

# Continuity or Incompatibility? A Comparative Study Between Sámuel Brassai's and István Angi's Theory of Aesthetics

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**ABSTRACT** – Sámuel Brassai (1797-1897) was a Transylvanian polymath, whose first essays on aesthetics were published in 1832, in the weekly newspaper *Nemzeti Társalkodó* in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca). As an active chamber musician, music critic and encyclopaedic thinker, Brassai supported his aesthetical assumptions with the help of fine arts, music and literature. Although there are only few publications on aesthetics in his oeuvre, it is essential to know them, because they have certainly influenced his work as a music critic. Over a century later, István Angi (1933-2020), founder of the Cluj school of musical aesthetics, published the prototype theory of his grotesque-transcendent axis system in 1970 in the journal *Utunk*. As a professor at the Conservatory of Music in Cluj-Napoca, he presented his aesthetic system in a two-volume course entitled *Prelegeri de estetică muzicală* [*Lectures on Musical Aesthetics*], 2004, and is also the author of numerous volumes and articles in Romanian and Hungarian. The article presents the views of these two prominent and beloved scholars of the treasure-city, emphasizing their philosophical roots and directions of their ideas; their attitude towards beauty in aesthetics; their interpretations of the relationship between reality and ideal. In light of these considerations, I seek to answer whether Brassai's assumptions, questions and concepts find continuity in the theory of István Angi's system of aesthetics.

**Keywords:** Sámuel Brassai, István Angi, aesthetics, Cluj-Napoca.

## 1. Introduction

The intellectual heritage of István Angi (1933-2020), former professor at the “Gheorghe Dima” National Academy of Music, continues to be preserved and revived within the

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framework of the institution's courses on aesthetics. Being formed at Academy in the spirit of the Cluj school of musical aesthetics created by Angi, I undertook to study his Hungarian volumes in my master's thesis defended in 2022.<sup>1</sup> This earlier work on aesthetics inspired me to take a further look at the aesthetical treatises of the Transylvanian scholar and music critic Sámuel Brassai, the protagonist of my current doctoral dissertation. Therefore, this paper primarily focuses on Brassai's treatises which are less known to the general public, beginning with exploring his intellectual environment prior to those being published, his possible documentary sources, followed by an exploration of his direction and methodology in aesthetics, and an overview of the research history and contextualisation of his work.

The further part of this study explores the theoretical core of István Angi's aesthetic system and the recurrent leitmotifs in his writings. The 90th anniversary of Angi's birth affords an opportunity to draw parallels between these two milestones in Transylvanian aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Both were long-lived music enthusiasts with excellent pedagogical sense, connected within the cultural horizon of the treasure-city, Cluj-Napoca.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Sámuel Brassai

Sámuel Brassai (1797/1800<sup>4</sup>-1897) was born into an educated Unitarian pastor's family in Torockószentgyörgy (today Colțești, Romania), located 60 kilometres from Kolozsvár<sup>5</sup> (today Cluj-Napoca, Romania). According to the educational system of his time, he graduated from the philosophy class at the Unitarian College in Cluj.<sup>6</sup> Due to his financial situation he did not apply to university, instead he continued to study languages and sciences individually and with great

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<sup>1</sup> Back in 2020, when I realized the entering project for master's studies, professor Angi was highly delighted by the topic and offered his help by sending me the manuscript/scanned versions of his volumes.

<sup>2</sup> For a comparative study over the lives and careers of István Angi and Sámuel Brassai see also: Csákány, "Brassai Sámuel és Angi István...".

<sup>3</sup> Cluj-Napoca, also referred to as the "treasure city" (*kincses város*) in Hungarian. (t.n.).

<sup>4</sup> The date of Brassai's birth is uncertain. In 1897, Brassai told his first biographer, László Kóváry, that his birth date of 13<sup>th</sup> February 1800 was actually 15<sup>th</sup> June 1797. Nevertheless, most of the literature refers to the initial date of his birth. See: Kóváry, *A száz évet élt Dr. Brassai Sámuel pályafutása és munkái*, 6; Fitz, *Brassai Sámuel. Monográfia*, 164.

<sup>5</sup> In the section of this paper concerning Brassai and the 19th Century I will refer to the city Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca] as „Cluj”.

<sup>6</sup> According to the school system of the time, he attended a poetry class from 1813, the literature class from 1820, and finished the philosophy class at the age of 24. In Boros, *Dr. Brassai Sámuel élete*, 46, 53, 54.

diligence.<sup>7</sup> His familiarity with all the sciences, which is a tribute to his thirst for knowledge and his talents, is based on his rich bibliographical background.

