THEATRON

MA/Today – 100 Years After

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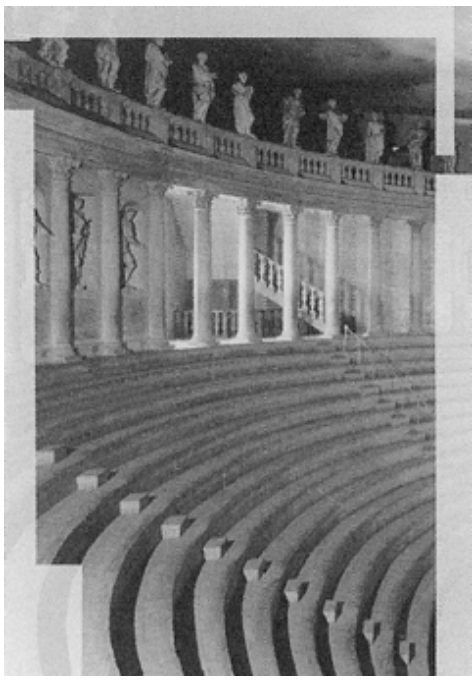

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Szerkesztői előszó

KÉKESI KUN ÁRPÁD

Lapunk történetének első angol nyelvű számát szemlézi képernyőjén az olvasó.

Miután tavaly online formában újraindítottuk a *Theatron*t, és digitalizálva közreadtuk a nyomtatásban megjelent valamennyi szám valamennyi cikkét, idén visszatértünk legnemesebb hagyományainkhoz. Ismét jelentkeztünk tematikus számmal, amely a színházi nevelést állította előtérbe, és a szerkesztő, Kiss Gabriella, illetve a kiváló szerzők jóvoltából sokszínűségében is különösen erősre sikeredett. Hasonlóképpen következő két számunk több tematikus blokkjához, amelyekben teret adtunk jeles hazai kutatóknak és PhD-hallgatóknak éppúgy, mint az OTDK színháztudományi szekciójában kimagaslóan szerepelt egyetemi hallgatóknak. Újra közöltünk fordításokat külföldi szaktekintélyektől és világhírű színházi alkotótól, illetve elérhetővé tettük jelentősebb konferenciákon elhangzott előadások szerkesztett változatát is.

Most pedig itt az első Issue in Hungarian (Theatre) Studies, amellyel hagyományt kívánunk teremteni: minden év utolsó lapszámát angol nyelven jelentetjük meg, és magyar színházi, tágabb művészeti törekvések elemzésének szenteljük, serkentve azok nemzetközi disszeminációját. Kevés könyv és tanulmány olvasható világnyelveken a honi színházról, ezt próbálja kompenzálni a *Theatron*.

Ebben a számunkban egy olyan konferencia anyagát közöljük, amely a *MA* című folyóirat első megjelenésének századik évfordulóján került megrendezésre az Egyesült Államokban, körüljárva a magyar avantgárd képzőművészet, zene, tánc, színház, film és irodalom számos kérdését és jelenségét. A cikkek szerzői között az USA-ba emigrált alkotókon (főként Moholy-Nagyon és Bartókon) keresztül számos kapcsolódási pontot találó magyar és külföldi szakemberek, művészek és tudósok egyaránt megtalálhatók, a gazdag illusztrációs anyag pedig igyekszik érzékletessé tenni az élénk szakmai diszkussziókkal tarkított esemény elevenségét, az elhangzott előadások sokrétű szemléletességét. A konferenciának az Indiana University Bloomington adott otthont, ahol sokunk egykori mestere és kollégája, Szegedy-Maszák Mihály professzor az ELTE mellett hosszú éveken keresztül tanított, így e számot az ő emlékének ajánljuk.

Foreword, Project Proposal

ANDRÁS KAPPANYOS

The position of a Hungarian professor at Indiana University, Bloomington, has been established in 1980, and it is now named after the founder, the exquisite historian, György Ránki. The mandate of the Ránki professors is for one academic year, and their tasks include organizing an international conference that is related to their own field of research and also facilitates the visibility of Hungarian culture. In the 2016-17 academic year, the position was filled by the writer of these lines. The mandate coincided with the centenary of the most important journal of the Hungarian avant-garde, *MA* ('Today'), so it came naturally for the conference to be titled "MA/Today – 100 Years After: The Impact of the Hungarian Avant-Garde". We invited scholars in a wide variety of artistic fields (architecture, photography, fine arts, theatre, music, dance, performing arts, literature) to examine the direct and indirect impact of MA, with special emphasis on those Hungarian artists who have really managed to pursue an international career.

The conference and its presentations were specially dedicated to the memory of Mihály Szegedy-Maszák (1943–2016), former Ránki Chair and tenured professor at Indiana University.

The present issue of *Theatron* contains the presentations of the conference held at Bloomington, April 14-15, 2017. Special thanks to Karen Sue Niggle for her tireless efforts in organizing the conference; to Jessie Labov for proofreading the non-native contributors' texts; and to Ágnes Major for checking and fixing the bibliographies.

The first issue of *MA* (Today), the outstanding periodical of Lajos Kassák, appeared on November 15, 1916. This journal, the most important institution of Hungarian avant-garde, that soon became internationally acknowledged, lived through the second half of the war, a democratic revolution, the Hungarian Soviet Republic, and long years of exile; also the transition from Expressionism to Constructivism through a period of Dadaism. Together with its short-lived pre-decessor, *A Tett* (The Deed), it was banned in three different political systems: in the belligerent Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the Commune, then in post-war, irredentist Hungary. Still, it managed to survive for ten years, that makes it almost unique among avant-garde periodicals. During its existence a part of Hungarian culture became a syn-chronous participant and an honoured cont-ributor of the latest developments of European culture.

But MA wasn't just a monthly magazine. It published more than thirty individual books (poetry volumes, essays, albums); organized ten exhibitions and more than twenty soirees and matinees, propagating avant-garde music, visual and performative arts. This is what makes it a worthy starting point and central subject of this academic year's Hungarian Chair Conference. It gives opportunity to invite literary scholars, musicologists, art historians and other academics who would examine the Hungarian and Central-European contribution to the international avant-garde (including the oeuvres of such artists as Béla Bartók, László Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer or Rudolf Laban); and especially the intermediary role that the Vienna Kassák group played between West and East (setting the example of several Central-European groups and periodicals), as well as between the diverse branches of art. Hopefully, the conference will be able to give an authentic picture of this unique equilibrium between receptivity and originality.

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The Role of Central European Avant-garde Reviews in the 1920s (Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia)

IRINA SUBOTIĆ

Abstract: After the collapse of four empires during World War I, several new European states emerged, with new energy, anti-military and progressive attitudes among the youth, and shared optimism for a peaceful future. A new generation of writers, poets, artists, theorists, philosophers, architects, musicians, and film makers helped revitalize the cultural life in Central European countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria) in the early 1920s by publishing a variety of reviews that promoted new ideas and radical forms of expression, often linked to progressive social positions and leftist political influences. In spite of different orientations and local historical, cultural, social and political conditions, they often had similar objectives and clearly expressed attitudes about multinational and cosmopolitan culture, new forms and fresh approaches, with an ideological commitment to considering culture as primarily a social issue. The review editors exchanged articles, manifestos, poems, reproductions of plastic and applied arts, methods and practices in theatre, film, music, photography and architecture. They invented new media, organized international exhibitions, performances, conferences; participated in provocative activities and discussions and often shared similar artistic worldviews. Some were successful; others were banned for political reasons, but all were important elements in avant-garde movements of the time.

After the end of World War I and the collapse of four empires (Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman and Russian), several new European states were created. They offered a different identity and image of the Old Continent in response to war. There were rapid changes, new ideas, the world was full of hope and positive energy. Although artists came from different cultural and historical backgrounds, they shared the same disillusions because of the war disasters and had similar antiwar aspirations. Positive perspectives about Europe and the world, and about a peaceful cosmopolitan future prevailed - at least for a while. The central part – the so-called "heart of Europe", was not well known; it was considered peripheral, and in many ways it remains so until today, even though Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria are all members of the European Union. Without arguing about how realistic, autochtonous or homogeneous Central Europe really is (the territory is primarily the successor of the former Habsburg Empire) – we will begin with the assumption that there really is such a thing as "Central Europe". It is important to emphasize that two remarkable art historians, professors Andrzej Turowski[1] and particularly Krisztina Passuth[2] were among the first experts who contributed to raising the awareness about the richness of ideas, variety of manifestations, important artworks and outstanding figures in the avant-garde sphere of the Central European cultural milieu. On the other hand, we must also accept

[1] Andrzej TUROWSKI, *Existe-t-il un art de l'Europe de l'Est? Utopie & Idéologie.* Penser l'Espace. (Paris: Editions de la Villette, 1986).

