

SCHOLARSHIP AND THE MEDIUM OF THOUGHT:
ON THE GROWING INTEREST IN COMMUNICATION IN *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* HUNGARY
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Introduction

The various aspects of communication-related problems occupy a central position in Hungarian scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century. This exhilarated attention to the modes, traditions, technologies and the history of communication, as well as to their consequences regarding the history of ideas, the history of style and social history, were present at the same time in the fields of philosophy, classical scholarship, literary theory, history, sociology etc., and contributed significantly with new ideas and insights to all of these disciplines. In the present paper I attempt to sketch some of the leading ideas in this field, and to formulate some hypotheses concerning the origins of the problems characteristic to these areas, and its sociologically relevant context. While an exact answer may elude us when attempting to explain the causes and the validity of István Hajnal's diagnosis, which claims that "it was Hungarian scholarship that brought up the cultural historical problem of literacy, and helped to position it as a fruitful problem in the research on European development" (Hajnal 1993, 444), yet I hope that possible elements of an answer might be fruitfully gestured toward.

It was neither around this specific time, nor in this particular place that matters of communication came into the focus of theoretical attention for the first time. Several problems with respect to writing and its philosophical consequences have been with us ever since the time of the sophists and Plato. Ever since the technology of communication has received immense philosophical attention, especially in times of significant innovations. So questions related to reading, writing and thinking also had a quite successful career in the eighteenth century, when the social and cognitive consequences of a widespread print culture became clearly visible.

In the early decades of the twentieth century the problems pertaining to communication were perceived in Hungary with an exceptional intensity, and one can point out two defining aspects that render this period outstanding when compared to earlier periods. One of these is *concentration*: interest is focussed on the various problems of communication in a way that is easy to localize in both space and time, while in previous instances, attention given to such problems had been typically scattered throughout great spatial and temporal distances. Besides being concentrated, the issues taken up are also *far-reaching*: interest in these problems in this specific period is not confined to the limits of one or two disciplines, but is pervasive in all areas of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Furthermore, there is not only an interest in synthesizing achievements, nor is there merely an elaboration of old insights, but, beyond that, new aspects of old problems are revealed – aspects that have not been perceived before.

I will explore these two phenomena from the vantage points of the sociology of knowledge and that of ideology-critique. The approach of the sociology of knowledge is taken here to mean a *genetic* inquiry: enquiring about the causes that help illuminate why

specific attention is paid to these problems at this particular time, in this particular place and in this particular fashion. Investigating this issue is especially fitting when one seeks to address the question of concentration. The approach of ideology-critique reconstruction – aims to explore the socially relevant meaning of ideas, being in this sense a *hermeneutic* enterprise that enables us in the present context to shed light on the phenomenon of far-reaching. Common to these modes of investigation is the commitment to view and understand thoughts as being socially and historically situated, and in what follows, I attempt to do exactly that as well.

Figures and themes

Before I can begin to satisfy the sociological interest, let me first turn to the central figures and topics that were discussed with a sensitivity to the means and ways of communication. I will introduce how the problems of various media and their uses figured in the work of a philosopher, a classical scholar, a social historian and a literary theorist who have had a lasting influence on their fields of study.

The first noteworthy figure in this respect is the philosopher Melchior Palágyi, who attempted to deal with some questions in the philosophy of knowledge within the framework defined by the history of communication. He begins with pointing out that writing is a precondition of several ideas that have a distinguished role in the history of logic. As he argues, it is inconceivable to distinguish between different kinds of thoughts such as concepts and judgements, and also to discover that judgements arise from the combination of concepts. He further points out that hieroglyphs are not sufficient to take this step forward, and it takes alphabetical writing to reach this insight, because hieroglyphs can represent concepts and judgements as well, so their use does not facilitate drawing this otherwise essential distinction in logic (Palágyi 1904, 13).

