

**Andrea Pócsik**  
**Philosophical Knowledge Transfers**  
**in György Galántai's Art Archival Practice and**  
**Its Relationship with the Work of**  
**Vilém Flusser, Arthur Koestler and Michael Polanyi**

“Articulate systems which foster and satisfy an intellectual passion can survive only with the support of a society which respects the values affirmed by these passions, and a society has a cultural life only to the extent to which it acknowledges and fulfils the obligation to lend its support to the cultivation of these passions.”

Michael Polanyi

“From the beginning of July 1972, I regarded my attempt at communicating with the representatives of cultural policy as finished, and I dismantled the fair play exhibition with which I sought to comply with the agreement we made with the party headquarters.

My experiences had to be allowed to sink to the level of “implied knowledge”, in order for them to become part of the underground – a naturally and characteristically outsider behaviour.”

György Galántai

## **Starting point**

It is a rare and exceptional opportunity to find practices of philosophical knowledge transfer in the creation, operation, and shaping of an artist's archive, and to see it, as in our case, at Artpool, as an "institutionalized artwork" of the artist György Galántai. In what follows, the different sources, from which this unique enterprise derived its inspiration will be shown, as well as the conceptions to which it is related.

Working at the Artpool Art Research Centre was an excellent synthesis. In addition to collecting documents and products of the work of neo-avant-garde artistic circles, Artpool has created several "reflective spaces", including a rich library of art theory and history, with many works on archival theory. On the online platform, Galántai has created a world of his own: one can see them as a part of his life's work, the parts of which are not only the individual artworks he created, but also those of his contemporaries, and the whole system of relationships and references, underpinned by documents, that this vast corpus sets in motion. It also includes his own 'meta-archives', documentation of exhibitions compiled from previous collections (mainly Györ-

gy Galántai's) or created with thematic keywords, and the research directed towards them. The list is not exhaustive: these are only the contents and peculiarities of greater importance to me.<sup>1</sup>

The research concept developed in the first part of the project "active-archival - research" is closely related to the above.<sup>2</sup> It began with basic research, in which I mapped the literature on art and archive theory and important historical knowledge to develop my connection to Artpool. This research was followed by a workshop with young researchers, in which, with the same expectation, we investigated the structure and function of the archive through the 'stalker-like' mediation of György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay.

During this research, I focused on György Galántai's relationship with the media theorist Vilém Flusser and published the questions that arose in this connection in my research report.<sup>3</sup> Since the methodological basis of the workshop was based on the work of Michael Polanyi in the theory of knowledge (tacit knowledge), it was a remarkable discovery to see the intellectual affinity between him and György Galántai. The artist's thinking was fundamentally shaped by Arthur Koestler's theory of holarchy (which was born almost simultaneously as Polanyi's major works). These connections<sup>4</sup>, which at the time took the form of a loop, provided the idea for an examination of the theories found in or influencing the artist's work.

### **“Whatever is not the future’s past is doomed to oblivion”<sup>5</sup>**

"Is it even possible?" - asks Zsolt K. Horváth, reflecting on the imaginary archive of the avant-garde, and invites several thinkers on historiography, archiving, and access to help answer this question. Among them is György Galántai on the concept of the Active Archive<sup>6</sup> and the creation of Artpool. "I believe that the idea of an active archive can be applied not only to artistic activity, but, somewhat detached from the poetic intentions of its inventor, can be the property of any initiative that seeks to preserve, understand, and make pedagogically accessible the historicity of the past, in short, to promote meaning. The cornerstone of this is that the historian *enters*

<sup>1</sup> At our first meeting, György Galántai greeted me warmly, but gave me a word of warning. I should try to understand and find the laws of this archive, which, like the laws of nature, according to Albert Szent-Györgyi, are uniform (this quote is on the virtual "façade" of the archive). In retrospect, this "travel advice" had for me the same significance/meaning as Andrei Tarkovsky's films of the early nineties, especially 1979's *Stalker*: given the way the Zone works and its allegorical meaning, this is hardly a coincidence.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.artpool.hu/posts/aktiv-archivum-kutatas>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/pocsik-archive.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Here I must immediately refer to Miklós Erdély's poem, Time-Möbius, and the film based on it, one line of which in the title of the volume of studies edited by Emese Kürti and Zsuzsa László paraphrases: "*What Will Be, Already Exists*" (Kürti-László, 2021). <https://artpool.hu/Erdely/mobius.html>

These essays on time management in Cold War archives in Central and Eastern Europe highlight similarities and differences in key case studies. Zsuzsa László, writing from this perspective in her introduction, summarizes the main features of Artpool and its art historical origins (László, 2021, pp. 9-20).

<sup>5</sup> Galántai György-Klaniczay Júlia (szerk.) *Galántai Lifeworks* (Artpool és Enciklopédia Kiadó, 1996, p. 18.)