[2] Krisztina PASSUTH, *Les Avant-Gardes de l'Europe Centrale, 1907–1927* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988).

Timothy O. Benson's[3] considerations of the complexity of Central European identity as "ambiguous, diffuse, fragmentary, and contradictory": "Not one avant-garde, but many avant-gardes, interacting with one another yet each retaining its unique characteristics".

Young generations of writers, poets, artists, theorists, philosophers, architects, musicians, and film makers helped editors in the early 1920s revitalize the cultural life of the region by, among else, publishing a variety of reviews, journals or magazines supporting new ideas and radical forms of expression, often connected to progressive social positions and leftist influences. In spite of different orientations and local historical or social conditions, different languages used, frequent changes of locations and even countries where those reviews were edited, they often had similar objectives. They had clearly expressed attitudes about multinational and cosmopolitan culture, and they supported new forms and fresh ideas, with an ideological commitment to considering culture as primerely a social issue. The editors exchanged articles, manifestos, poems, reproductions of plastic and applied arts, thoughts and practices in theatre, film, music, photography and architecture. They invented new media, organized international exhibitions, performances, soirées, conferences; participated in provocative activities and discussions with radical slogans about the need to improve the conditions of institutions and, in general, to change social and often also the larger political situation. They stimulated dialogues between the traditional and the modern and were among the first to understand the importance of new technical and technological developments which they introduced to their publications and activities.

[3] Timothy O. BENSON, "Introduction", in *Central European Avant-gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910–1930*, ed. Timothy O. BENSON, 12–21 (Los Angeles: County Museum of Art; Cambridge, Mass. – London, England: The MIT Press, 2002), 16, 21.

In this rush to present and even accept new events and new statements, we can sometimes recognize the overlapping of different – if not opposed – phenomena, with a dynamic structure, diverse subjects and a variety of stylistique forms.

In spite of this very active, frequent and fruitful international communication, cooperation and sharing common ideas about utopian expectations, the avant-garde reviews could not contribute to the creation of a united and unique avant-garde movement. Therefore, we will discuss different avant-garde "voices" in Central European reviews and their particularities within distinct cultural, historical, political and social conditions; their isolated expressions but also often with very close points of view.

Reviews were important as the easiest and most direct, independent way to express and confront statements and ideologies, to gather people with same or similar attitudes, to be international and interdisciplinary, able to enlarge the number of collaborators from distant locations, to be, in a word – a forum for the exchange and dissemination of new ideas and complex new tendencies in various disciplines. It is incredible how this communication was intense and quick, rich and productive – in spite of the only possible technology of that time – traditional letters delivered by mail, and sometimes direct contacts among the involved editors and artists established in big cultural centers – Paris, Vienna, Berlin.

Both the similarities and the differences evident in these reviews will reveal simultaneous autochthonous and independent developments in their respective milieus. At the same time, however, the major European metropolis and the unofficial European capital of that time, Berlin, was extremely important as the meeting point and the crossroads of artists coming from the East and from the West. Above all, there was Herwarth Walden and his *Der Sturm*, established in the 1910s, as an example and a source of information. However, it also of-

fered space for presentations of fresh ideas and forms coming from all over the world, including various Central European artists. There were many Hungarians in Berlin who left their country because of Miklós Horthy, or Bulgarians who escaped from Cankov's dictatorship, Romanians and Austrians, Poles, some Croats, Slovenians and Serbs, Ukrainians and Belarusians, but mostly - hundreds of thousands of Russians of all colors, white and red, left and right, progressive and conservative, gathered round the Nolendorfplatz. The so-called *Russian Berlin* had a particular role in spreading outside of Russia the ideas of utopian Constructivism, headed by Lazar El Lissitzky, as well as the shortlasting review *Veshch/Objet/Gegenstand*, which he edited together with Ilya Ehrenburg. Ehrenburg's momentous novel *It does Revolve* was reflected in some Central European avant-garde reviews, as it was the *First Russian Exhibition of New Art* in the Van Diemen Gallery from October to December 1922.

Reviews and the emerging ideas were often presented and developed in popular cafes that the artists occupied at that time, such as *Japan Café* or *Café Central* in Budapest, *Narodni Café*, *Slavia*, *Tumovka*, *Union* or *Metro* in Prague, *Polish art Club* in *Polonia Hotel* in Warsaw, *Kasina* and *Korzo* in Zagreb, *Moscow* in Belgrade, *Café Capsa*, *Teresa Otelesteanu* or *Café Enache Dinu*, near Bucharest Piata Mare, *Schloss Café* and *Café* Beethoven in Vienna.

Among the very first, most influential and longest lasting avant-garde journals, reviews or periodicals, probably in the entire Europe, was the antiwar review *MA* [Today], representative *par excellence* for our narrative. (See Fig. 1. on Plate I.) It appeared in 1916, succeeding the review *A Tett* [The Deed], banned during World War I. The founder, the charismatic Lajos Kassák and his *Activists* celebrated social justice and the moral role of art, revolutionary changes not only on the political but also the technological level. They strongly emphasized and promoted new values of industrial production, design, architecture, technology and all other new inventions, such as photography, collages, photomontages, new typography and newly invented alphabet. After supporting the ideas of Cubism and Futurism, *MA* embraced Dadaist humor and sarcastic behavior. Kurt Schwitters' *picture-poems* were reflected in Kassák's works. His *picture-architecture* became a proto-model for geometrical compositions: proto-Constructivism appeared here for the first time. Exceeding Russian *Obmokhu*, the review became the loudspeaker of the most radical pan European Constructivist abstraction, "social and technological utopia", or "Romantic Constructivism", according to Ilya Ehrenburg. Artworks that appeared in *Ma* were identified as promoters of a better world to come. Kassák believed that it was a symbol of a future without nationalism and social class stratification. The review had a great impact on other avant-garde periodicals almost all over Central Europe: after Kassák's articles and woodcuts appeared on cover pages of *MA*, they were soon replicated in *Der Sturm* and *Veshch/Objet/ Gegenstand* in Berlin, *Zenit* in Zagreb/Belgrade, *Contimporanul* in Bucharest, *Zvortnica* in Cracow, etc.

The year 1922 was important for the Hungarian avant-garde: after the collapse of the Commune, Kassák and *Activists* chose Vienna as their new stage. An even larger international collaboration was established with deeper Communist influence, particularly in Béla Uitz's journal *Egység* [Unity]. Quoting Jaroslav Andel, Oliver A. I. Botar argues:

> The Hungarians' concept of "Proletcult" was equivalent to what was known in Soviet Russia as "Proletarian Art", e.g., art in the service of the Communist Party. "Proletarian Art" was not only separate from the Proletcult, an autonomous movement founded by Aleksandr Bogdanov and others to encourage artistic production among workers,

but was promoted by the Party in opposition to it.[4]

Dadaism became visible in Sandor Barta's *Akasztott Ember* [The Hanged Man] – together with Proletcult ideas and simplicity of its expression, on the one side, and on the other, with George Grosz and Berlin Dada there was humor full of satire, sarcasm and absurdity. In that respect it was similar to the spirit of Yugoslav *Zenit* or Romanian *Urmuz*. Although Kassák rejected Dadaist mood in his *MA*, he considered the Hungarian Dadaists' review *Út* [Path] from Novi Sad & Subotica (in Voïvodina) as a "brother's review". Kassák and Moholy-Nagy published their important overview of different avant-garde movements in the book *Buch Neuer Kunstler (Book of New Artists).* Moholy-Nagy's *Picture-architecture (Bildarchitectur)* manifesto was accepted as a guide to spiritual constructivism.

Ma had a rather dissolute organization, with various interests and backgrounds during its long life. Important participation of various Hungarian artists such as Béla Uitz, János Máttis Teutsch, Iván Hevesy, Sándor Bortnyik, Lajos Tihanyi, Aurél Bernáth, Lajos Kudlák, and "prophetic poets" Endre Ady, János Mácza and Béla Bartók created a rich scenery for the review's concept. Ernő Kállai was the key link to the international context. On the other hand, Socialist Berlin was present through connections with Franz Pfemfert's journal *Die Aktion.* Collaboration with other progressive magazines, institutions and figures was intense as well, such as for example, with *Periszkop* and *Genius* in Arad (Transylvania), with Hannes Meyer, Bauhaus etc.

Back in Budapest in 1926, new challenges did not surprise Kassák: in his review he gave support to another international uprising movement, Surrealism, confirming his permanent confidence in art as a social activity but without political involvement.