The consequences of Palágyi's insight go beyond its direct logical context, because he in fact claims that a technique of communication, namely alphabetical writing, is not only a new way of expressing thoughts, but it also has an influence on the very contents of thought as it makes ideas thinkable that were unthinkable without this technique. And Palágyi (1904, 13) is quite explicit on this count when he emphasizes that it was writing that “made people more attentive” to the workings of the mind.

In this latter, psychological context another suggestion has special relevance. As Palágyi (1904, 30-31) claims, there is a “precise analogy” between silent reading and silent thinking, the former being nothing else than a silent re-thinking a previously fixed “text of ideas”. The central elements of Palágyi's analogy are 1) the motoric functions equally associated to the processes of reading and thinking that are hardly noticeable, and 2) the fact that silent reading and silent thinking are possible only after one has managed to learn reading aloud and thinking out loud. The point is, Palágyi argues, that one has to learn first to associate meaning with audible signs and it becomes possible only after that to revive the same process silently.

As a consequence, our internal, psychological world is not a secretive, private realm that stands opposite to the external world, but it is a product of a process through which

external signs are turned into internal ones. At the end of this process we start to feel so secure and natural in our internal world, that we begin to think that it is a world existing and accessible independently of the external world. And this process is a source of dangerous philosophical illusions that can be grasped as the common error of empiricism and rationalism, namely that they both consider psychological processes as essentially internal, and think that we do not need (external or learned) signs for thinking. Rationalists dream about thinking without signs that arises from “pure reason” hermetically closed from the world of the senses. Empiricists are mistaken because they consider signs to be irrelevant for knowledge, and conclude that impressions arising from the senses are the only condition of knowledge – so much so that they can hardly make a distinction between impression and knowledge.

So, the common error springs from the same source of overlooking the importance of signs for human knowledge, and this mistaken view “has developed under the mystical nature of silent thinking” (Palágyi 1904, 31). This is the source of the idea that the word is only a means of communication between human beings, and that the individual thinker can get along without the use of words. But as there are no relevant psychological and epistemological differences between silent reading and reading aloud, there are equally no such differences between silent thinking and thinking out loud – except for the greater speed and automatism introduced by long practice in these processes.

The historical role Palágyi ascribes to the techniques of reading, writing and thinking has significance in the context of his critique of psychologism. Psychologistic doctrines in various forms had been dominant in epistemology from the time of Descartes and Locke until at least the mid-nineteenth century when they came under attack from various philosophical angles (see Nyíri 1974). A most characteristic feature of psychologistic stances is the divide they presuppose between the cognitive subject and object, the inner and the outer, and thus becomes consciousness the shadow phenomenon of impression arriving from the external world (Palágyi 1904, 46, Palágyi 1902, 3).

From the end of the nineteenth century a new, experimental psychology started to take shape on the basis of this distinction. Lacking its own chairs at universities, the new discipline started to occupy philosophy chairs, and this provoked a fierce reaction among the representatives of the philosophy profession proper (see Kusch 1995). Palágyi took part in the ensuing controversy, and considers the roots of psychologism as reaching to the metaphor of “an inner world” that due to sociological reasons has been overstretched. Under the influence of the natural sciences psychology started to postulate its own sphere of authority and interpreted this metaphor literally as a separate realm of phenomena. Thus the world of human beings has been doubled: it turned into an external world, which is in space-time, where physics is in charge, and an internal world, which is only in time, where psychology is supposed to have authority (Palágyi 1904, 46-47, 214).

In the controversy about psychologism Palágyi sides with anti-psychologism, but at the same time he warns against the dangers of Platonistic tendencies in some versions of anti-psychologism. For example, he welcomes the liberation of logic from under the oppression of psychology, but he would not accept its subsumption under the rule of mathematics (Palágyi 1902, 5, 12), and it is equally unacceptable to create an independent, abstract realm for the laws of logic. This would make those laws unknowable and truth unreachable (Palágyi 1902,

47). This is the spirit in which he criticizes Bolzano and Husserl who claim that the content of our judgements exist independently of anyone ever thinking them. There is a certain independence, Palágyi (1902, 28-29) admits, in the sense that the content remains the same whenever someone thinks it, but without these occasions of thinking them the judgement could not claim validity.