<sup>6</sup> [https://artpool.hu/archives\\_active.html](https://artpool.hu/archives_active.html)

the space of the present and, with the active intention of the archive to shape the present, opens a field of action to the strangeness of the past." Among the thinkers he cites, Michel de Certeau and Michel Foucault are vital for their ability to transform what seems alien to historical knowledge into a cognitive resource: "And to this extent, de Certeau's ideas are harmoniously linked to Foucault's proposal of an 'archive' extracted above, in that the latter proposes not only to collect and fetishize documents but also to reconstruct the regulatory systems that made their manifestations possible, while the former encourages us to try to evaluate and understand the past and its complex temporality in the present through the strangeness of these systems."<sup>7</sup>

These two "proposals" can also be understood as intellectual and spiritual *re-functioning* (to use and modify a bit Galántai's term): if we make the events and concepts, we have come to know part of our contemporary media and cultural environment.

"'Trans-functioning' is none other than movement: we add, take away or substitute functions. Movement continually trans-functions everything. We never terminate anything, only change its function. The new = trans-functioned. Trans-functioning is a qualitative move, producing either a higher or lower quality of the effected trans-functioning is the degree to which there is a gain or a loss of information value. (...) The essence of trans-functioning is the recharging of objects with new energy."<sup>8</sup>

If we put this in parallel with Michael Polanyi's concept of science, according to which we can make progress by discovering new facts or by discovering systems and mechanisms that explain already known facts.<sup>9</sup> In both cases, intuition, or deviation from the rule, plays a significant role. "But to produce an object by following a precise prescription is a process of manufacture not the creation of a work of art. And likewise, to acquire a new knowledge, by a prescribed manipulation, is to make a survey, and not a discovery."<sup>10</sup>

Polanyi often draws parallels between scientific knowledge and artistic creation. His studies of Gestalt perception influenced his insights into Gestalt psychology theory. These influences will be discussed in more detail later, in the context of Galántai's holarchy (Arthur Koestler) and his telematic conception of society (Vilém Flusser). "It is characteristic of the process of scientific conjecture that, as in this case, the several consecutive elements of a coherent sequence – even though each step guessed at a time can be justified only by the success of the further yet unguessed steps with which it will eventually combine to the final solution (...) There must be a sufficient foreknowledge of the whole solution to guide conjecture with reasonable probability in

<sup>7</sup> K. Horváth Zsolt: Lehetőség-e egyáltalán? – Az avantgárd képzeletbeli archívuma, *MúzeumCafé*, 10. évfolyam, 2016/5-6., november-december, 55-56. szám <https://muzeumcafe.hu/hu/lehetseges-e-egyaltalan/>

<sup>8</sup> Galántai-Klanczay 1996: 105

<sup>9</sup> Polanyi, Michael: *Science, Faith and Society*, The University of Chicago Press, 1964, p.10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.14.

making the right choice at each consecutive stage. The process resembles the creation of a work of art, which is firmly guided with a fundamental vision of the final whole even though that final whole can be definitely conceived only in terms of its yet undiscovered particulars – with the remarkable difference however that in natural science the final whole lies not within the powers of our shaping, but must give a true picture of a hidden pattern of the outer world"<sup>11</sup>

I think that György Galántai's *ars poetica*, the formation of which one can trace in his diary entries, is permeated by this thought: in his case, the "work as a whole" is the future, and the parts are the perceptions, observations, and activities of his present.

In the section of Polanyi's study entitled "Authority and Conscience," the scholar attaches great importance to the relationship between master and disciple, and thus touches on the question of rules and their observance.<sup>12</sup>

The real task of building and developing archives is to produce knowledge that encourages the transmission of this tradition. Discovery plays a massive role, and Polanyi adds dynamic intuition to its specificity. Among the numbered thematic years of Artpool was "2001 - The Year of the Impossible", for which György Galántai prepared a collection of paradoxes.<sup>13</sup>

One of these was Plato's so-called Meno's paradox: overcoming it was a matter of great concern to Michael Polanyi, as the highlighted quotation shows: "[...] Plato's Menonian paradox is: 'If we know the solution to a problem, there is no problem, but if we do not know the solution, we do not know what we are looking for and cannot expect to find anything'. Plato's answer in Menon is that 'remembering' the world of ideas helps us to find the solution. Polányi wants to replace this recollection of the elusive world of ideas with a more plausible process of discovery guided by dynamic intuition: "We can strive for scientific discovery without knowing what we are looking for, since the direction towards a deepening context shows us where to begin, where to turn, and finally leads us to a point where we can stop and formulate a right of discovery" [...] "Scientific problems are not fixed tasks. The scientist knows only the outlines of his goal and must rely on his intuition of increasing coherence to guide him toward discovery [...] "Although the solution to a problem is something we have never encountered before, it plays a role in the heuristic act, similar to that of a lost pen or a familiar but forgotten name. We look for it as if it were there, given in advance" [...] "The difference between the two kinds of problem solving, systematic and heuristic, is also reflected in the fact that a systematic operation is an entirely volitional act. In contrast, the heuristic process combines active and passive stages."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.32.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.59.