In cosmopolitan Prague, the cultural atmosphere was favourable for new events: there were plenty of exhibitions, collections (for example the famous Vincenc Kramař's early Cubist collection with works of Picasso, Braque and other French painters), in addition to emerging local new art movements such as Czech Symbolism, Cubo-Expressionism based on local Baroque experiences with Otto Gutfreund, Bohumil Kubišta or Antonin Procházka, followed by specific Czech Cubism in art, design and architecture. The entire Prague cultural scene, where Franz Kafka lived, Roman Jacobsen worked as a distinguished linguist, Albert Einstein lectured, many prominent European artists visited and White Russians stayed after the October revolution, contributed to the intellectual environment and creativity of the 1920s.

Umělecký Svaz Devětsil [Art Union Nine Powers], the art group and avant-garde movement, founded in 1920 in Prague and in 1923 in Brno, had a loose program in the early period, combining different ideas and aesthetic platforms, first of all willing to mobilize the post-war energy and creative potentials of young artists. The first phase was close to Expressionism, combined with Magic Realism and Primitivism or Primordialism. This early Czech modernism was immediately represented in the review *Zenit*, Zagreb, nos. 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, 1921. (See Fig. 2. on Plate I.) The leading theoretical figure Karel Teige, who in a way had a similar role as Lajos Kassák in Hungary, was at the same time an eminent writer, poet and radical plastic artist. He advocated clear proletarian positions, especially after his visit to the Soviet Union in 1925. For him, art should be con-

[4] Oliver A. I. BOTAR, "From the Avant-garde to »Proletarian Art«: The Émigré Hungarian Journals *Egység* and *Akasztott Ember*, 1922–23", *Art Journal* 52, No. 1 (1993): 34–45, 44, endnote 4. [Online]. Available at: Academia.edu http://www.academia.edu/10993842/From_the_Avant-Garde_to_Proletarian_Art_The_Emigre_Hungarian_Journals_Egyseg_and_Akasztott_Ember_1922-23. [Accessed 5 June 2017].

nected to social life and in that respect all the limitations should be abolished through new forms of creativity. Therefore, he supported new experiments in art, such as the technique of photo-collages where film procedures of cutting and interpolation were practiced, or new typography, as well as real objects from everyday life introduced into the exhibitions, both in photos or as "ready-mades". Teige created his *picture – poems* as the basis of Czech Poetismus, which was "not one more *ism*, but the necessary complement of Constructivism" – according to his statements. Poetismus was gradually moving towards Surrealism, both in literature and in plastic and visual arts, and *Devětsil* was its full supporter.

Devětsil members published a series of publications: the regular monthly review ReD [Review of *Devětsil*], *Disk*, *Pasmo* [Zone], *Stavba* [Construction], and also important almanacs in 1922 – Revolučni sbornik *Devětsil* [Revolutionary Collective volume *Devětsil*] and *Život* [Life] *I & II* with a great number of international contributions (among others – Yvan Goll, Ilya Ehrenburg, Jeanneret & Ozenfant, Micić etc.). Beside the charismatic Teige, very active were painters Jindřrch Štyrskŷ and Toyen (Marie Čerminova). Already living in Paris for years, they were close to leading Dadaist and Surrealist circles around Breton, Arp, Dali, Max Ernst, Masson, Miró, Paalen, Tanguy, Giacometti, De Chirico etc. Therefore, it was not surprising that Surrealism would be present early in major Czech avant-garde reviews.

Great contribution was given by Czech poets and writers, such as Jaroslav Seifert, Vladislav Vančura, Adolf Hoffmeister, Jaroslav Rössler, Bedřich Václavek, Konstantin Biebl, Vítězslav Nezval or Jiří Voskovec, leader of *Osvoboždene* [Liberated] *Theater*, who put on stage progressive plays by Alfred Jarry, Apollinaire, Breton and Cocteau.

Important activity was realized by the Architects' club with participation of many local members and also with contributions by Pieter Oud, Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Adolf Loos, Theo van Doesburg and many other prominent architects. Czech Functionalism immediately attained special recognition worldwide.

Among the most attractive *Devětsil* activities were exhibitions and anti-exhibitions, which were reflections of the Berlin Dada Fair. After the first, *Jarni vystava* [Spring exhibition] in 1922, the following exhibition, *Rudolphinum* first in Prague and then in Brno in 1923–24, was much more radical: called the *Bazaar of Modern Art*, this exhibition expanded the notion of exhibits. It included stage design and architectural projects, reproductions exposed close to the original works, special combinations of pictures & poems, photomontages, fashion design, installations, such as mirrors instead of portraits, or window dummies instead of sculptures...

The next show organized by the Review was held in 1926 when Constructivism and Poetismus dominated. The exhibits promoted machine production, modern technology and the technical world. The "electric century" glorified telephone, radio, airplanes, railroads, ships and cars. The new order was established – emotions were governed by mathematical laws, not by individual expressions in art. In a way, this preceded the ideas of *L'Esprit Nouveau*. Teige declared that no more pictures in frames are needed, originals will disappear, and instead reproductions and prints will dominate.

Devětsil was quickly acknowledged abroad and became also an important part of the local scene, which was not the case with many other reviews of that period in other cultural milieus.

Another distinct periodical *Fronta* appeared in 1927 in Brno under the slogan "an international journal for current activity". Its editors František Halas, Zdenek Rőssman and Bedřich Vaclavek summarized the actual state of art and culture, with another socialist idea. According to them: "The new art in life is to create new people who will create a new society". Little by little – all those utopi-

as will sink in deep seas of different aspirations and ambitions, and not only in Czechoslovakia...

Since Poland also obtained its independence and unification in 1918, a new strategy for rediscovery of national identity was developed, with new ideological expressions, but without Dadaist sarcasm or irony, like in many other countries. They had some typical local issues. It was believed that folk elements may offer truly national, unique, archetypal and eternally modern and original spirit. In that respect a group of *Formists* put its roots of modernism in Poland. Supported by the great Polish and European writer Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz – Witkacy, *Formists* represented a variant of Polish Cubism, with some Futurist and folk elements. They stated that the aim of painting is not to reproduce the real world, but to construct an unbreakable whole from various planes. This was the path towards Constructivism.

In May 1923 visual artists organized an exhibition with a very special installation in a special place – the luxury car show room, in a way similar to the Czech *Bazaar*: postcards replaced traditional painted landscapes, periodicals and books on modern art were displayed together with works of art. This exhibition stimulated the foundation of an art group called *Blok* – Group of Cubists, Constructivists, and Suprematists (1924–26). They were editing the homonym review *Blok* in Warsaw, also active in Vilnius. (See Fig. 3. on Plate I.) Here again the general concept had a strong social commitment, reflected in theoretical writings and pragmatic art works. The most prominent representatives were Henrik Berlewi, Mieczysław Szczuka, Teresa Żarnower (Żarnowerówna), Władysław Strzemiński and Katarzyna Kobro. In the *Blok* Manifesto "What is Constructivism?" we recognize the closeness to the concept of Alexander Rodčenko's *Lef* (Left Front of the Arts), especially when questions about the relationship between art and social revolution are raised. The same goes for utilitarianism and industrial production in service of social change. Mechanical objects were reproduced, and use of new materials stimulated (iron, glass, cement). Consequently – new forms were expected. Szczuka and Žarnower, on the other hand, attended *Vhutemas* (*Vysshiye Khudozhestvenno-Tekhnicheskiye Masterskiye* [Higher Art and Technical Studios]) and accepted positions of El Lissitzky and Naum Gabo.

Władysław Strzemiński, artist, critic, theorist, teacher and organizer of cultural life in Lodz, the author of the most radical concept in Polish avant-garde *Unism*, had a distinguished international career: as a Belarusian, he was one the most prominent Polish avant-gardists, who also contributed to the organization of the first avant-garde art exhibition in Vilnius (in Poland, at that time), together with his wife Katarzyna Kobro, a prominent Polish sculptor of Russian, Latvian and German origin. Their theory of *Unism* was influenced first by Moscow INHUK (*Institut Hudožestvenoi kulturi* / Institute of Art Culture), but soon their theoretical approach has changed: they announced the idea of a complete unity of various elements in the artwork. Strzemiński' s paintings found the inspiration in Unistic musical compositions by the Polish composer Zygmunt Krauze and he also created his *architectonics* – compositions in space – and was interested in making new typography. His revolutionary book *The Theory of Vision* speaks in a different way about Constructivism and its social purpose. Strzemiński stood for the idea that art should be autonomous and artists should have "laboratory conditions" in artistic experimentation. In that respect, for him, Productivism had a pejorative meaning.

The successors of *Blok* – the group *Praesens* (1926–29) and later *a.r.* (1929–36) were transferred to Łodz where the first Museum of Modern (e.g. Avant-garde) Art was created in one textile factory thanks to the artists Szczuka, Strzemiński, Kobro, Henryk Stażewski, and poets Julian Przyboś and Jan Brzękowski. It remains until now one of the most important museums for avant-garde art.