Despite his criticism of Platonistic tendencies, Palágyi's anti-psychologism is beyond doubt. He insists that human thinking and cognition would not be possible without "expressive signs" (Palágyi 1902, 28; 1904, 220-221). In this sense thinking consists in the manipulation of symbols: Palágyi intends to replace the psychologistic account of cognition that builds upon the philosophical illusion of an inner world with a different image of cognition as processing signs. The attention Palágyi turns on the techniques of communication and their psychological and epistemological surroundings thus leads him to unmasking philosophical illusions.

Beginning at the end of the 1910s József Balogh, a classical scholar, started to explore Augustine's work with an attention to its aesthetic and stylistic features, and as a by-product of these investigations he published important contributions on the history of reading aloud. Of central importance for Balogh's understanding of Augustine is his perceived connection between Augustine's conversion, his turn from rhetoric to philosophy, and the development of a new literary style in connection with those conversions. As Balogh believes, a primarily aesthetic investigation of the link between them might provide a deeper understanding of the real origins of Augustine's philosophy. This was the focal point of his investigations which he intended to develop into an overarching interpretation of Augustine's thought, of which, however, only some central fragments have eventually been published.

Balogh's main point is not that Augustine's conversion is linked to the arbitrary creation of a new literary style, but that behind it lay a real and deep conflict between the spoken and the written word, between oral and literal styles of expression, composition and indeed of thought. Augustine's conversion to Catholicism is in significant part an outcome of his rejection of rhetoric in favour of philosophy, which Balogh understood as an aesthetic conflict, and this stylistic turn not only influenced the formal modes of expression, but also his way of thought. As Balogh puts it: "Augustine's real conversion is preceded by a *formal*, so to speak, aesthetic one, which he only subsequently became aware of. Indications of this may be found in a given word or sentence, or in an unusual turn of phrase." (Balogh 1918, 7) Augustine's turn to philosophy opened up a new sphere of experience for him: it was "not sound but feeling that leads him into the new realm" (Balogh 1927, 361). This stylistic conversion was, however, not without problems and was not complete either: As Balogh sees it, Augustine's *oeuvre* as a whole is characterized by the conflict between orality and literacy and its consequences, as well as his nostalgia felt for his former self as rhetorician.

For an illustration of Balogh's core idea one could turn to the interpretation of, and the context Balogh creates for, *Confessiones* 1.16.26 (Balogh 1927, 365). Here Augustine contrasts the beauty of rhetorical words (*vasa lecta atque pretiosa*) and their erroneous content (*vinum erroris*). Balogh shows that this metaphor is deeply rooted in Augustine's thought and reoccurs frequently in various passages (Balogh 1918, 16-18). For example, in *Confessiones* 1.18.29 Augustine complains about obeying the laws of letters and syllables instead of the eternal laws of salvation; in a letter to Licentius he blames him for his rhetorical ideals

compared to which the moral man is diminished (*Letter 26*). Augustine also points out that the simple and concise style of the Bible may seem less appealing to those coming to Christianity with a background in rhetoric (*Catech. rud.* 9, 1 ff). This poses the need for an educational reform that places more emphasis on intellectual content as opposed to the beauty of expression thus making people more sensitive to the spiritual content of real importance. This insight leads Augustine from rhetoric to Christian mysticism, whose symbolic moment is the *tolle lege* scene in *Confessiones*. 8.12.29. For Balogh the act of taking and reading the Bible silently is symbolic both for Augustine's religious as well as stylistic conversion: the mystical experience of religious conversion is also an important moment of turning away from the spoken word (Balogh 1918, 11-14; for a discussion see Simon 2008).