<sup>13</sup> <https://artpool.hu/lehetetlen/realizmus/paradoxon.html>

<sup>14</sup> The quote is from an article by János Tanács in *Polanyiana*, in which the author analyzes the "explicit" consequences of Polanyi's philosophy of science. (Tanács 2000)

To introduce the figurative concept of *recollection* is not to recall everyday events (that is, memory), but to direct our attention *to the given contents of our souls*. In my research, I am trying to explore contexts that will help us understand how this approach is supported by Artpool's collection and structural system. I suggest that György Galántai's thinking and creative approach is embodied in an archival system that is both a way of putting into practice Flusser-Koestler-Polányi's theories and a way of gaining better self-awareness through the exploration of social and cultural relations in the past. It gives way to the pressures of our assumptions; it encourages us to explore.

## Trans-functionings in practice

Literature is abundant on the importance of art archives in art history and their particular role in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>15</sup>. Self-historization counts as one of the most important motivations in the practice of founding an artist's archive. Biographical inspiration is an important authentication tool; the global trend in historiography towards valorizing personal narratives as sources in the 1980s and 1990s is also linked to the paradigm shift in the micro-historical approach (Bernard Lepetit). Of course, for those who lived in the shadow of dictatorships, self-archiving was in a sense a necessity of life, since artists who were classified as 'banned' or 'tolerated' were rarely or not at all included in the institutionalised artistic scene.

What is important for the study of György Galántai's intention to found the archive and its joint creation with Júlia Klaniczay is not these art-historical, in a certain sense, "practical" factors, but the philosophical foundations of its origin.<sup>16</sup> The key concept of this understanding of an archive is the "periodical space", which the founders used to describe the initial form:

At first Artpool's operation was realized strictly via the mail art network using postal services. Artpool's projects were made public at APS-s (Artpool's Periodical Space) organized at various venues. The project materials and intensive exchanges facilitated the accumulation of the archive and its numerous collections. Galántai created Artpool's image design (he designed a rubber

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<sup>15</sup> To mention a few: *Interarchive. Archivarische Praktiken und Handlungsräume im zeitgenössischen Kunstfeld* (Buchhandlung Walther König, Köln, 2002); Kemp-Welch, Klara/Freire, Cristina (2012): "Artists' Networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe." In: ARTmargins 1/2–3, pp. 3–14.; Jerome Bazin/Pascal Dubourg Glatigny/Piotr Piotrowski (eds.), *Art Beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989)*, Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016.; Schwarz, Isabelle: *Archive für Künstlerpublikationen der 1960er bis 1980er Jahre* (Schriftenreihe für Künstlerpublikationen; 4), Köln: Salon Verlag, 2008; Daniel GRUŇ: The Artist's Archive – a Parallel Institution or a Medium of Self-historization? In: Magid, Vaclav (ed.): Notebook for Art, Theory and Related Zones, pp. 100–122.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, we can learn a lot from understanding their motivations: the turning away from the attitude that defined the artistic and cultural life of the period, "the culture of complaints" as Júlia Klaniczay called it, the "escape into activity", is a fact that cannot be avoided.

stamp and envelope stamps, and issued postcards).<sup>17</sup> Another important thought about the foundation of the archive is a diary note from 1979 quoted from the volume *Lifeworks* of Galántai.

## “PROJECTS

The founding of ARTPOOL 1979

Primary aims:

1. To collect material for the museum of artistic scheduled to open in 2079.
2. To inspire the founding of the museum.
3. To fill the gap, for the time being, with spaces available periodically.
4. To operate as part of the museum when it is established (according to the original plans.)”<sup>18</sup>

The interesting thing about this volume, published as a catalogue for the “Galántai Lifeworks” exhibition, is that despite its printed form, its editorial style is surprisingly similar to the digital version of the archive. In the table of contents, which, after the introductory essays, introduces the 'Diary of Galántai' section, the individual chapters present the oeuvre in a specific structure: sections that also indicate the chronological order of the diaries but are labelled thematically (e.g. 'On Art 1968-1991' or 'Object Works 1974-1993') provide an insight into a constantly evolving yet original *ars poetica* and the specificities of the groups of works created in each period.<sup>19</sup> This intention is fundamental to Galántai: the way of 'self-labeling' and the individual names used here reveal as much about his art as his chosen form.