Łodz was also home of the influential *Jung Idysz* group and its publications that were introducing various Expressionist feelings, referring to Mark Chagall: Jankiel Adler, Marek Szwarc, Henryk Barciski, Ida Brauner, Neuman were its promoters. El Lissitzky, on his way from Vitebsk to Berlin, spoke in their club about international Constructivism. He also went to Warsaw.

The Cracow based review *Zwrotnica* [Railway Switch] was ideologically also on the left, launching new forms and media, thanks to the editor and poet Tadeusz Peiper who was an active and successful mediator: he introduced Polish avant-garde artists to the international scene, and among others also introduced Malevič to Gropius and Moholy-Nagy. In his review, he also supported Kazimierz Podsadecki, prominent constructivist and abstract painter, who made photomontages and experimental films.

Contimporanul [The Contemporary] was an avant-garde political, satirical and art weekly journal, with plenty of fresh news and up-to-date comments, published in Bucharest since 1922. (See Fig. 4. on Plate I.) It claimed to continue the tradition of the homonym former newspaper from Iasi, which was sponsored by Socialist societies in the 1880s. There was a new series from 1946 on, with a slightly changed name *(Contemporanul)* which continues to be published until today, but obviously without avant-garde connotations.

This political orientation of the review already changed in 1923, but the review remained committed to serious social issues, attacking anti-Semitism or bourgeois mentality. It was oriented more and more towards cultural and artistic subjects, treating Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, and Surrealism (one entire issue was dedicated to it) and thus became the meeting place of journalists, editors, writers, artists and architects. The two major personalities responsible for *Contimporanul* avant-garde beginnings were Marcel Janco and Ion Vinea. Janco was once a prominent Dadaist, one of the organizers of the Zurich *Cabaret Voltaire*, although the Romanian review did not support Dadaism nor Tristan Tzara's changed views regarding this movement. Ion Vinea was a fervent opponent of the ruling *National Liberal Party* and he was openly against art imitating nature; therefore he was struggling to find new forms and consequently a new reality. The review established international collaboration with numerous reviews all over Europe.

Radical, abstract Constructivism was not often present on the pages of this review because more attention was given to the synthesis called "integralism" of Cubism, Futurism and some forms of mild Constructivism. Little by little, the direction towards Romanian Surrealism prevailed due to the imaginative works with subconscious messages by leading Romanian painters Viktor Brauner, Jacques Herold and Jules Perahim (aka Iulius Blumenfeld).

Contimporanul paid particular attention to modern architecture, probably thanks to Marcel Janco's revolutionary vision of urban planning nourished with some expressionist ideas of Cubist dynamism in construction. As a real Renaissance man, Janco made projects for various innovative constructions in the city center, and was recognized for his sculptures and reliefs with slight reminiscence to Constructivism, for his paintings, prints, illustrations, furniture and stage design; he also wrote essays on art, film and theater, arguing that "Constructivism is the left extreme of Cubism".

The third important collaborator and editor of *Contimporanul* was the painter Maxim Max Herman Maxy, responsible for the organization of the International Exhibition of this review in December 1924 in *Sala Sindicatului Artelor Frumoase* (Exhibition Hall of the Plastic Artists Trade Union). He was assisted by Marcel Janco in organizing this huge show. The most impressive was the section of Romanian artists who sent their works from various parts of Europe: from Paris, Berlin, Rome, Zurich; among others, there

were exhibits by Arthur Segal, one of the founders of *Novembergruppe*, Tristan Tzara's portraits, Maxy's and Janco's constructions, Viktor Brauner's Surrealist and Janos Mattis-Teutsch's abstract paintings, four important sculptures by Konstantin Brancusi (*Melle Pogany*, *Kiss*, *Maiastra* and *Child's Head* and a photo from his Paris studio), as well as several works of his student Milita Petrascu.

Beside works of modern art, the show had an eclectic agenda – it included Dida Solom's puppets, East Asian idols, Ceylonese masks, applied art objects, architectural drawings, abstract designs, and Viking Eggeling's films, alongside the works by Arp, Klee, Richter, Lajos Kassák, Kurt Schwitters and others (such as, for example, the Zenitist Jo Klek). The double issue (nos. 50–51) of the review *Contimporanul* served as a catalogue of the exhibition, as was the case of the *Zenit* exhibition in April 1924.

The inauguration of the *Contimporanul* show was in a Dada mood: with "Negro jazz" musicians as "modernist ritual", drumrolls, sirens, inaugural speeches in darkness with candles. "It was chaos", visitors remembered. There were no commercial issues, but many articles about this event remained.

Even earlier, while they were still in high school, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco and Ion Vinea edited the magazine *Simbolul* [The Symbol] Also in early 1920s, a group of young revolutionaries in Yambol, Bulgaria, who opposed the mainstream cultural and social environment published a small review entitled *Crescendo* (1922), which published articles and reproductions by progressive Bulgarian artists and also included works by Celine Arnault, Ozenfant and Jeanneret, Teo van Doesburg, Tristan Tzara, Ilya Ehrenburg, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Benjamin Péret, Kurt Schwitters, Alexandre Tairov, etc. (See Fig. 5. on Plate II.) This activity was possible thanks to the European contacts of the major figure in Bulgarian modernism, Geo Milev, a poet, writer, journalist, translator, and editor of several reviews (*Vezni*/Scales, *Plamk*/Flame etc.). He fell victim to Cankov's dictatorship because of his famous poem *Septemvri* (September, 1924), which railed against the military *coup d'état* in June 1923.

There were several other Romanian avant-garde magazines with different concepts and positions: *Unu* (editor Sasa Pana) was a leftist periodical, making a transition from Romanian avant-garde to Surrealism; *Urmuz* (editor Demetrescu-Buzau) was the predecessor of absurdity in literature and new language; *Integral* (edited by Ilarie Voronca) preferred Futurist ideas; *75 HP* was nominally anti-*Contimporanul* and pro-Dada; *Punct* (editor was the socialist Scarlat Callimachi). This Dadaist-Constructivist journal also cultivated abstract lyricism.

In the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (in December 1918), Zagreb played a particularly important role in connecting with Western centers and contributing to the quick modernization of life. Therefore, it was not surprising that it was there that *Zenit* (Zenith), the international magazine for new art and culture appeared in February 1921. *Zenit* published manifestos declaring antimilitarism and brotherhood among nations; it was open to the international avant-garde scene (this character of the review was ensured by the French-German writer Yvan Goll who was co-editor of *Zenit* in 1921–22, nos. 8–13). A great number of contributions came from almost all parts of the world, seeking absolute freedom, with an emphasis on liberated language and poetry (*words in freedom, words in space*), accepting all innovative, progressive ideas, forms of expression and stylistic differences.

In that respect, the founder and editor of the review *Zenit*, Ljubomir Micić, in the beginning supported the international Expressionist mood with works by Egon Schiele, Vilko Gecan, Jovan Bijelić, Mihailo S. Petrov etc. (See Fig. 6. on Plate II.) Soon the Italian Futurist enthusiasm for dynamic movements and technological novelties also appears in *Zenit* with works by F.T. Marinetti, Buzzi, Depero, Azari. Nikola Tesla was celebrated

as a genius-inventor. Simultaneously present was the Dadaist revolt, with its claim for the abolishment of traditional culture, old forms of expression and freedom for interpreting reality (Dragan Aleksić, Branko Ve Poliansky, and Hungarian Dadaists from Voïvodina). *Zenit* also included French Cubist Orphism and its research into formal structures and colors, materials and relations to music (Robert Delaunay, Serge Charchoune, Alexander Archipenko). Particularly successful was the collaboration with the Russian avant-garde from Berlin – the direct connections with Lazar El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg who edited the special Russian issue of *Zenit*, no. 17–18, October–November 1922) dedicated entirely to new Russian literature, plastic arts, theater, music etc. *Zenit* also supported early manifestations of Surrealism (around Paul Dermée and Max Jacob), and finally social commitment in culture (dissemination of statements from De Stijl, Bauhaus and Purism).

The Zenitist idiosyncrasy culminated with the slogan *Balkanisation of Europe* by means of a metaphoric figure *Barbarogenius* – coming from innocent, wild areas of the Balkans and ready to recover old, tired and degenerated Europe – responsible for the unprecedented tragedies and traumas of World War I. In that respect, Micić's book *AntiEurope* shows a fundamental anti-European state of mind.