Library work and books were his lifelong passion. An early excellent source of reference was his father's library, which he organised thematically at the age of sixteen.<sup>8</sup> He did the same in 1822 when he organised József Wesselényi's library in Zsibó [today Jibou, Romania], as attested by the manuscript library catalogue written in German language.<sup>9</sup> The Wesselényi library could have been a possible and rich source for the young scholar, thus its catalogue contains a list of volumes on aesthetics and philosophy.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, at that time the Lyceum-library was available in Cluj, where Brassai could get to works of ancient thinkers and poets – who had a strong influence on him – such as Cicero, Horace, Sophocles, Virgil, and titles as *Commentaries on the Writings of Aristotle* (A. Columna, 1500), *Commentaries on the Iliad of Homer* (C. Joachim, 1538).<sup>11</sup> His estate's catalogue of his personal collection<sup>12</sup> also includes titles of several philosophical textbooks.

Brassai's academic advance was greatly assisted by the fact that, after finishing his studies at the Unitarian College, he became a tutor and piano teacher for aristocratic families.<sup>13</sup> Although he was taught to play the piano for a few months as a child<sup>14</sup>, and also became a student for a short time at the Cluj Music Association [Kolozsvári Muzsikai

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<sup>7</sup> According to Kőváry's monograph (*A száz évet élt Dr. Brassai Sámuel pályafutása és munkái*, 8), Brassai studied at home in Torockószentgyörgy during his first twelve years. His father taught him to think independently, to develop problem-solving skills (pointing out his mistakes and allowing him to find the right solution on his own), which may have laid the basis for Brassai's heuristic teaching methods. See also: Nagy, "Kognitív szempontok Brassai gondolkodásában", 126-128.

<sup>8</sup> Although he had been a student at the Unitarian College in Cluj since 1813, the famine that began in 1816 meant that Brassai was taken home by his father to his native house. It was during his time at home that he could be able to organise the library. He returned to Cluj-Napoca two years later. In: Boros, *Dr. Brassai Sámuel élete*, 50; 52.

<sup>9</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Attila István Kárpáti, PhD from the National Archives in Budapest for his kind help and assistance, for sharing his digitized archival materials and for drawing my attention to the correct date of the Wesselényi library's indexing (1822), thus to the inaccurate dates given by Brassai's monographers. For Attila Kárpáti's extensive research on Miklós Wesselényi and Cluj-Napoca, please consult: Kárpáti, *Wesselényi Miklós kapcsolatrendszere*; Kárpáti, "A Kolozsvári Casino története az alapítástól 1848-ig"; Kárpáti, "A Wesselényi-emléktábla története"; Kárpáti, "Wesselényi Miklós és Pataki József 1814. évi útinaplója". See also: Csetri, "Reform és gazdaság...".

<sup>10</sup> The nearly 100-page index is organised thematically as follows: I. Philology; II. Mathematics; III. Natural Sciences IV. History, Geography; V. Philosophy; VI. Law; VII. Theology; VIII. Aesthetics.

<sup>11</sup> György, *A kolozsvári római katolikus Lyceum-könyvtár története 1579-1948*, 11-12.

<sup>12</sup> Catalogue available in the Hungarian Unitarian Church Archives in Kolozsvár.

<sup>13</sup> He was a tutor at Károly Bethlen's (1823-1829) and later at József Bethlen's (1829-1834). Boros, *Dr. Brassai Sámuel élete*, 56.

<sup>14</sup> Data recorded from Brassai's recollections. Boros, *Dr. Brassai Sámuel élete*, 46.

Egyesület] – later the Cluj Music Conservatory [Kolozsvári Muzsikai Conservatorium]<sup>15</sup>, still he mainly studied music on his own, as he loved it to the point of passion.<sup>16</sup> Being fascinated by music and arts, as a teacher he could read, learn and enjoy all those benefits of the aristocratic environment.

## **2.1. Brassai's Aesthetical Treatises.<sup>17</sup> An Overview**

The two essays on aesthetics published in 1832 marked Brassai's first appearance in the literary journalism in Cluj. Both of them were written in Hungarian language and printed in the weekly journal *Nemzeti Társalkodó*: “On delight caused by viewing or hearing beautiful artwork”<sup>18</sup> and “On delight caused by beautiful artwork”<sup>19</sup>.

He affirmed that these treatises were the result of twelve years of induction (art enjoyment). Extracting the main principles of his treatises (as numbered below), we could predictably conclude that it was aesthetics through which he could prove best his philosophical convictions.

### 1) Self-consciousness – perception of artwork

Brassai began his very first treatise by remarking that he had not created an aesthetic system, but rather hoped that “perhaps a Virgil eye discovering the pearl among the rubbish would add to it others, more beautiful ones”<sup>20</sup>. He therefore sees his own work as a point of reference. The essay's direction follows his philosophical convictions, being

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<sup>15</sup> In the academic year of 1820-21, he was a student in the wind section of the Music Association of Cluj [Kolozsvári Muzsikai Egyesület], and in 1822 he also played at a performance of Mozart's *Requiem* given by the same association in honour of the death of its former patron, György Bánffy. Sófalvi, *Zeneoktatás a kolozsvári Muzsikai Conservatoriumban: 1819-1869 között*, 71; Sófalvi, “Bánffy György, a Kolozsvári Muzsikai Egyesület első védnöke”.