Balogh explores the traces of the oral-literal opposition and its consequences throughout Augustine's work, both for his philosophy and Christianity. For example, he points out Augustine's complaint about his struggles with language in search for appropriate expressions for his new themes. Balogh ascribes this to the fact that the means the oral tradition provides are not suitable for the meanings Augustine intended to convey. For these he needed a different kind of language, a new conceptual scheme which increasingly distanced him from rhetoric and turned his attention to the problems of philosophy. In the course of this stylistic journey he created, as Balogh argues, a new genre which had no predecessor in Latin literature – namely, Latin mystical prose (Balogh 1927, 363; 1918 47-49). This changing perspective explains Augustine's growing dissatisfaction with the contemporary system of education, which was rooted in the requirements posed by oral expression, and which was thus in conflict with his emerging literary cultural ideals. Balogh finds the origins of this conflict in a clash between, on the one hand, the oral-rhetoric tradition in which Augustine was educated, and, on the other, his new experiences originating in private reading practices and a deeply interiorized literacy. In Balogh's interpretation the significance of these and similar topics is that they present orality, rhetoric, and the oral tradition as an obstacle to truth, both in cognitive and moral respects. These must be overcome by setting new stylistic and aesthetic standards in order for the soul to arrive at its proper food, i.e. truth. This is the angle from which Augustine's religious conversion and the development of his thought are said to arise from his gradual conversion to literacy.

While studying these aspects of Augustine's work, Balogh came to realize the central significance of the phenomenon of reading aloud in ancient and medieval culture whose well-known *locus classicus* is in the *Confessiones* 6.3.3 where Augustine reports his surprise upon seeing Ambrose reading silently. Also inspired by reading relevant passages in Nietzsche, Balogh was the first to systematically collect textual evidence on the strength of which he was able to establish conclusively just how widespread and deeply entrenched the habit of reading aloud actually was. As he points out, this fact alone explains why this phenomenon had previously avoided systematic scholarly attention: it was a natural practice at that time that hardly anyone thought to be worthy taking note of. Literary sources reporting a common practice are of course scarce, and it is somewhat easier to find reports on the rare deviating exceptions of someone reading silently. The habit of reading aloud deeply influenced the styles of thought and composition at that time, including those of the *Confessiones* itself (Balogh 1918, 26, 46). As Balogh saw it, this custom produced an orally

based literacy, which prevailed in the ancient and medieval intellectual worlds. Beside its relevance to cultural history, this insight has also proved to be methodologically significant in translating and interpreting certain sentences whose meaning, as Balogh argues, are perceived in a different way if the fact that it had been composed not for the eye but for the ear is taken into due consideration.

István Hajnal's works on the history of writing and its relation to social history had been published from the 1920s onwards. A characteristic feature of Hajnal's early writings is that – up until his *A History of the Modern Age*, published in 1942 – he took the history of writing to be the primary key to solving historical problems. It was such a strong conviction that he initially wanted to write his *A History of the Modern Age* on the foundations of a history of writing. This intention is rather obvious in the eventually unpublished draft introduction of this volume. Hajnal's historical interests in this period are focused the concept of *literacy*: the way in which writing as a technique of recording thoughts plays an ever-increasing part in the organization of society. Writing itself is a mere technique until it is transformed into a highly relevant historical factor when it permeates the life of society in depth.