Two year later, in 1923, Micić had to move from Zagreb to Belgrade because of his radical and severe criticism of Croatia's *petit-bourgeois* in culture and politics. But Belgrade was also not ready to accept his isolated behavior, sharp judgments and suspicious ideas published in *Zenit* and related to the Bolshevik Soviet Union. For various reasons, being subversive, critical, and autonomous, Micić was put on trial and the police banned *Zenit* editions on several occasions. Finally, because of the article *Zenitism through the Prism of Marxism*, signed by a certain "Dr. M. Rasinov", obviously a fictional character (*Zenit*, no. 43, 1926), Micić was accused of organizing a Bolshevik Communist Revolution and *coup d'état*. This turned out to be the last issue of *Zenit*. Micić escaped to Paris and was back in Belgrade only ten years later, in 1937. His heroic years were almost forgotten and they remained so until his death in 1971.

To quote one example of the international position of *Zenit* in the 1920s: Ljubomir Micić's program text "Zenitosophy or the Creative energy of Zenitism" (originally published in *Zenit*, nos. 26–33, 1924) was translated and printed in *Der Sturm* and *Blok* (September 1924), in *7Arts* (March &April 1925), *Het Overzicht* (1925), and according to Micić in several other reviews (with no data).

One of the most important activities during the existence of the review *Zenit* was the First (and only) International *Zenit* Exhibition of New Art, inaugurated in one music school in Belgrade in April 1924. The best example of plastic ideas that *Zenit* disseminated was the work by Josip Seissel, in Zenitism called Jo Josif Klek. His system *PaFaMa* (Papier-Farben-Material), abstract paintings and temperas, his Dada and Constructivist collages and photomontages, were published in *Zenit* and exhibited in various shows as representative of *Zenit*. The other works exhibited and collected in the *Zenit* gallery first in Zagreb and also in Belgrade, came from eleven European countries and the United States, including Vassily Kandinsky, Alexander Archipenko, Robert Delaunay, László Moholy-Nagy, Lajos Tihanyi, El Lissitzky, Jozef Peeters, Albert Carel Willink, Albert Gleizes, Louis Lozowick, Serge Charchoune, Helen Grünhoff...and several Yugoslav artists (Mihailo S. Petrov, Jovan Bijelić, Vilko Gecan, Vjera Biller...). The stylistic variety of exhibits in this show was the deliberate indicator of pluralism that the review *Zenit* declared.

In Zagreb, in 1922, Dragan Aleksić, close associate of Micić's, published his small but important reviews *Dada Tank* and *Dada Jazz*, trying to formulate *Yugo-dada*, following his interest in Dadaism awaken in Prague where

he stayed with Micić's brother, Branko Ve Poliansky (aka Branko Micić; called also Valerij Poljanski), a Zenitist poet, writer, editor and later painter. The answer came from Poliansky who immediately published his review *Dada- Jok* and *Dada Express* pamphlets/papers – defending Zenitist positions with Dadaist tools: criticism, sarcasm, irony, photomontages, new typography etc. Poliansky was also the editor of the proto-Zenitist reviews, published in Ljubljana in 1921/22 – *Svetokret* (Turning World) and *Kinofon* – the first review on cinema predicting the arrival of sound film. (See Fig. 7. on Plate II.)

An anarchist poet Anton Podbevšek, author of the book *Človek s bombami* (Man with the Bombs, 1925) published in Ljubljana, was the only editor of the review *Rdeči pilot* (Red Pilot, 1922) and its *Proletcult* program. He inspired young generations with "cosmic anarchism" – ideas coming from Nietzsche, Whitman and social criticism. Some information and ideas also came from Micić and his review *Zenit*, as was the case with August Černigoj, a Bauhaus student, identified with Slovenian Constructivism, published in *Der Strum* in 1928. Černigoj's exhibition in Ljubljana in 1925 was considered politically dangerous, and for that reason he had to leave the country. Back in Ljubljana from Trieste, together with Ferdo Delak he published three issues of the review *Tank* (1927) where basic Constructivism was amalgamated with Zenitist vocabulary, traces of Futurism, Proletarian theater of Enrico Prampolini and Erwin Piscator – freed from traditional literature narrative. (See Fig. 8. on Plate II.)

Another Slovenian poet and Marxist, Srečko Kosovel, leader of the avant-garde review *Mladina* [The Youth] represents a clear example of Constructivism in poetry, the so-called "velvet modernism" leading towards later proletarian social radicalism. He practiced constructions of poetic motives - montage of fragments, a kind of visual poetry *avant-la-lettre* in his collection of *Integrali* [Integrals]. Kosovel died very young, in 1926, and his work remained almost unknown until it was revalorized only in the late 1960s.

The geopolitical situation after World War I affected greatly artists all over the world, particularly in the territories of the newly founded states. Among other things, the Dusseldorf declaration in May 1922 proclaimed: "Art is a universal and real expression of creative energy, which can be used to organize the progress of mankind." This stimulated the proliferation of collaboration and an upsurge in new ideas in culture and art, expressed in numerous reviews which served as the mediators of communication all over Europe and especially among Central European countries. These reviews contributed to the transformation of traditional forms of expression to modernist and avant-garde models, with a belief in creating new order and new societies. Obvious transformation occurred from various forms of Expressionism and Cubism, towards Dadaist and Constructivist international language. This was possible due to powerful personalities like Kassák, Uitz, Moholy-Nagy, Teige, Seiffert, Peiper, Strzemiński, Kobro, Janco, Maxy, Milev, Micić, Poliansky, Černigoj...

Some Central European reviews were dominated by writers (*Devětsil*, *Fronta*, *MA*, *Zenit*, *Vezni*, *Crescendo*, *Zwrotnica*), others by plastic artists (*Blok*, *Contimporanul*), but all disciplines were included and great attentions was paid to interdisciplinary forms, to layout, to new typography and to reproductions of art works. Photography – artistic and from real life, posters, reportage, new media (*picture-poems*, *picto-poetra*, *picture-architecture*, *PaFaMa*, *Bildarchitektur / Képarchitektúra)* and advertising, as a new way of communication, were the organic part of all Central European reviews of the 1920s. In various ways music and particularly jazz was present in those avant-garde reviews, as well as film and radio, circus, architecture and applied or decorative arts.

Some periodicals put an accent on premodern values, national mythology and archetypal ethno-symbolic elements as eternal

sources of creativity (Barbarogenius in *Zenit*; preexisting ethnicities and folklore in *Vezni*; Primordialism in *Contimporanul*, early Poetismus in *Formists*).

Along with a theoretical approach, most reviews organized practical events– conferences, discussions, soirées, literary circle, and huge, truly international exhibitions covering multiple tendencies and artists' works from various countries (*MA*, *Blok*, *Devětsil*, *Zenit*, *Contimporanul*) in general public instead of professional spaces, as the official art institutions were bypassed. Some exhibitions had great success (*Bazaar of Modern art* or *Contimporanul* show), others (like *Zenit*) – were ignored or criticized.

Exhibits were not only art works but also ready-made objects – the arte-facts of life; new machine era and technology were included, as they were glorified in articles and poetry as well. Poetry spoke about everyday modern life, social crises and workers' problems. The critical approach was supported by the presence of Charlie Chaplin and a leftist orientation throughout articles and images, poems, collages, photomontages and films with V. I. Lenin (*Ma*, *Devětsil*, *ReD*, Černigoj, *Tank*, *Blok*, *Zenit*). All the editors paid great attention to the new, modern and attractive graphic design of their reviews or journals, often full of irony and criticism.

Although being predominantly a masculine affair, Central European avant-garde reviews show the signs of the coming era with the new roles for women: we encounter many women either as prominent female artists (Katarzyna Kobro, Teresa Żarnower, Toyen, Ida Brauner, Milita Petrescu, Margarete Kubicka) or as companions and active members of avant-garde societies, circles and reviews (Neil Walden, Jolan Simon, Ljubov Kozincova Ehrenburg, Lucia Moholy, Erzsébet Kassák Ujváry, Anuška Micić – Nina-Naj, Mela Maxy, Lilia Milev). And we discover some forgotten names and their works, vanished with the flow of history (Thea Černigoj, Vjera Biller, Helen Grünhoff /Elena Gringova).

The contacts among the editors were intense and constant: they exchanged letters, opinions, ideas, materials for reviews and magazines, for exhibitions and collections.

The destiny of each review was, as usual, very distinct: some were banned; some survived difficult times and were transformed according to new demands of new times. Some faded away gradually from the scene together with their founders and leaders. Some have accomplished their historical objectives, some have just tried to. The story goes on... but the traces of those heroic times remarkably remain and always invite new research and new interpretations.