*The title:*

1. Always follows the meaning of the used junk (or found object), or refers to its use.
2. The most important reason for verbal formulation is to lift the object from the sphere of sense perception, i.e. experience, to the level of cognition.
3. The fact that we take for granted that signs operate at the level of both a primary and a secondary meaning makes us receptive to their being ‘commandeered by art’.”<sup>20</sup>

The core of the oeuvre is therefore the section from page 40 to the appendix, page 298, where the diary entries can be seen as the organising principle, i.e. the philosophical reflections can be associated with works of art (far from being illustrative), but according to a creative method based on the integrity of text and visibility. Galántai's approach to curating, a role he has developed in his work, in the design of his exhibitions, actions, films and, above all, in the organisa-

<sup>17</sup> Galántai, György - Klaniczay, Júlia (eds.): *Artpool. The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe*, Artpool, Budapest, 2013, p. 38.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 244.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.107.

tion of his archive, long before it became widely accepted, is based on a strong interaction and dynamic between the two (text and image), in many cases the verbal manifestations (quotations) themselves becoming images or acting as images. Among the many possible examples, I would like to mention two.

The first is the archive space, with inscriptions everywhere, from the research rooms to the service rooms (kitchen, toilets, and cloakroom). In my opinion, these contribute to a kind of intellectual alertness or vigilance, the constant encouragement of which, as an expectation to the world, can be seen as György Galántai's signature. This extension to public space is related to one of Vilém Flusser's writings, a public art exhibition in the context of the "Context" project and the Budapest Autumn Festival in 1999. The art genre, which had been alive in Western democracies since the 1960s and 1970s, was accepted in Hungary after the fall of communism, one of the first examples being the billboard exhibition, on which passers-by could read excerpts from Flusser's essay<sup>21</sup> (Arthur Koestler also had concerns about the relationship between verballity and visuality and their role in creative thinking and creation. His knowledge and experience led him to believe that verbal thinking is subordinate to the "decisive moments" (the inspired state of creation and discovery).<sup>22</sup>

## Correspondence art<sup>23</sup>, conviviality and network communities

György Galántai's relation to mail art and fluxus is decisive. Collaborative work and joint creation inspired by thematic proposals also originate in it, but the socio-political conditions of the time strongly justified the constant interdependence and interrelatedness.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it is not easy to approach artistic and intellectual activities embedded in the relations of the period without taking all this into account. An important source has recently been published, an anthology recalling the debates in the fine arts scene of the period, in its first and second (other-half) public sphere. (The

<sup>21</sup> <https://artpool.hu/kontextus/utcai/default.html>

<sup>22</sup> Koestler, Arthur: *The Ghost in the Machine*, Hutchinson, 1967, pp. 234-236.

<sup>23</sup> György Galántai defined correspondence art as a different version of mail art. See: <https://artpool.hu/MailArt/kronologia/introduction.html>. Later, some researchers, e.g. Katalin Cseh-Varga used "contact art" as the equivalent of Galántai's "kapcsolatművészet". It is worth looking at the etymology of both "correspondence" and "kapcsolat": the English word is composed of the prefix '(with) each other' and the suffix 'respond', while the Hungarian "kapcsolat" comes from the form of the verb 'to receive' with a frequentative active suffix. So, in both cases, there is an emphasis on reciprocity, which is one of the cornerstones of the artist's vision of the world.

<sup>24</sup> Galántai's contemporary, the famous poet György Petri, sums up his experiences in an interview: 'I have already spoken about how the very close circles of friends in the opposition coincided with political cooperation, developing a kind of "warm sheep flock feeling": private parties were regular, and we were always staying at each other's home. Because they marginalised us, we got the jobs from each other, so there was a powerful existential and emotional interconnectedness between us, a very dense web of social interaction, which suddenly disappeared with the change of regime.'

literature on this period does not treat the names of the public spheres coherently, and the matter is further complicated if we take social, media, or cultural studies as a reference.)<sup>25</sup>

In this volume, edited by Julius Huth and Kristóf Nagy<sup>26</sup>, we find more than fifty articles (mostly reviews) from this period, put into context by painstaking research by Julius Huth.<sup>27</sup> However, the question is, how can the younger generation distinguish between the statements without “local knowledge”?<sup>28</sup> I deliberately use the geographical term, which refers both concretely (to public spaces) and figuratively to their use. The anthology mentioned can serve as a 'map' to navigate these spaces, while the Artpool archive, with its dense, personal collection of hyperlinks, is more like a travelogue or guidebook.

The hyperlinks refer forward and backward in time: Subsequent editing of the digital version at the website not only allowed for recall of past events but also for the addition of information drawn from the personal knowledge of the founders, György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay.

If we carefully open the hyperlinks while reading, we can learn about the background of the event<sup>29</sup> the essence of the problem<sup>30</sup>, and its characteristics<sup>31</sup>. The most telling is the content compiled by György Galántai, "Aczél Era: cultural counterintelligence"<sup>32</sup>, which is connected to the phrase "cultural-political experience". The artist selected the quotations (according to the content description) from the poster newspaper of the exhibition "Underground Art in the Aczél Era," held in 1990, as well as from official documents and announcements. He then supplemented them with related (contemporary and subsequent) literature.