<sup>16</sup> This passion later led to the practice of music criticism and the founding of the Cluj Music Society [Kolozsvári Zenetársaság].

<sup>17</sup> Main bibliographical titles that concern Brassai's aesthetical treatises: Gál, “Brassai mint philosophus. I. Aesztetikai munkássága”; Kozma, *Brassai Sámuel, mint aesthetikus és műkritikus*; Fitz, *Brassai Sámuel. Monográfia*; Jánosi, “A lélektani aesthetica úttörői Magyarországon”; Jánosi, “Brassai a művészi hatás okairól”; Pauler, “Brassai Sámuel esztétikája”; Mikó, *Az utolsó erdélyi polihisztor...*; Nagy, *A Magyar Esztétika Történetéből...*

<sup>18</sup> First part: W., “A gyönyörűségről, melyet a szépművek szemlélése és hallása okoz bennünk”, 161-170; Second part: W., “A gyönyörűségről, melyet a szépművek szemlélése és hallása okoz bennünk. Második értekezés (Végzet)”, 177-184. In the following referred to as W., “A gyönyörűségről [...]”, I/1 and I/2.

<sup>19</sup> First part: W., “A szépművek által okozott gyönyörűségről”, 49-63; Second part: W., “A szépművek által okozott gyönyörűségről. Második értekezés (Végzet)”, 65-80. In the following referred to as W., “A szépművek [...]”, II/1 and II/2.

<sup>20</sup> W., “A gyönyörűségről [...]”, I/1, 161.

grounded in the only certain knowledge: in *self-consciousness*, which comes from the awareness of human existence.<sup>21</sup>

Firstly, he establishes *self-consciousness* in three necessary conditions,<sup>22</sup> and deduces the main problem of his aesthetics from the last condition: “To see or hear a beautiful artwork and to understand the sense of delight that flows from it, to be able to explain its causes”<sup>23</sup>. Consciousness, from where he unfolds his aesthetics, means the simultaneous presence of object and subject in front of the “I/self”, because one perceives and experiences the object as well as the effect itself. Thus, after initially failing to discover the sense of beauty either in imitation or in idealization, Brassai rejects searching for delight in the object. He proposes the inductive method instead, such as focusing on the subject’s (human) impression and emotions caused by an artwork. His writing hits the empirical tone, searching for beauty and value based on perceptual judgement, on the sense of delight.

Brassai only considers artificial, artistic beauty in order to find the cause of beauty, distinguishing it from the natural beauty that is independent of it and less stimulating.

## 2) Faculty of imagination

Brassai searches for the cause of delight/pleasure in the concept of imagination, which have played an important role in the 18th century English tradition as well (Addison, Lock, Hume). On the other hand, his fundamental idea is Kantian,<sup>24</sup> he applies Kant’s principle of the genesis of the imagination (*any image* results from the combination of the object’s effect and our mental activity) to define the sense of delight. Kant also considered the imagination a distinctive faculty of the soul, active in generating scientific judgements and aesthetic pleasure.<sup>25</sup> Brassai concludes, that the sense of delight, similarly to imagination, results from the combination of the object’s effect (work of art) and our mental activity, those linked to the faculty of imagination<sup>26</sup>: the faculties of perception, representation, fantasy and association (ability to connect images).

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<sup>21</sup> Brassai, *Az igazi pozitív philosophia*, 6-7.

<sup>22</sup> The first two conditions are: 1) To see the external and internal reasons for action; 2) To learn and to bring knowledge into proportion with the whole of the sciences and with the existing knowledge “1) *A cselekvés külső és belső indokló okait átlátni*; 2) *Tanulni és a tudást a tudományok egészével és a meglévő tudással arányba hozni*”. W., “A gyönyörűségről [...]”, I/1, 162.

<sup>23</sup> “*A szépmívet látni vagy hallani s az abból folyó gyönyörűség érzését felfejteni, okairól magának számat adni tudni*”. W., “A gyönyörűségről [...]”, I/1, 162.

<sup>24</sup> „According to Brassai, the three principal faculties of the soul are work, self-consciousness and free will. Kant says it is the faculty of perception, the faculty of delight and pain, and the will”. In: Fitz, *Brassai Sámuel. Monográfia*, 98.

<sup>25</sup> Munro and Scruton, “Aesthetics”.

<sup>26</sup> Descartes (1618) also suggests that music requires imaginative activity on the part of the listener. Kant extends this theory to knowledge itself, which also depends on imagination. Goehr, Sparshott, Bowie, and Davies, “Philosophy of music”.

Mental work is essential in causing the sense of delight, because “the work of art can never give the real object in its entirety”, considered Brassai. The enjoyer needs to complete the artistically described object by their experiences and links of *associations* (mental work), making the artwork lifelike, forming thus a *perfect* mental image for themselves (*illusion*).<sup>27</sup> “The delight of hearing or seeing a work of art is caused by: the voluntary [willing] work of our soul, which, by adding to the features of the work of art according to our own sensibility, forms for the subject a perfect image”<sup>28</sup>.