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PLATE I

Fig. 1. *MA*, Vienna, 1924.
Cover design by Lajos Kassák

Fig. 2. *Devětsil*, Prague, 1922

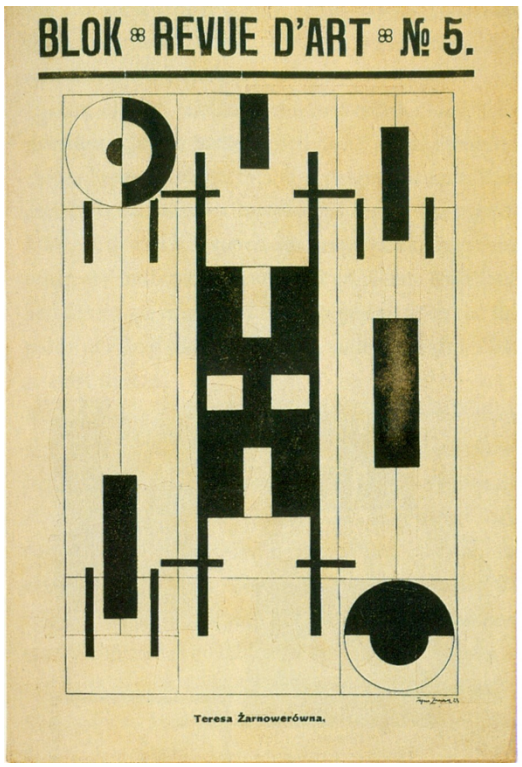

Fig. 3. *Blok*, Warsaw, no. 5, 1924.
Cover Teresa Żarnowerówna

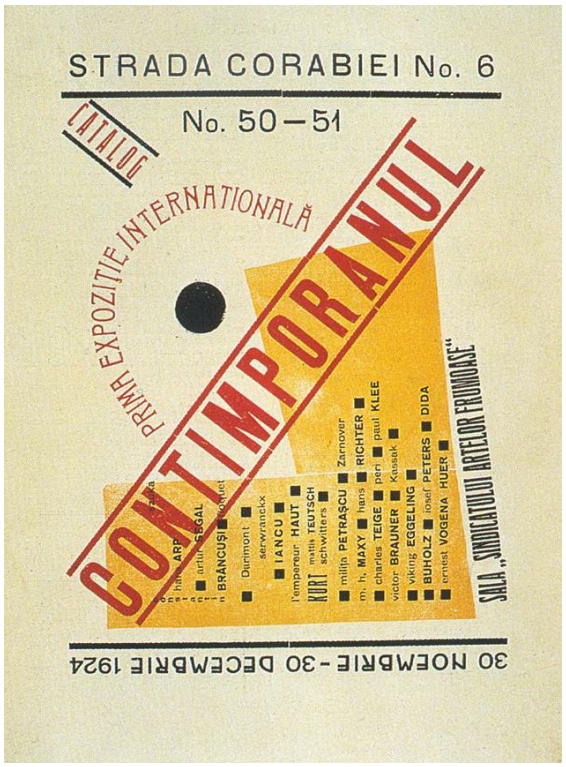

Fig. 4. *Contimporanul*,
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PLATE II

Fig. 5. *Crescendo*, Yambol, no. 2, 1922

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The Photogram as a Medium of Art and Education

ÁGNES EPERJESI

Abstract: The focus of this paper is the position of photogram in the avantgarde tradition. I explore the subtle changes in the conception of the photogram as a medium in the course of the avantgarde, neo-avantgarde and post-avantgarde using a lineage of Hungarian artists. For all three phases the photogram is more than just a tool to carry out an artistic program; it stands for an approach to educational methodology as well.

> *It appears that in Moholy-Nagy's native land the photogram is highly popular as a teaching material, while in the schools of our country it is marginal.* (Floris M. Neusüss)

1.

The genre of the photogram has been a hallmark of my whole career. I keep finding research areas and topics of interest for which I find the photogram to be the appropriate medium. There is also a good reason for my nearly complete avoidance of the camera in my works, so much so that my overall relationship to photography can well be characterized as cameraless. The "cameraless photograph" is a familiar term in contemporary international photo theory and includes all techniques whereby a trace is left on a photosensitive material without the use of a camera. Beyond attributing an image-making, representational capacity to photography, I find it important to consider its more abstract, philosophical roles. I also try to understand why the photogram engages my attention, since the technique has been exhaustively covered in theory and is rather limited in its visual possibilities. The photogram has a strong tradition in Hungary: it is firmly embedded in the traditions of modernism and the avantgarde. Yet, this medium means something else, something more to me: the photogram gives me a comprehensive and attractive option of all the medial components and senses that repel me in camera use. Being based on my own artistic and human experience, this may not match the experience of other artists or scholars.

I try to reposition the medium of the photogram by including considerations previously neglected in relevant scholarly work. Rather than merely supplementing modernist and (neo)avantgarde considerations, I try to elucidate what may (partly) account for this lack of emphasis. I need this repositioning, because I consider the photogram to be not only an autonomous medium, but a paradigmatic one, which goes beyond the meaning and significance of the cameraless. It makes the general category of cameraless photography more precise and, at the same time, it pushes against its own constraints to open up important possibilities. When I refer to photograms, I mean less a technique, visual art procedure, or visual world. For me, the photogram has the paradigmatic significance of direct imprinting, similarly to the imprint of paint-coated bodies on a plane or to three-dimensional casting in sculpture. (See Fig. 1. on Plate III.) Although these are nearly timeless techniques, their "success" always depends on how well the artist manages to determine the parameters of the imprinting conditions in a way that suits the given society.

2.

There was a renewed interest in cameraless photography after the First World War. The War was sometimes considered 'the war to end all wars', and it led to the utopian promise of modern industrial progress.

László Moholy-Nagy considered light as the primary medium of art as opposed to painting and pigment. He saw light as the instrument of the future and believed that the man of the future had to develop an intimate relationship with it, in order to be able to meet the challenges of the 20th century. In his view, light was as basic a material for photography as sound was for music. For him photography was one of the ways to shape light in a creative way, and he considered the photogram-experiments as the first and most important stage along the path towards photography. As he pointed out:

> The photogramme, or camera-less record of forms produced by light, which embodies the unique nature of the photographic process, is the real key to photography. It allows us to capture the patterned interplay of light on a sheet of sensitised paper without recourse to any apparatus. The photogramme opens up perspectives of a hitherto wholly unknown morphosis governed by optical laws peculiar to itself. It is the most completely dematerialised medium which the new vision commands.[1]

According to Moholy-Nagy, the photogram provides the key to acquiring abstract seeing. For him, abstraction was essential, as opposed to representation, and the photogram was the medium with an abstract capacity to shape light. It provided empirical visual data for a deeper understanding of light and space values. He created many of his photograms with the Light-Space-Modulator, which was a kinetic sculpture for generating light and motion effects. (See Fig. 2. on Plate IV.)

> Moholy-Nagy used the term 'photogram' instead of 'shadowgraph'. He renamed it because he thought it was a better name: 'I used or tried to use not alone shadows of solid and transparent and translucent objects but really light effects themselves.'[2]

Moholy-Nagy made the photogram part of the introductory courses he held at the Bauhaus. He was also the most outspoken advocate of the integrated teaching of photography. However, Hannes Meyer, the new director after Walter Gropius, invited the photographer Walter Peterhans to teach photography as an independent, self-standing course at Bauhaus.

This was the first time when the fundamental difference between the two approaches to photography became clearly manifest, and not without conflicts. Gropius and Moholy-Nagy both left the Bauhaus in 1928. In one view, that of the Bauhaus's new leaders, professional skills are indispensable for photography, it is a trade which has tricks and rules that can be taught. According to the other approach, here represented by Moholy-Nagy, imposing professional rules impairs creative thinking. As he wrote:

> The enemy of photography is the convention, the fixed rules of the „how-to-do". The salvation of photography comes from the experiment. The experimenter has no preconceived idea about photography. He does not believe that photography is only as it is known today, the exact repetition and rendering of the customary vision. He does not think that photographic mistakes should be avoided since they are usually "mistakes" only from the routine angle of the historic development. He dares to call "photography" all the results which can be achieved with

[1] László MOHOLY-NAGY, *Telehor*, 2 Vols. (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2011), 35.

[2] Louis KAPLAN, *László Moholy-Nagy: Biographical Writings* (Durham – London: Duke University Press, 1995), 48.

> photographic means with camera or without.[3]

3.