Michael Polanyi introduced and applied conviviality as an important element of his philosophy of knowledge. His biographers trace the importance of social knowledge transfer in interpersonal relationships back to Polanyi's childhood experiences in his mother's salon, which avant-garde artists and intellectuals visited.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Sources in art history, social history, and press history use concepts of the structure of the public sphere in different ways. See, for example, Katalin Cseh-Varga, *The Hungarian Avant-garde and Socialism. The Art of the Second Public Sphere*, Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023, and [https://mmi.elte.hu/szabadbolcseszett/mmi.elte.hu/szabadbolcseszett/index522f.html?option=com\\_tanelem&id\\_tanelem=1291&tip=0](https://mmi.elte.hu/szabadbolcseszett/mmi.elte.hu/szabadbolcseszett/index522f.html?option=com_tanelem&id_tanelem=1291&tip=0)

<sup>26</sup> Huth Július- Nagy Kristóf (szerk.): *Kiállítások és kritikák. Képzőművészeti diskurzusok a 80-as években* (KEMKI – Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2024)

<sup>27</sup> Huth Július: Képzőművészeti viták és kritikák az 1980-as években, In: Huth Július- Nagy Kristóf (szerk.): *Kiállítások és kritikák. Képzőművészeti diskurzusok a 80-as években* (KEMKI – Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2024, 17-67.)

<sup>28</sup> Júlia Klaniczay brought this extremely relevant question to my attention in a social media post advertising the book launch.

<sup>29</sup> <https://artpool.hu/kontextus/kronologia/1970.html> ; <https://artpool.hu/Erdely/Posztneo.html>

<sup>30</sup> [https://artpool.hu/Al/al01/Birkas\\_Douglas.html](https://artpool.hu/Al/al01/Birkas_Douglas.html)

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.c3.hu/collection/koncept/images/birkas1.html>

<sup>32</sup> [https://artpool.hu/Aczelkor/kulturaelharitas\\_e.html](https://artpool.hu/Aczelkor/kulturaelharitas_e.html)

<sup>33</sup> Taussig, William – Moleski, Martin X.: *Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher*, Oxford Uni Press, 2005.

Conversations between intellectuals from different backgrounds can lead to the "integration of incompatible elements," which Polányi compares to Koestler's concept of bisociation.<sup>34</sup> Koestler understood this as "the combination of different sets of rules" and "thinking on several levels at once": "Bisociation means that two previously unrelated cognitive matrices (elsewhere referred to as cognitive holons – *author's note*) are combined in such a way that a new level is created in the hierarchy, which includes the previously separate structures as its members."<sup>35</sup> Both thinkers expound these ideas in their reflections on the relationship between art and science (Polanyi in "What is a painting?"; Koestler in the chapter entitled "The Glory of Man").

At this point, it is worth paying attention to György Galántai's holarchic approach, which was greatly influenced by Koestler's aforementioned work, *The Ghost in the Machine*. According to this approach, we are social holons as individuals in the system of parts and wholes that appears in all areas of our lives. I have already mentioned the great importance of social relationships in the neo-avant-garde and opposition circles of the Kádár era. This was not unique, of course, as networking also played a massive role in the history of intellectual movements and schools (e.g., the Bauhaus) during the historical avant-garde.<sup>36</sup>

Excellent literature on the "network communities" of the 1970s and 1980s is available in the works of Katalin Cseh-Varga and Roddy Hunter. Clearly, coercive political circumstances played a role in their formation, as Hunter argues: "Artists arguably resisted state-driven Cold War propaganda, on both sides, through intervening in communication systems such as postal, radio, telephonic, and television transmission to develop their own horizontally distributive 'distance art and activism' (Chandler and Neumark, 2006, *At a Distance*). This networked approach of 'artists turning communication media into their art media' (ibid. p. 3) is also where 'art, activism and media fundamentally reconfigure each other (ibid) as the post-avant-garde aspires to become a counter-cultural experience of global, peer-to-peer communication."<sup>37</sup>

In György Galántai's anthropological view, "at the heart of telematics is a type of anthropology that does not perceive the human person as an individual, but rather as the manner how systems of relations function; as the realization of possible links - this is the basis of telematics, which has so often inspired the creation of works of art."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Polanyi, Michael: *Personal Knowledge. Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958

<sup>35</sup> Koestler, Arthur: *The Ghost in the Machine*, Hutchinson, 1967, p. 239.