In 1871 he restated his conclusions unchanged: “the delight/pleasure of enjoying a masterpiece consists in the activity [imagination, association, illusion] if you like, of the intellectual faculties of the enjoyer, as a result of the work itself”<sup>29</sup>.

### 3) Mental work – creation

In his second treatise called “On delight caused by the beautiful artwork”, Brassai studied the quantity of delight one could experience in different artistic fields. He concluded that the more mental work an artwork requires, the more delight it is capable of producing.<sup>30</sup> In opposition to poetry and fine arts (which leave space for association and imagination), he did not come to a positive conclusion about music. He said, that “the notes of music – the sounds arranged in melody and harmony – have such a magical effect that they leave for the most of us little room for our own work”<sup>31</sup>.

The generally central concept of his aesthetic related writings is *work*, especially the “work of the soul” (the *creation* and the *perfection* that results from it). According to Brassai, the mental work of the creator, interpreter and preceptor is in essence identical, even though it’s not equal in extent.<sup>32</sup> “The dramatist, the composer is as much the creator of the suggestions made by their ideas as the actor, the musician, the performer, is the creator of the effect they produce”<sup>33</sup>. The enjoyer becomes a creator through the work of perceiving, through imagination. In the triad of the creator-performer-enjoyer of art, Brassai shows a modern way of thinking and draws attention to the *active* viewer/listener.

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<sup>27</sup> Brassai seeks artistic effect in disappointment. Every work of art is a disappointment in the face of reality, and therefore encourages our soul to complement (to work) this effect with its experience of reality. Jánosi, “Brassai a művészi hatás okairól”, 202.

<sup>28</sup> Original citation: “*A szépművek hallásából vagy látásából származó gyönyörűséget okozza: Lelkünknek az az önkéntes munkássága, mely a szép-műv által érzékenységünk elébe állított vonásokat kiegészítve, magáinak egy tökéletes képet alkot*”. See: W., “A gyönyörűségről [...]”, I/2, 181-182.

<sup>29</sup> Original citation: “*A mesterművek élvezetebeli gyönyör átalában véve az élvező szellemi tehetségeinek a mű által ébresztett működésében – ha úgy tetszik: „tevellésében” vagy „ténykedésében áll*”. Brassai, “Burns olvasása után”, 234.

<sup>30</sup> W., “A szépművek [...]”, II/2, 69-73.

<sup>31</sup> In opposition to Brassai “Diderot (1751) set music highest among the arts [...], because musical relationships are perceived directly and not mediated through interpretation of content, so that music gives imagination more freedom”. Goehr, Sparshott, Bowie, and Davies, “Philosophy of music”.

<sup>32</sup> W., “A szépművek [...]”, II/2, 76.

<sup>33</sup> Brassai, “Munkaosztás elve az esztetikában”.

His interest is also extended to the “fashionable” problems of his time, such as the cult and phenomenon of *genius*. He notes three elements needed for a genius: talent (that can be found in everyone), condition (focusing the talent to a single discipline), and *work*.

#### 4) Value

His view on aesthetics and beauty is not only influenced by the humanities, literature and art history. In his 1858 series of articles on the division of labour in aesthetics (“Munkosztás elve az aestheticában”), he applies to aesthetics the economist-philosopher Adam Smith’s principle of the division of professions.<sup>34</sup> He argues, in terms of judgement and value, that the division of artistic labour – specialisations applied in sciences – would not reduce but increase the value of fine arts and the number of masterpieces by concentrating the potential of genius to a single department of art.<sup>35</sup>

#### 5) Will

By being convinced that the general cause of delight is our soul’s voluntary [willing] work, the ramifications of Brassai’s aesthetics lead back to the *origo* of his philosophy: the self-consciously driven “active/willing self”. *Will* has the power over mental work, and that is what Brassai later considers the basis of his positive philosophy (1895). The highest quality of the human soul is will: will is power, and power is a form of the divine.<sup>36</sup>

Brassai’s first articles in aesthetics were still echoless after releasing them to the public. This can be explained by the fact that on the one hand there was no strong interest in aesthetics in Cluj at that time, but on the other hand the journal probably did not reach the hands of those offering potential feedback. The *Nemzeti Társalkodó* represented a local, narrow circle of intellectuals, as its slightly ironic front page suggests: “Written by the readers”. Brassai republished his treatises in 1859 in the *Szépirodalmi Közlöny* in Pest, and after another two decades they appeared again in German translation by Hugo Meltzl in the 1877-78 volumes of the *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok* [*Comparative Literature Papers*].<sup>37</sup>

### 2.1.1. Philosophical roots

Brassai initiates a paradigm shift by looking at the work of art from the perspective of the enjoyer exploring *delight*.<sup>38</sup> His inductive ambitions can be traced back to the 18th century

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<sup>34</sup> Adam Smith wrote about the division of labour in his volume called *The Wealth of Nation* (London, 1776).