As Hajnal puts it: "it is not writing in itself that plays the role of an instrument of dynamics and development; it is 'literacy' that has historical importance. That is: when writing truly becomes a means to establish sociological relations. [...] This only happened in the modern age, after centuries of development in the Middle Ages." This perspective of the history of communication provides him with the opportunity to criticize Max Weber's theory of rational organization, which derives the development of modern European societies from a process in which a certain 'spirit', i.e. the spirit of capitalism prevails. Contrary to that, Hajnal maintains that "if we would like to explore the developments in the modern age from the widest, all-encompassing point of view", then we should "investigate the consequences of the techniques of written interaction and thought instead those of a rational spirit. These consequences drive us towards rationalization, but they are not the products of a pervasive spirit." (Hajnal 1993, 34) That is precisely what guarantees the exceptionality of European social development: "writing as we understand it [i.e. as alphabetical writing] has never appeared outside the boundaries of European culture. In all other areas, it was an instrument detached from speech and linguistic thought: it was thinking in pictures, symbols and, finally, syllables." (Hajnal 1993, 33)

The *proliferation* of literacy throughout almost all areas of life triggered a process as a consequence of which "the role, the constitution and the whole concept of the literary-intellectual stratum had been transformed, and it became society itself" (Hajnal 1993, 62). For Hajnal, this process is the defining characteristic of European development, the help of which enabled Europe to reach levels of economic, social and cultural organization that would have been left unattainable in its absence. "Large-scale economic organizational processes are impossible to maintain without writing. The economic instinct is the motivational force that has always been part of the human condition; writing is the sociological element, a novelty attached to the existing forces, developing them and developing itself as well. Even its most primitive form leads to a novel way in which the existing forces can manifest themselves." (Hajnal 1993, 51)

Techniques of writing and literacy are thus not causes that operate only when they emerge, but they have a self-developing character due to their interaction with various social processes. So, the role literacy plays in social development is not only due to its ever-widening application, but **it also depends** on the intensification of its applications. It is not only the extension of literacy to various fields of social organization, from the universities, to governance and economics, that matters, but also the degree to which literacy permeates these fields – not only the breadth but also the depth of literacy should be seen as a driving force.

The expansion of literacy is intertwined with socially relevant processes due to it becoming connected to wider and wider circles of society, and through this process literacy also permeates the modes of thinking. This insight of Hajnal that closely resembles Palágyi's remarks on the matter: people of the antiquities "had essentially been thinking and interacting verbally" (Hajnal 1993, 432), whereas from the Middle Ages onwards, "thinking in writing and reading" (Hajnal 1993, 441) became more and more prevalent. The intellectual consequences of this development are far-reaching. Interiorized literacy makes the objectification of thought possible, thereby enabling us to view our thoughts from an 'external perspective'; it facilitates the emergence of individualism, as "it brings to the surface such human peculiarities that members of a community came to recognize as common general and eternal human characteristics" (18). And it can be generally concluded that without literacy "our civilized life could not have come into being; whatever values humanity has uncovered in emotional, spiritual and material achievements, they all have been accumulated with the help of letters, and they all continued to spread and evolve through them. Human development is fashioned after an entirely different method ever since letters started to conserve (and to refine) each and every thought." (Hajnal 1921, 5.)

Social and intellectual development walk hand in hand in Hajnal's account, with the active participation of literacy as an ever-present and catalyzing factor. Through these insights, the vantage point of the history of communication becomes a necessary element of investigations in the fields of both social and intellectual history – making its recognition probably the most important achievement of Hajnal's intellectual endeavour (for a more detailed discussion see Szirák 2008).

Béla Zolnai's works containing his analyses in poetics, the history of style and aesthetics fall also within the framework that a perspective from the history of communication can provide. Just like Balogh's and Hajnal's contributions, Zolnai's papers started to appear in the 1920s. His interests are demonstrably connected to Balogh's investigations in the history of style and Hajnal's research on the history of writing (Kovács 2006).