<sup>36</sup> Perhaps it is no coincidence that, according to its etymology, the word "network" first appeared in connection with connecting things, and the meaning "a group of related people" appeared in psychological jargon in 1934. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/network>

<sup>37</sup> Hunter, Roddy: *Beyond "East" and West" through The Eternal Network: Networked Artists' Communities as Counter-publics of Cold War Europe*. In: Cseh-Varga, K., Czirák, A. (eds.): *Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere. Event-based Art in Late Socialist Europe*, Routledge, 2018, 19-32.

<sup>38</sup> I am referring here to the 2005 exhibition "Telematic Art—The Art of Perception," which I briefly discussed in my previous writing. (Pócsik, Andrea: *Activ – Archive – Research*, *Flusser Studies* 37, 2023)

The source of this, which the artist held in high regard and quoted frequently, was Vilém Flusser. Among these, we have focused on the direct influence: the Artpool website contains numerous texts and quotations from him in digital form, and the library keeps related publications, letters, and other documents in a special box. Artpool also played an important role in the Hungarian publication of the media theorist's works. In one of his studies, Media historian Benedek Tóth describes Flusser's telematic society and calculative consciousness.<sup>39</sup> The excerpt from Flusser quoted in the author's translation reads as follows: "We must understand ourselves as the curves and hollows of relationships that intersect in a field, primarily between people. We, too, are the 'digital computations' of fleeting possibilities. [...] We are no longer subjects of a given objective world, but projects of alternative worlds. We have risen from our subjugated subjective position into projection."<sup>40</sup>

## POOLMAIL

In the past, postal correspondence was often the form of communication used to maintain interpersonal relationships. In terms of content, this was limited to exchanging information, the most important purpose of which was maintaining social relationships, providing updates on current events and interests, and organizing meetings—this type of correspondence developed between Arthur Koestler and Michael Polanyi. Their correspondence illustrates the process of a superficial acquaintance developing into friendship and intellectual and personal closeness. However, the letter writers rarely referred to scientific issues, except to share their recent reading experiences and recommend books to each other. However, we often find references to plans for upcoming meetings, which meant a lot to both of them, especially to Polanyi.<sup>41</sup>

In contrast, correspondence played an exceptionally important role in Vilém Flusser's work. The Flusser Archive contains an entire wall of folders containing the original letters. These belong to the collection entitled "Manuscripts and Correspondence," stored in numbered files. Only some of them have been digitized, allowing for keyword searches.

From my research perspective, his correspondence with Felix Philip Ingold, a literary scholar and translator teaching Russian cultural and social history at the University of St Gallen in Switzerland, is fascinating. Flusser published these times in German (their correspondence was

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<sup>39</sup> Tóth Benedek: A média fenomenológiája: Vilém Flusser kommunikáció- és médiaelméletének körvonalai és alapfogalmai. *Apertúra*, 2023. tavasz.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted from Flusser, Vilém: Digitaler Schein, In: *Ein Reader: Grundlagentexte der Medienkultur* (1991:71-75.) in the author's translation.

<sup>41</sup> The recently established Imre Kertész Research Institute in Budapest holds a copy of Arthur Koestler's "Koestler Archives" collection from the University of Edinburgh Library. The collection includes correspondence between Mihály Polányi and Arthur Koestler from 1941 to 1975.

also in German). In fact, the fruits of this period (his image and media theories) brought Flusser real recognition in Europe. A close intellectual friendship developed between him and Ingold quickly: Flusser shared his manuscripts with him, and Ingold carefully annotated them with critical comments. In an article published in *Flusser Studies*, author Daniel Irrgang traces this dialogue. He reveals how Flusser refined his terminology to distinguish between technical and synthetic images due to their correspondence. The correspondence uncovered in Irrgang's research provides a unique insight into the origins of many of Flusser's works. The TV series based on the philosophical series of scenes entitled *Angenommen* (never realized) summarizes these reflections uniquely. Flusser writes about this in one of his letters to Ingold: "You know my hypothesis that the emerging power of imagination brings traditional scenes into images and concepts. I am not referring to traditional images (those that depict or imagine what we perceive), but to images that attempt to depict and imagine concepts. I am completely incapable of imagining such things (although I am familiar with images of fractal equations, for example)." <sup>42</sup>

The study's concluding thought relates to the quote from 1987, in which Flusser (during preparations for the 1989 edition of the book) enthusiastically comments on the computer graphics of the artist working on the cover design: "Now I can finally see mathematical thinking realized in an image!"<sup>43</sup>

The problematization of conceptual and visual expression runs through Galántai's artistic career. Although it arises in different ways, it can still be linked to Flusser's thinking. His mail artworks, in particular, contain many interesting visual motifs and connections.