<sup>35</sup> Brassai, “Munkaosztás elve az aestheticában”.

<sup>36</sup> Parászka, “Dr. Brassai Sámuel”, 96.

<sup>37</sup> *Összehasonlító Irodalomtörténeti Lapok* (1878-1888) edited by Sámuel Brassai and Hugo Meltzl. Starting from 1879 the journal changed its name to *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*.

<sup>38</sup> Dubos, Lambert and Montesquieu were less concerned with the definition of beauty, and were mainly interested in what happens in the mind and body of the enjoyer when they contemplate a pleasant object. Tsien and Morizot, “18th Century French Aesthetics”.

British philosophical tradition, to which Henry Home, Lord Kames (1695-1782) gave the psychological direction.<sup>39</sup> Brassai certainly encountered Home's writings, since his *Elements of Criticism* is mentioned in his article "Classicism and Romanticism", in 1856.<sup>40</sup> His second treatise on aesthetics mentions John Locke linked to the theory of association, which proves Brassai's source. The analysis of the phenomenon of perception, which is also prominent in Brassai's theory, became dominant in British philosophy in the works of Locke and Hume. The sense of delight derived from the work of the soul, where Brassai's treatise eventually leads to, had previously been discussed by the Abbot Jean-Baptiste Dubos, the source of Lessing, who was much cited by Brassai.<sup>41</sup>

## **2.2. Major research background to Brassai's aesthetical merits**

The Brassai – researcher Kelemen Gál wrote a series of articles called "Brassai, as a philosopher", published in 1898-1899 in the unitarian journal *Keresztény Magvető* in Cluj. Gál noticed, that Brassai's aesthetic thinking is based on the principle of association, and also that despite the blossoming deductive philosophical spirit of his time, Brassai considered aesthetics to be an inductive discipline.<sup>42</sup>

The Hungarian academician Béla Jánosi did not mention Brassai's publications on aesthetics in his three-volume *History of Aesthetics* (1899-1901), so it proved to be forgotten in the Hungarian public domain. However, in his academical inaugural in Budapest (1916), Jánosi already included in his talk the uniqueness and value of Brassai's modern way of thinking, and was the first to refer to him as a pioneer of psychological aesthetics in Hungary.<sup>43</sup>

The essay he wrote in the following year "Brassai on the causes of artistic effects" (1917), summarises in five essential points the significance of Brassai's aesthetical approach. In addition to the theory of association and the use of the inductive method, previously emphasised by Kelemen Gál (1898), he considers as essential:

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<sup>39</sup> Fitz, *Brassai Sámuel. Monográfia*, 99.

<sup>40</sup> Brassai, "Classicismus és Romanticismus".

<sup>41</sup> Jánosi, "A lélektani aethetica úttörői Magyarországon", 17. See also: Gál, "Fitz József, Brassai Sámuel", 258-260.

<sup>42</sup> Brassai was not concerned about defining the "beautiful", nor did he seek the beautiful in the object, but rather he investigated the cause of the sense of delight a work of art evokes, starting from the subject who observes/lives it. Gál illustrates Brassai's significance ahead of his time by juxtaposing his principles, published in his writings of 1832, with Károly Pekár's *Positive Aesthetics* (1897) and Gustav T. Fechner's *The Aesthetic Association Principle* [*Das Associationsprincip in der Aesthetik*, 1866], based on experiments in association. See Gál, "Brassai mint philosophus. I. Aesthetikai munkássága", 69.

<sup>43</sup> Before coming to this conclusion, Jánosi also examined the works of Brassai's contemporaries (István Nyíri, Camill Körmendi, Fidél Briedl, Sámuel Kőteles, Izidor Guzmich, Pál Hunfalvy). Jánosi, "A lélektani aethetica úttörői Magyarországon", 13-17.

- the introduction of psychological aesthetics into Hungarian aesthetics;
- the recognition of the active listener;
- the emergence of the theory of illusion, which brought Brassai closer to the explanation and confirmation of his hypothesis.

Concerning psychological aesthetics, Alajos György Szerdahely (1740-1808)<sup>44</sup> had sought to base aesthetics on empirical foundations, primarily on the Baumgartenian model (*Aesthetik von Unten*), but Béla Jánosi does not attribute representative psychological significance to his considerations. The psychological line initiated by Brassai was continued in the late aesthetic system of Ágost Greguss (son of aesthetician Mihály Greguss).<sup>45</sup>

Piroska Balogh and Botond Csuka's study "Aesthetics in Hungary: Traditions and Perspectives" shows that aesthetics was taught in historical Hungary as a universal science [university aesthetics], and therefore from the beginning it had a transdisciplinary character, "dealing with the whole sphere of humanity", and was intertwined with literature and classical philosophy.<sup>46</sup> In this regard, Brassai's aesthetic initiative was not far from the universal spirit of the Hungarian aesthetic tradition; yet he rejected to follow the Western speculative-flow in vogue. His contemporaries had little influence on him, perhaps not only because of his maverick scholarly attitude, but also because of the peripheral location of Cluj. From the isolated aristocratic environment, he could have a relatively objective view of the currents raging in the cultural capitals.

