artworks, but laid bare the essential guidelines of a universal theory of art. When leading scientific communities were losing interest in such idealistically informed ways of theorizing, Hauser's formerly good reputation easily gave way to the label of quaint Marxism.

A series of other documents and archival records complement this reader: a selection of his letters to various colleagues and notable persons of his era (like Thomas Mann or Georg Lukács); his curricula vitae reflecting on the development of his thinking; and last but not least, an interview with Hauser's widow, Rózsa Borus on his development as a young man and his affinities with the societal dimension of life.

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