Zolnai shares their belief that the techniques of communication and recording thoughts are, stylistically speaking, "formal agents of influence" (Zolnai 1926, 13); moreover, they are agents that shape thinking itself, rendering "the history of writing and intellectual history [to be] parallel phenomena" (Zolnai 1926, 21). Zolnai – in accordance with Hajnal and Palágyi – maintains that writing has an effect on our thinking: "writing (printing) is not a neutral instrument of communicating thoughts. Its mediating presence is felt at every step, sometimes even becoming an aesthetic end in itself." (Zolnai 1926, 56) Writing also plays a part in shaping our worldview: ancient forms of writing are closely tied

to a religious-metaphysical worldview, and only the emergence of alphabetic writing opens up the possibility to draw away from that and push toward "intellectualization and abstraction". Zolnai also suggests that styles of writing and "the spirit of the ages" are closely connected: this connection is made manifest in the general taste and the works of art characteristic to a given era (Zolnai 1926, 13-14, 16).

Zolnai's interest in the history of ideas is, however, rather tangential, his attention being primarily focused on the history of style – just like Balogh's attention in the case of Augustine. The most important organizational principle behind his investigations is the contraposition of the "acoustics" and the "optics of language" (Zolnai 1926, 3). This distinction is clearly motivated by the tension between the spoken and the written word that is commonly alluded to ever since Plato. As for him "literacy is in opposition with spoken language even from a stylistic point of view" (Zolnai 1926, 53), Zolnai is primarily interested in those stylistical characteristics and aesthetic ideals that differentiate between the oral and written techniques of communication.

Parallel to the changing techniques of communication, Zolnai also explores the problem of style in the context of literary history and theory: "if we would like to find theoretical literature on the style of the complex sentence, we are left with no other option than to consult the chapters of older rhetoric and stylistics" (Zolnai 1957, 149). Following Balogh's path, he differentiates between "visual" sentences written for the eye, and "acoustic" sentences that target the ear, and accordingly between poetry for the eye and poetry for the ear. His enquiries regarding the consequences of such a distinction, however, are conducted against a background of literary history that is substantially broader in scope than what Balogh's similar excursions exploited. Zolnai's interests reach from classical stylistic characteristics to the comparative study of baroque and romantic literature (Zolnai 1957, 154, 173), and he explores how various poetic devices fit oral and written stylistic ideals in poetry.

Further examples of similarly inspired investigations could be introduced to illustrate the importance of communication in various fields of contemporary scholarship. The list of emblematic figures would include Béla Balázs, Helga Hajdú, Ede Kallós, Károly Kerényi, Tivadar Thienemann or Nándor Várkonyi among others, but this enterprise would far exceed the limits of the present paper.

The sociological context

Let me now turn to the question whether it is possible to explain why the problems of communication and media gained special importance in the specific period of the early decades of the twentieth century. The growing historical attention is of interest in itself, but as we have seen, there are methodological consequences arising from this attention, as is the case especially in Balogh, Hajnal and Zolnai, and this has been largely missing from earlier enquiries. Communication technologies play a leading role in humanity's development according to Condorcet's philosophy of history, but the need never arises for him to conduct further investigations into social or intellectual history based on this insight. Friedrich Nietzsche laments on the disappearance of the practice of reading aloud in passing remarks,

but never elaborates its consequences for classical scholarship any further. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Gottfried Herder and Nietzsche all disapprove of the current state of book-culture, and find the 'reign of books' worrying – but they all do so without systematically examining the differences between orality and literacy, between oral and written modes of expression, and without taking into account the cognitive and sociological consequences of the shift from orality to literacy and the prevalence of literacy in all areas of life.

Hungarian scholars, however, are not the only ones to show interest in these questions. It may suffice here to refer to Oswald Spengler's philosophy of history and the role writing plays in it. Spengler's explorations proved to be inspirational for Zolnai and to the circle of classical scholars formed around Eduard Norden, to which Balogh was professionally tied to – a connection that loosely tied him to Nietzsche (see Demeter 2004). Bronislaw Malinowski's research on the cognitive consequences of orality in primitive societies is also of relevance, as well as Milman Parry's works that concern themselves with the mnemotechniques used in Homeric epics - and the list could certainly be extended with countless more examples (Malinowski 1924, Parry 1971). Most of these investigations, however, (Malinowski being an obvious exception) do not urge further research based on their primary results, and to draw methodological conclusions from them.