Other motivations naturally fuelled György Galántai's mail art activities. However, the beneficial tension between physical distance and intellectual and in some cases emotional, closeness is an undeniable element of the practice of "correspondence art." Instead of conceptual "correspondence," the ideas for the 1973 plans for the exhibition "MAIL WORKS", began to take shape, he moved away from conceptual "self-correspondence" and began to build real relationships, thus seeking his way out of the fundamentally closed system of the Kádár era, which had become even more oppressive for him after the closure of his Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár. All this coincided with the founding of Artpool and the beginning of regular collecting. The intertwining of the two is described in the Galántai Lifeworks catalogue as follows:

**"1979, March:** They decided to "institutionalize" their new activity, and set up the Artpool Archive. Galántai designed the Artpool logo, made stamps and a rubber stamp, and printed picture postcards advertising Artpool.

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<sup>42</sup> Irrgang, Daniel: Die Briefe zwischen Vilém Flusser und Felix Philipp Ingold, 1981-1990, *Flusser Studies*, 20, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

For the information of posterity: Up to 1989-90, every unauthorized duplication-printed, mimeographed, Xeroxed or stamped-of the printed word was illegal in Hungary, and was punishable by law. The way to get around the law was to take advantage of the special provisions regulating the reproduction of works of art.

**1979:** the Post Office refuses to deliver to Galántai the registered mail addressed to Artpool. To solve this problem, he asks the Arts Foundation to register Artpool as his professional name in his membership card.

**1979** was the year Galántai started doing mail art; with a few interruptions, he's been doing it ever since. His personal involvement in the network is what guarantees the Artpool Archive's constant growth."<sup>44</sup>

The Artpool collection contains an extremely rich collection of mail art materials, which could be the subject of separate research in their own right. The relationship between text and image in these communications and artistic expressions is remarkable. While Vilém Flusser was polyglot, György Galántai hardly ever used his language skills: mail art might have been to him as a medium of translanguaging, a form of communication that transcends languages. Galántai has been interested in the relationship between visual expression and language since the very beginning of his career. It is worth placing these manifestations in context. Galántai's conceptual art work *Agyféltekék harca* (Battle of the Brain Hemispheres) and its context as presented in Artpool offer a complex interpretation. The graphically designed Gestalt tension, which arises from the discrepancy between the colors of the letters of the words and the colors indicated by their meanings, refers simultaneously to the political environment and the disruption of perception associated with additional knowledge. (It is no coincidence that Galántai collects links to secret agent reports<sup>45</sup> and to art<sup>46</sup> and specific artworks<sup>47</sup> on the page.

## What if...

"The possibility of visual speech, the expression of ideas, the laws of visual thinking and feeling! (...) The preservation of freedom, and if this cannot be guaranteed, the constant search for ways to realize one's own ideas!" (Galántai 1973)<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Galántai-Klaniczay *ibid.* 303-304 or <https://www.galantai.hu/appendix/biography.html>

<sup>45</sup> <https://artpool.hu/veletlen/naplo/0929.html>

<sup>46</sup> <https://artpool.hu/veletlen/naplo/1014.html>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.c3.hu/collection/koncept/footnote/f12.html>

<sup>48</sup> An entry in Galántai's diary 1973, Manuscript

In his work, which shares the same title as this subchapter, Vilém Flusser presents the challenges of the Anthropocene in twenty-two fictional scenes, outlining future scenarios in which he does not make assertions but instead weighs up possibilities and probabilities<sup>49</sup>. It is a fact that a decade earlier, while still in Brazil, Flusser was actively involved in organizing the São Paulo Biennial and drew heavily on the work of conceptual and Fluxus artists. At that time, weighing up possibilities and potentialities was a common phenomenon, which may also have been a source of inspiration.<sup>50</sup>

György Galántai's work finds a rich set of motifs related to the "possible" and the "conceivable." The way he formulates it is an example of a strong intellectual affinity between the philosopher-theorist Flusser and the philosopher-artist Galántai, and the social environment (resistance) may also have played a role in bringing this about.

If we look at the analyses in the previous section, we can also find the "possible" motive in correspondence and relationship-building activities. In the former, time-delayed communication (the different, successive times of writing/receiving/replying to/re-receiving a letter) implies the conditional and the conceivable, since the factors influencing the individual phases are unknown and constantly changing. On Galántai's part, all this is inherent in his definition of connection art as a substitute for mail art and in his subjective chronology<sup>51</sup>, but it is even more evident in the individual exhibitions and collections organized based on calls for submissions<sup>52</sup>. After all, the individual thematic calls for submissions are based on possible, conceivable reactions and responses, but their most important characteristic is not contingency, but connection, relatedness, and conviviality. The collected statements, studies, and documents from contemporaries on the mail art research page evidence this.<sup>53</sup>

In Vilém Flusser's work, the possible is closely linked to thinking about fiction, speculation, and fabulation. I had already been interested in his writings on this subject (there are countless examples, ranging from fictional beings to ontological questions of fiction). However, my interest was further aroused by a related article and the possible connections with Galántai's intellectual tradition. Tom Bieling, in his study "Fact and Fiction: Design as a Search for Reality in the Cycle of Lies," published in the three-part issue of Flusser Studies celebrating the 100th anniversary of Flusser's birth. I quote: "The epistemic potentials of Speculative Design are increasingly