With the intention to pass on tradition, classify and identify laws and regularities, Dóra Maurer, a highly influential artist-teacher in the past several decades, used the photogram in the spirit of Moholy-Nagy. Her book titled *Fényelvtan* [On the Principles of Light] is the only detailed and comprehensive work on the subject in Hungarian. (See Fig. 3. on Plate IV.) Here she proposes the following definition:

> The photogram is an image produced without the mediation of a camera and photonegative, using solely light, photosensitive materials, and chemicals that develop the changes in those material, recording mostly the shadows of objects.[4]

An essential difference between her photogram definition and Moholy-Nagy's is that she calls the shapes appearing on the photosensitive surface 'shadows'. In other words, Maurer adopts a different approach to abstraction, a characteristic feature of the photogram. It is not only in Maurer's view of the photogram that the shadow has more significance than in Moholy-Nagy's theory, but also in her visual education program.

Drawing shadows was an important part of the workshops she held in a cultural centre in 1975 and '76 – together with Miklós Erdély, who was the most important figure in the neo-avantgarde scene in Hungary. In the beginning, Maurer would have preferred to leave drawing out of the programme altogether, as it was related strongly to the tradition of representation. For Maurer, it was a new experience that drawing, instead of being a form of representation, functioned as a diagram of interactions, leading back to abstract thinking. The drawing exercises primarily had a psychological / performative function. The focus was not on recording a view but in living a situation. Maurer began to use the photogram only at a later stage in her teaching practice. In 1981, she held an experimental course at the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest that focused on experimental photography and film. (See Fig. 4. on Plate V.) It started with drawing shadows, a preliminary exercise in preparation to making photograms.

A photogram is a diagram of making images. As Maurer says:

> Photo-graphy (light imaging) broken down to its constituting parts totally revaluates traditional image making because every image documents its own birth at the same time. [...] The image is no other than an authentic print of the process, and as such, it serves cognition.[5]

In Maurer's view, there is a straight line leading from the photogram and the creative use of the materials of the photogram to the methods of leaving marks in graphics. According to her the photogram can be regarded as the ancient formula of representation: the shadow and the trace of presence, these two are the origins of the image. She also declares that the differences between the fine artistic and photographic thinking can be grasped in the photogram.

> Professional photographers do not regard making photograms as a serious task. Meanwhile, artists, who are used to the freedom of shaping and form-

[3] László MOHOLY-NAGY, *Vision in Motion* (Milwaukee: Wisconsin Cuneo Press, 1947), 197.
[4] MAURER Dóra, *Fényelvtan* [On the Principles of Light] (Budapest: Magyar Fotográfiai Múzeum – Balassi Kiadó, 2001), 7.
[5] Ibid. 219.

> ing, hold the photogram in respect because it does not depict what is visible to the eye.[6]

Despite all that, Maurer did not make many photograms. In fact, she made only two major series, Floodgates in 1977–78 (See Fig. 5. on Plate V.); and Blind Touching in 1984. (See Fig. 6. on Plate VI.) Meanwhile she regularly used this medium in her teaching. Apart from historical examples, most of the images in her book are the works of students.

In 1987, Maurer taught an experimental seminar on the photogram at the Hungarian University of Arts and Design. I participated in that seminar as one of the five students at the Photography Department of the University. The method she proposed was not to force us to achieve artworks. Instead, she suggested that we try to be modest and explore all the technical potentials of the photogram. Not to strive to make art but to take the opposite approach: "invest ourselves in making something, and as we do so, something that is perhaps art may also come out."[7] The method proved effective. The seminar provided materials for Maurer's book titled *Fényelvtan.*

4.

In the avantgarde and eo-avantgarde the photogram was seen as a democratic instrument. It was simple to make, it did not require either complicated equipment, or professional skills. The basic photographic tools were easy to access, lots of people had photo laboratories in the bathroom at home, and amateur photo workshops were also very popular. Compared to the technical skills and knowledge required for photography, the photogram was a means to achieve quick and spectacular results for those who did not possess those skills and knowledge. As a result, the photogram used to play a significant role in artistic education and training. The case today is different. The entire process is becoming more and more expensive and distant. The photogram is rather a "creative" technique than a handy tool. Though it is an element in almost every course on photography, its function is about gaining some darkroom experience. But the avant-garde practice of making photograms exemplify a unique stance where one can make an imprint of light without any camera, or virtually any instrument. This approach still can be used effectively in teaching and was an essential part of Moholy-Nagy's and Maurer's educational practice. Following them I also use this approach in my teaching practice. In the last years, I held workshops for groups of students at the Hungarian University of Theatre and Film. The participants of the class were to become actors and dramaturgs. The courses focused on space, light and explored how light and shadow can shape space values. In this sense, we went back to Moholy-Nagy's concepts. We made use of the fact that the walls of the room were painted black. The students were drawing shadows on the black wall with white chalk that evoked reverse light and shadow relations, positive-negative states. A fundamental, medial feature of the photogram is that it treats the outcome's negative tonal position as final result, with all its subversive-connotations and consequences. (See Fig. 7. on Plate VI.) Thus the students in the course were experiencing and experimenting with the visual characteristics of the photogram – without making photograms in effect.

Today, digital photography is a democratic medium accessible to anyone. Working in a darkroom is more of a privilege for visual

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[6] Ibid. 8.

[7] MAURER Dóra és GÁYOR Tibor, *Maurer – Gáyor: Egy művészpár. Maurer Dórával és Gáyor Tiborral a Győri Városi Művészeti Múzeumban nyílt kiállításuk alkalmából beszélget Kaszás Gábor*, Exindex, 23 Nov 2001, http://exindex.hu/index.php?l=hu&page=3&id=205.

art students and photographers. Nevertheless, I still feel it appropriate to call the photogram a democratic medium. The photogram by nature does not obey the rules of central perspective and single viewpoint, following from the medium's practice and technical conditions. It is a significant feature of the photogram that the shadow of the three-dimensional object placed on the photoactive paper does not submit itself to the constraining rules of central perspective, the viewing from an external viewpoint. The deconstruction of the principle of the single viewpoint metaphorically inspired several theories over the past decades – but the photogram is the only technical medium that, by its immanent nature, possesses this anti-hierarchical extra meaning.

I would also recommend distinguishing within the photographic medium between camera-based and cameraless images. In case we consider photogram as an independent medium within photography, photogram might appear as a pendant of photography, as a social metaphor.

As Geoffrey Batchen put it in his new book about *The Art of Cameraless Photography*:

> Many artists now see modernism as an unfulfilled project and seek to reinvigorate its promise of a link between radical perspectives and social transformation. Their cameraless photographs therefore look back in order to signify a future that never was but still might be.[8]

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[8] Geoffrey BATCHEN, *Emanations: The Art of the Cameraless Photograph* (New York: Prestel Verlag, 2016), 42.

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PLATE III

Fig. 1. Ágnes Eperjesi, *Somersault*, 1987, chemi-photogram, 100 x 200 cm

PLATE IV

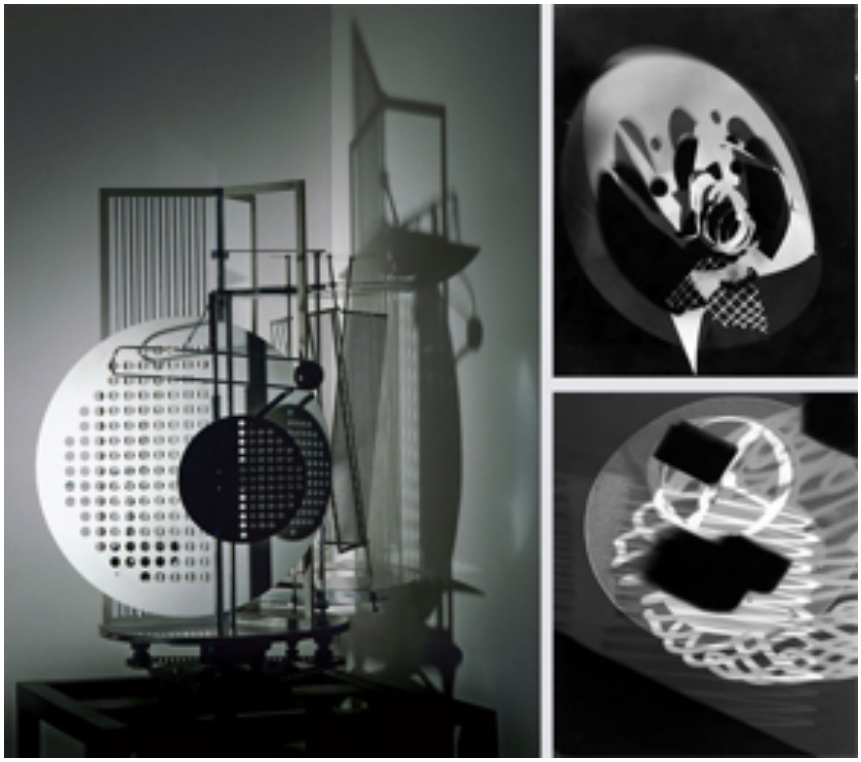

Fig. 2. László Moholy-Nagy, Light Space Modulator, 1930 and photograms created by using it