### 3. István Angi

István Angi<sup>47</sup> (1933-2020), similarly to Brassai, wasn't originally rooted in Cluj-Napoca, as he was born in Ozsdola (today Ojdula, Romania), close to Kézdivásárhely (Tîrgu Secuiesc, Romania). He studied at the Conservatory of Music in Cluj-Napoca from 1953 to 1958, and has been the institution's professor from 1958 until the very end of his life, the autumn of 2020.<sup>48</sup> From 1963 he spent three years at the Moscow University of

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<sup>44</sup> The first Hungarian professor of aesthetics. His main work was written in Latin, see: Szerdahely György Alajos: *Aesthetica, sive doctrina boni gustus* (I-II, Budae, 1778; Hungarian edition by János Szép, 1794). See also: Szerdahely, *Szerdahely Esztétikai írásai: I. Aesthetica (1778)*.

<sup>45</sup> Gál, "Brassai Sámuel", 140; Jánosi, "A lélektani aesthetica úttörői Magyarországon", 17.

<sup>46</sup> Balogh and Csuka, "Aesthetics in Hungary: Traditions and Perspectives", 8.

<sup>47</sup> István Angi wrote numerous books and articles in Hungarian and Romanian. Volumes in Hungarian: *Zene és esztétika; Az esztétikum zeneisége; Zeneesztétikai előadások I-II; A zenei szépség modelljei. Zenetudományi írások; Értéktől jelentésig; A harmónia marad; A megérintett szép továbbgondolásai*. Volumes in Romanian: *Prelegeri de estetică muzicală I-II; Fotografii la minut din atelierele compozitorilor clujeni; Site de in. Scrieri despre muzică; Cornel Țăranu. Mărturisiri mozaicate. Studii și eseuri; Divertismente. Eseuri*.

<sup>48</sup> Pușcaș, "Ștefan Angi. Hominaticum Magistri", 80. See also: Șuteu and Banciu, "Angi, Ștefan [Angi István]".

Philosophy, where he defended his doctoral thesis on *Music and Affectivity*. During his studies in Moscow, he was influenced by the Hegelian and Kantian traditions, as one of his teachers V. F. Asmus was Kantian in his ideologies, but M. F. Ovsyannikov a Hegelian. They had a great influence on him, as had the heirs of the Kantian and Hegelian leading spirits of the 20th century Western tradition of aesthetics, Theodor Adorno and Georg [György] Lukács. Angi published a comparative essay on Adorno and Lukács, which can be found in his very first volume, *Zene és Esztétika [Music and Aesthetics]*, 1975.<sup>49</sup> This book, being the author's first appearance, already presents a model of his grotesque-transcendental axis system of aesthetics. The prototype of this model was published back in 1970 in the journal *Utunk* under the title "The dialectic of aesthetics in the light of philosophical booklets"<sup>50</sup>.

### **3.1. The grotesque-transcendental axis system of aesthetics**

Angi's aesthetical category system is a dynamic axis system of the artistic particular, with a double opening towards the two poles, the singular and the universal. The space of manifestation of the particular is thus between the grotesque singular and the transcendental general. The grotesque belongs to the real, it is the ideal's opposite.

The aesthetical categories are essential moments between the two poles, the real and ideal. The centre of the axis represents balance (gives the category of beautiful and ugly), towards the two poles comes the quantitative *exaggeration* (sublime-base) and *conflict* (tragic-comic). In the case of aesthetic categories, the author follows the Hegelian dialectic: all categories open to both poles of the axis, all have an antipolar category. The beautiful is constant and stable, the comic and the tragic determine the direction of the categories' evolution.<sup>51</sup>

Balance, that is, *beautiful* on the grotesque-transcendental axis, has a reduced oscillation between tranquillity and restlessness. In artistic language, it manifests itself in small forms because of the short life of balance: chamber music, the sonnet. The absence of balance makes the category of *ugly*. The beautiful is the present form of the aesthetic particular and not the direction of its development, which is found in the moments of tragedy or comedy. The two extremes, the *tragic* and the *sublime* are much more often represented in works of art, which is explained by the practice of aesthetics, the aspiration of the beautiful towards even more beautiful, the evolution of the beautiful through contrast. The essence of aesthetic stands in the dialectical relationship between reality and

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<sup>49</sup> Angi, "Két kategóriarendszer margójára" in *Zene és esztétika*, 123-142.

<sup>50</sup> Angi, "Az esztétikum dialektikája a filozófiai füzetek fényében", 2.