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.flusserstudies.net/tags/angenommen>

<sup>50</sup> Among the many examples of concept art, one of the most exciting was perhaps created in Hungary on the initiative of art historian László Beke, entitled *Elképzelés (Imagination/ Idea)*. Beke did not display the collected A4 sheets filed away in a filing cabinet during the Kádár era at an exhibition; instead, these unique examples of conceptual art could be viewed at his home. <https://artpool.hu/lehetetlen/real-kiall/elkepzeles/beke.html> In book form: <https://hu.tranzit.org/hu/kiadvany/0/publication/imagination>

<sup>51</sup> <https://artpool.hu/MailArt/kronologia/introduction.html>

<sup>52</sup> [https://artpool.hu/events/APS\\_4.html](https://artpool.hu/events/APS_4.html) FMK 1980

<sup>53</sup> <https://artpool.hu/Research/maillartu.html>

recognized within the wider academic sphere, not least in the area of design research. Generally speaking, design wishes to develop (counter) narratives to demonstrate (alternative) proposals for the future and to provide impetus for their implementation. This raises attention to the *discursive*, *critical* and *fictional* practices of design, as its tools and strategies often come along with a narrative, speculative and interrogative design methodology. In recent years, a growing number of research and knowledge fields from within and beyond design research have been devoting themselves to “questioning” design, representing approaches such as "Critical Design", "Speculative Design", "Design for Debate", "Design Fiction", or "Discursive Design" in which it is primarily a matter of underpinning social, cultural, technical or economic controversies and debates with the help of "critical", "speculative" artefacts. These do not necessarily have to be functional, real design objects. Rather, the approach of a critical, speculative design consists in stimulating social discourses with the help of fictitious artefacts.”<sup>54</sup>

I believe that we can form interpretations of György Galántai's works that draw on entirely different contexts if we view them in speculative design. From this vibrant collection of works, I have selected those most relevant to my study's subject: iron sculptures using the sole motif. The artist writes the following in his preface: “The sole (footprint) symbolizes walking. Taking steps: getting around, for, luckily, one does not always use an automobile. (...) The array of meanings, inherent in the footprint – communication, moving ahead, marking time but not going anywhere, etc. – are highly relevant in Hungary, and in fact the world over, today.”<sup>55</sup>

The formal and semantic richness of the objects, playing with the motif and pattern of the sole and the relationship between the two, reveals the infinite possibilities inherent in fiction, speculation, and fabulation. Given the time in which Galántai created them, one cannot separate them from the socio-political environment and the situation of banned or tolerated artists. The sense of weight created by the iron material and the awareness of gravity, as well as the play of abstraction in the form and titles<sup>56</sup> fill the viewer with a tension that is sometimes beneficially liberating, sometimes viscerally painful. An essential element of almost every work is the possibility of movement created by the sight of the base and the sensation it evokes, as a universal allegory of life in a system built on oppression.

Moreover, it is in this universalism that the different paths of Michael Polanyi, Arthur Koestler, Vilém Flusser, and György Galántai, all drawn from similar historical experiences, seem to converge. In developing the concept of tacit knowledge in his theory of scientific thought, Polanyi attached great importance to the belief in commitment to truth and to the intuitive power

<sup>54</sup> Bieling, Tom: Fact and Fiction – Design as a Search for Reality on the Circuit of Lies, *Flusser Studies* 29,

<sup>55</sup> Galántai – Klaniczay ibid. 138. or <https://www.galantai.hu/diary/Objectworks.html>

<sup>56</sup> E.g.: "One-legged" (1975), "Step-Frame" (1983), "In Exile" (1979), "Bureaucratic Step Mobile" (1979) "Splitting" (1979), "Parallel Motion" (1979).

that plays an enormous role in scientific discovery: “Real is that which is expected to reveal itself indeterminately in the future” – he argued.<sup>57</sup> And the discovery of this reality – whether through artistic or scientific means – is, like “all discovery is a remembering of past lives”<sup>58</sup>.

All four of these life's works embody this, especially the areas where they intersect. One of the most important benefits of archival research (especially when the available collections, such as the contents of Artpool Archive, “predetermine” a particular way of seeing things through structuring them, while constantly offering freedom of choice) is the transfer and production of personal knowledge which seems necessary in our telematic society, deeply permeated by digital and artificial intelligence.

The study was conducted with a research grant from the Artpool Foundation in early 2025.

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<sup>57</sup> Polanyi, Michael: *Science, Faith and Society*, The University of Chicago Press, 1964, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Polanyi, Michael: *The Tacit Dimension*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1966, p. 22

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