It is worth reminding here that contrary to these tendencies, Balogh was planning to write a comprehensive treatise on the history of style; the examination of the acoustics and optics of language provides a framework for Zolnai's work in literary history and theory, and Hajnal attempted to write about social history based on the history of writing. Palágyi had also formulated his critical remarks towards the psychologistic tendencies of modern philosophy in the frame of the history of communication. Elaborating and extending the insights provided by the history of communication is a defining characteristic of Hungarian cultural history in the period.

What motivated such investigations? The technological advances in the middle of the nineteenth century were signalling the dawn of a new era of communication. The telegraph and the typewriter paved the way for a process in which the word and its context was about to go through swift and radical transformations – a process that was completed by inventions such as the radio, the film, the television, and finally, the computer. On the one hand, the vocal word has regained some of its former importance, while on the other, this new, technically produced "orality" has demonstrably affected grammatical structures, the modes of thinking and expression. These tendencies marked the beginnings of the era of "secondary orality" (following Walter J. Ong's terminology).

Secondary orality is fundamentally different from literacy, but it is not to be equated with the primary orality of pre-literal communities, since "this new orality [...] is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print" (Ong 1982, 136). This renewed importance of the spoken word has served as a catalyst for the rising interest that lies behind the growing need to inquire into mediality. It is worth noting in that respect how Hungary excelled at developing and employing communication technologies at this time, the prime example of which is the work of Tivadar Puskás, who was – to borrow a phrase from Ian Hacking (2006, 28) – a prophet of this process.

These Hungarian investigations can, however, be placed in a different context of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, which could lead us to a further component of a possible explanation besides the catalytic effect of developing communication technologies. This component is to be found in the specific socio-political situation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In an earlier paper, Kristóf Nyíri alluded to the importance of "disturbed communication" as the source of the tension between contemporary philosophies of language (Nyíri 1994, 75). Disturbed communication is not only the consequence of the diversity and coexistence of multiple languages, it is also a corollary of the fact that "extra-linguistic factors have again and again rendered the process of semantic equalization rather difficult".

Among these factors the tension between spoken and written language plays the most important role for our present concerns, for example the fact that it was not the same language that had been used for the purposes of written and oral communication. It may suffice to mention here tensions between various dialects and literary language, or the different national languages and the official language of the Empire. Nyíri partially attributes the lively interest for the philosophy of language in Austrian philosophical circles to this context, though one might even say that this kind of experience could not facilitate interest in such problems only within the borders of Austria – it was manifested in Hungary too. The only difference is that Hungarian interest did not emerge primarily in the field of philosophy – an understandable discrepancy considering the differences between the philosophical cultures of Austria and Hungary (see Demeter 2008). These problems were pressing in the everyday life of the Monarchy, and they plausibly contribute to the explanation of interests – the intensity of which could not be matched by areas where such problems emerged only on the theoretical level, and not in the actual practice of everyday life.

These two elements – technological development and the specific circumstances of communication within the Monarchy – are able to shed light on why Hungarian intellectual life was especially well positioned to tackle such issues; while they also let us grasp why the attention devoted to problems of communication has transcended disciplinary boundaries. There is, however, one further component one needs to consider when taking account of the interdisciplinary nature of these investigations, and it stems from the conservative image of man characteristic of Central-European thought. Kristóf Nyíri has argued that a strong orientation to conservative anthropology is present in Austro-Hungarian philosophies. This orientation can situate local intellectual achievements in a coherent narrative and this may also explain the ideological background against which contemporary interest in problems of communication and mediality can plausibly be positioned (Nyíri 1986).