<sup>51</sup> Angi, "Az esztétikum groteszk-transzcendens tengelyrendszere" in *Zene és esztétika*, 111-122.

ideal, the internal battle, therefore the system's central category is *mutual conditioning*.<sup>52</sup> It doesn't directly denote the content of the categorical judgment (beautiful, sublime), but rather the relationship, the ratio between these values.

### 3.1.1. Reflecting philosophical traditions

The axiological orientation of the Cluj-Napoca school of philosophy, founded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by Károly Böhm – university professor in Cluj between 1896-1911 – could have been an influence for Angi's aesthetical system. The polarity, the opposing and complementary relationship of aesthetical categories in his system finds its roots in the impulse-horseshoe theory of Károly Böhm, presented in Angi's article over the history of aesthetics in Transylvania.

And because of that in any form of the emotion there lies the seed of the opposite emotion too, but with the opposite power relation; if this counter-seed blossoms, then the dominant emotion is annihilated or suppressed, since opposite emotion pairs completely paralyze one another, as we can see in attached survey: Therefore, when the emotion stands in one phase, the opposite phase still exists in a minimal degree. In impatience there is a little susceptibility to wonder, in anger to fright, in haughtiness to shame, in the intention to kill to resignation. [...] Exactly these opposite relations of emotion and desire explain the fact that the aesthetic values form pairs from beautiful-ugly, sublime-base to tragic-comic and grotesque-absurd.<sup>53</sup>

Károly Böhm was a subjective-idealist thinker. Later, Menyhért Palágyi, Ákos Pauler,<sup>54</sup> György Bartók Málnási spent a few years in Cluj-Napoca, and they considered aesthetics as a value discipline, which can be attributed to the axiological orientation of the first Hungarian school of philosophy.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, apart from the Western schools of philosophy, Angi's choice of topics and directions clearly reflect the sociological tradition of the 20th century

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<sup>52</sup> The Hungarian term is *viszonyfoglalom*. Angi, *Értéktől jelentésig*, 8.

<sup>53</sup> “És azért az indulat bármely alakjában az ellenkező indulat csirája is rejlik, csak hogy megfordított erőviszonyban; ha ezen ellencsira kifejlik, akkor az uralkodó indulat megsemmisül vagy leszorul, A mikor ennél fogva az indulat az egyik phasisban áll, akkor a megfelelő ellentétes phasis minimalis fokai még mindig fennállanak. A türelmetlenségben van kis fogékonyság az elbámulásra, a haragban a megszeppenésre, a gögben a szégyenkezésre, az ölési szándékban a lemondásra” (Angi, „Az erdélyi magyar filozófia esztétikatörténeti vonulata máig”, 19); “Az indulatnak és a vágynak éppen ezek az ellentéző relációi magyarázzák az esztétikai értékek párokba rendeződését a szép-rüttől, a fenséges-alantastól a tragikus komikusig, illetve groteszk abszurdig” (Angi, “Az erdélyi magyar filozófia esztétikatörténeti vonulata máig”, 18-20).

<sup>54</sup> Ákos Pauler noticed Brassai's aesthetics and wrote a short article remembering his aesthetics published in German translation. Pauler had probably come across the essays by chance while reading the *Comparative Literature Journals*. See Pauler, “Brassai Sámuel esztétikája”, 184.

<sup>55</sup> Máté, *Magyar esztétikatörténeti és esztétikai tanulmányok*, 8.

Hungarian musical aesthetics movement, in which the aesthetical problems were approached with sociological sensitivity. The sociological approach to philosophical and aesthetical questions differs in the fact that it will not give rise to new questions, but rather resolves the problems and offers solutions.<sup>56</sup> As an example, Angi in his analysis made over works by Bartók and Kodály, considers the composers worldview in the process of investigating the aesthetical message. They reflect his aesthetical axis system as well as the sociological background of their era. In Bartók's *Cantata Profana* the contrasting movements stand for beauty and the ugly, portrayed in a particular dialectic: the ideal (happiness) and the distortion ("estrangement") manifesting in an opposing unity (the distortion shows how reality was, but the ideal offers positive perspectives for the society).<sup>57</sup> The condition resulting from the ideal-distortion conflict proves the truth of the dialectic: growth is the result of the conflict of opposites. Angi's system does not culminate in pairs of antagonistic opposites, but in the unity that emerges from them.

Angi in his book *Zene és esztétika* applies the avant-garde's general paradox to Bartók's compositional attitude: in the one hand there is the happiness of being a member of [the Hungarian] society, offering them the way out of estrangement, but at the same time Bartók opposes to the current political situation in Hungary; Angi thinks, that unity lies precisely in this paradox, for Bartók's resistance led to this positive return to the values of the past, to folklore, to fight for the future. Through folklore, he succeeds appealing to the sense of collectivity, to a common *ethos* in the face of alienation, thus draws closer to society instead of turning away from it.<sup>58</sup>

#### 4. Conclusive comparison

Angi's article "The History of Aesthetics in the Hungarian Philosophy in Transylvania to Our Days"<sup>59</sup> written in 2008 provides evidence that he was familiar with Brassai's aesthetical endeavours, referring to him as a forgotten aesthetician. Although there is no direct connection between them, in the following I will attempt to highlight couple of intersections between Brassai's and Angi's views in aesthetics.