The most striking feature of this interest from this perspective is the way the authors discussed above turn with great nostalgia towards vocal speech, and contrast it with the mechanization of the word. Balogh, for instance, turns back to the centuries of reading aloud, for he takes silent reading to be the product of a technology that ultimately smothers language through its mechanical connections: "This process of mechanization has begun with the invention of the printing press, and has gone on undeterred to the present day. The mechanization of written and oral human word has at its disposal the writing-, dictating- and speaking-machines, on the one hand; and the telegraph, the telephone and 'Broadcasting' on the other. A special place is guaranteed for the cinematograph, which not only displaces the stage, but functions as a book-surrogate in many respects as well." (Balogh 1926)

Palágyi also promulgates the superiority of the vocal word by saying: "We, so-called 'modern people', are enamoured with our steam engines, our telegraphs and telephones that, as the saying goes, vanquish all distance on the face of the Earth. But what are these inventions altogether, when contrasted with our words that vanquish the distance of time between us, connecting generations of millennia through the electric currents of the spirit! Should we call our speech an invention, it would be the greatest of all our inventions, since this is the one thing that makes it possible for us to have inventions in the first place." (Palágyi 1904, 84-85.) And Zolnai is also frequent in letting his nostalgia shine through when he is talking about the displacement of spoken word by writing, and the modern culture under the sign of the dead word, or when he voices his complaint that in the present we tend to talk as if we were reading. At other times, he turns with sympathy towards the rules of classical sentence construction, and refers us to consult authors that belonged to the classical, oral-rhetorical culture when we attempt to lay the foundations for a theory of complex sentences. Zolnai's paragraphs strongly suggest that he takes vocal language to be under the oppression of writing, and his own ideal is much closer to orality than it is to some exaggerated and anarchistic typography (i. e. Zolnai 1926, 7, 12, 23).

A similar kind of nostalgia is easily discernible in Hajnal's writings as well: "the true intellectual of the day almost only takes part in direct personal interactions accidentally, he is much more defined by his electric connections to cultural down-trickling. The fatal extremes of his position are mocked with bitter irony by Nietzsche" (Hajnal 1993, 33-34). Hajnal puts it differently on another occasion: "The interactional instrument of writing is already in the age of full maturity; it has absorbed everything that has formerly been the property of vocal language. [...] In this age of maturity the one-sided role of literacy has to come to an end. [...] Orality is once again what we desire, the possible elimination of writing; spontaneity is the main value, in both art and life." (Hajnal 1998, 202)

This nostalgia provides the framework for the thought processes and interests of our heroes, and this is the link that connects them to the tradition of conservative anthropology. It is not necessarily political conservatism, although it is certainly not an exaggeration to state even that in the case of Balogh (Frank 2005). More importantly though, it is *anthropological conservatism*: adherence to an image of man that takes traditions and customs to be necessary, desirable and valuable parts of human life; that is sympathetic to organic development and the natural in general; and that is averse to artificiality.

The above expressions of nostalgia convey precisely these sentiments. For Balogh, the process of the mechanization of the word means distancing it from its natural origins, while the declining importance of classical educations in the wake of secondary orality represents a loss of important values for him. Palágyi embeds the problem of reading and writing into his criticism of psychologism's liberal anthropology, the one that understands man to be a consciously acting agent who is the absolute ruler of his mental realm; a conception against which he emphasizes that cognition is maintained and transmitted through signals (through language), and is therefore bound to a community.

The central concept of Hajnal's social historical approach based on communication technologies is "habituality": communication technologies can only be seen as true instruments of shaping and moulding society and thought once their use becomes habitual and gets embedded into everyday practice. This is an organic process that cannot be guided

artificially, and that is an ineliminable part of the lives of the community and the individuals. Zolnai's ideal of style, as it is evident from his aversion towards *avant-garde*, is classical, very much in the vein of Balogh's (or it can be said to lean towards natural-oral modes of expression). These sympathies and aversions constitute possible vantage points from which the significance of the interest regarding communication in the context of the history of ideas could be explored.

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