1) Béla Jánosi, in his chair inaugural "The Pioneers of Psychological Aesthetics in Hungary" (1916), considers Brassai's initiative to be the most representative of this movement. Even before him, the aesthetics of Alajos György Szerdahely, who approached beauty from the epistemological side, had already pointed towards

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<sup>56</sup> Demeter, "A szociologizáló hagyomány körvonalai".

<sup>57</sup> Angi, *Zene és esztétika*, 18-21.

<sup>58</sup> Angi, *Zene és esztétika*, 12.

<sup>59</sup> Angi, "Az erdélyi magyar filozófia esztétikatörténeti vonulata máig".

the psychological direction.<sup>60</sup> According to Szerdahelyi, the beautiful is not only subjective (the state of the enjoyer), but also not only objective, but it is the *relation between subject and object*.<sup>61</sup> In Brassai's view, the beautiful, as a value judgement, is based on the effects of art on man. While seeking to explain the state of pleasure (subject), he refers to aesthetical qualities as well (object), since they influence the feeling of delight. István Angi, starting from a similar core of ideas, captures aesthetical categories in their *accompanying sentiments*. He distinguishes two stages of the accompanying sentiment: the direct (immediate) stage is the *emotion* and the indirect level is the *affectivity*.<sup>62</sup>

2) Brassai sees the *beautiful* in the sense of the delight it causes. In painting, the harmonious use of colour, the sweetness of form is marked as essential, while in music, perfect harmony and graceful melody are necessary. For Angi beautiful means unity, order and balance. Unity and proportionality symbolize perfection, and perfection thus becomes a model of beauty for both of them.

3) Both Brassai and Angi emphasize the importance of association in finding the value of an artwork. For Brassai, the greater the listeners/viewers knowledge of the object is, the greater becomes the possibility of associating images and thus the sense of delight. Angi thinks along similar lines: the object of an artwork is a metaphor which entails association of images; for him, the aesthetic analysis aims, in fact, to reveal the possible meanings between the object and the thought about the object.<sup>63</sup>

4) The relationship between art and society is what mainly preoccupies Angi's analyses. He considers that the indispensability of art lies in the fact that art shows reality as man wishes to see it, reveals the problems of our present but suggests solutions (real: the world is like that; ideal: but it could be like this). Brassai focuses rather on the relationship between art and the individual, considering the enjoyer's mental work, the particularly perfect image they create for themselves while listening or seeing an artwork.

5) The *ideal*, in Brassai's consideration, "is the most perfect state of the same reality imaginable", and exists only at the level of the idea [materialized in reality, it loses its heavenly light and ceases to be an ideal]. Similarly, in Angi's thinking the ideal exists only at the level of the idea, because its transformation into reality gives rise to a new ideal.

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<sup>60</sup> His main sources were Baumgarten, Home, Batteux, Sulzer, Riedel (Jánosi, "Szerdahelyi György esztétikája", 11).

<sup>61</sup> Jánosi, "Szerdahelyi György esztétikája", 22.

<sup>62</sup> For the category of the beautiful, the direct stage is joy, the indirect stage is nostalgia. For the category of the ugly the direct stage is fear and the indirect one is anxiety. Angi, *Zeneesztétikai előadások* I, 300-301.

<sup>63</sup> Angi, *Értéktől jelentésig*, 9-10.

## Conclusion

Brassai and Angi were both pioneers in the field of Hungarian aesthetics/musical aesthetics in Cluj. Sámuel Brassai was an independent thinker, but remained alone with his views about psychological aesthetics among his contemporaries. As regards István Angi, the founder of the school of music aesthetics in Cluj, although his main influences and ideas show connection to the tradition of musical aesthetics in the Hungarian capital, Budapest, he remained on the periphery, but nonetheless his system and teaching methods are being guarded by his Transylvanian students.

Angi finds the common thread in the tradition of Hungarian history of aesthetics in Transylvania, it being the universal validity of the discovery, appreciation and preservation of values: “Whether it was the education of taste or the formation of value judgments, or the exploration of the message contained in the work of art that initiated these researches, and even if the entertainment role of aesthetics came to the fore, the ultimate origin was the protection of values. *And therein lies the philosophical determination of the Hungarian history of aesthetics in Transylvania*”<sup>64</sup>. His observation applies equally to Brassai's aesthetic aspirations, but also to his very own, since it is their caring and passionate attitude towards the artistic value that binds them together across time.

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<sup>64</sup> Angi, “Az erdélyi magyar filozófia esztétikatörténeti vonulata máig”, 28.

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