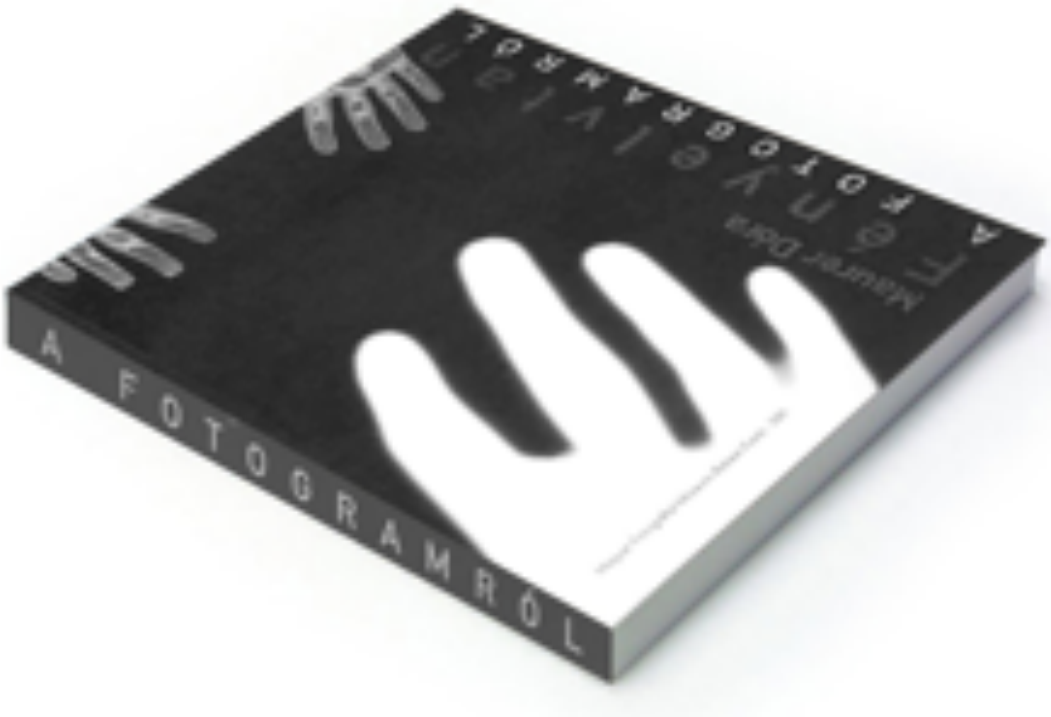

Fig. 3. Maurer, Dóra, *Fényelvtan* [On the Principles of Light]. MFM-Balassi, 2001.

PLATE V

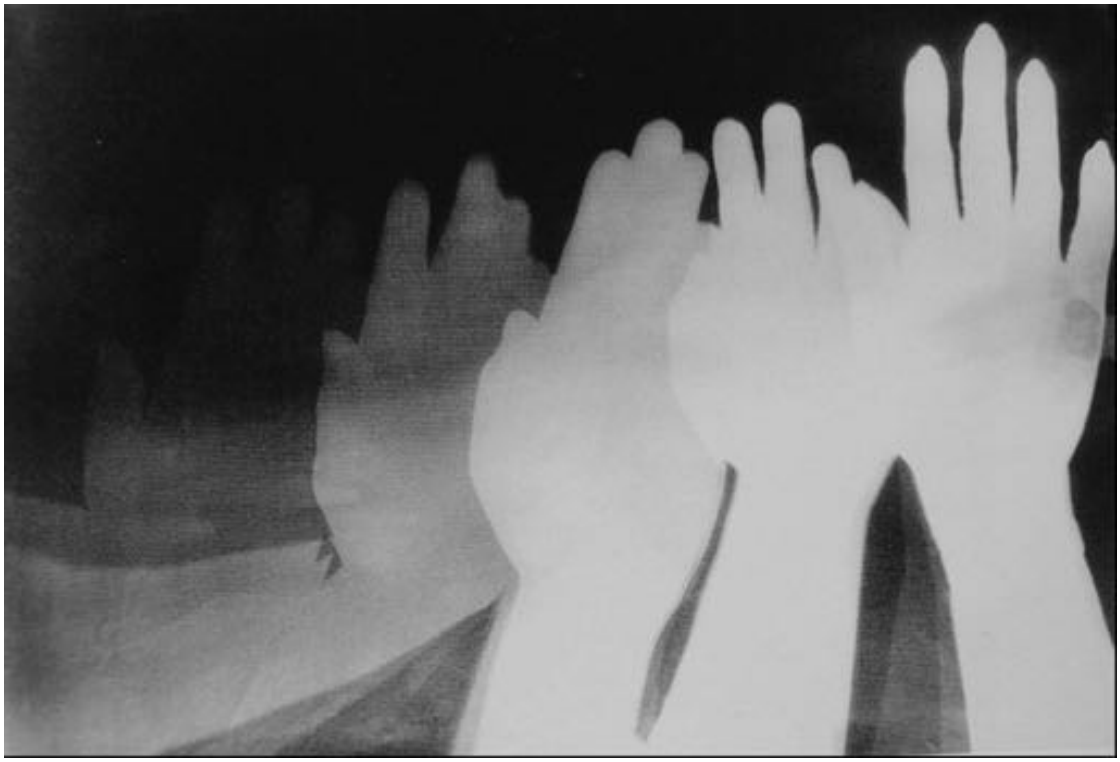

Fig. 4. Photogram created at the „Szak-közi" interdisciplinary course, 1981.

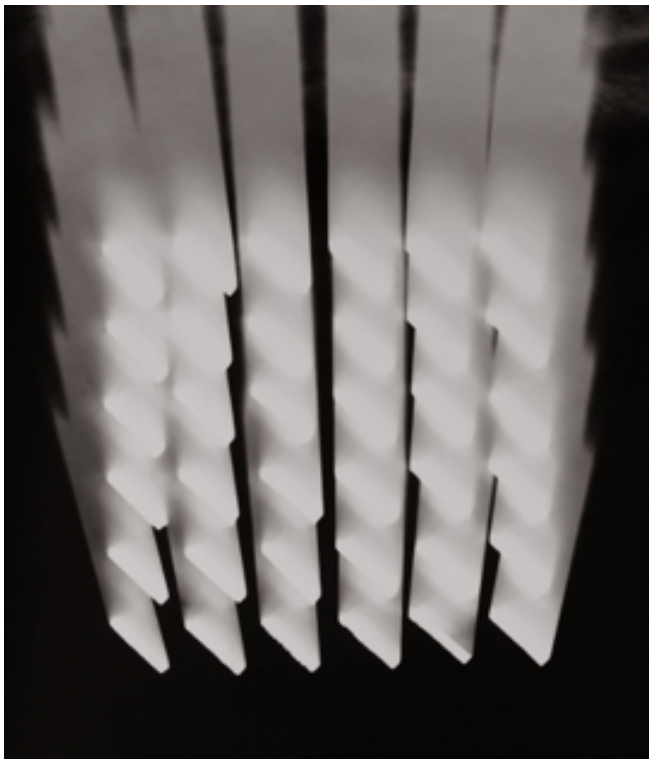

Fig. 5. Dóra Maurer: *Floodgate* (from the series of photographs and photograms), 1977–81, photogram, 65 × 49 cm

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Fig. 6. Dóra Maurer: *Blind Touching*, 1984

Fig. 7. Workshop at the University of Theatre and Film, Budapest, 2008.

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László Moholy-Nagy's Photoplastics and Homogeneous Photomontage

MAGDA DRAGU

Abstract: I trace the emergence and evolution of László Moholy-Nagy's photoplastics and their connection to the artist's movies and movie scripts. By closely reading Moholy-Nagy's statements concerning the nature of his photopastics, I show that their homogeneity and their clarity of meaning is derived from his similar experiments with film montage. Moholy-Nagy's experiments from his film script *Dynamic of the Metropolis* (1925) exhibit similar characteristics to Eisenstein's intellectual montage. In the evolution of avant-garde photomontage during the second decade of the past century, Moholy-Nagy's photoplastics are an important achievement in the transformation of heterogeneous photomontage, which consisted of abrupt juxtaposition of the most disparate elements – a technique closely related to visual collage –, into homogeneous photomontage which is defined by the articulation of clear meaning.

The emergence of photomontage around the years 1919–20, in the works of Dada artists (Raoul Hausmann, George Grosz and Hannah Höch) and the Russian constructivists Gustav Klutsis and Alexander Rodcheko, was a crucial moment in the history of the visual arts of the past century. Shortly after the discovery of the new technique, Moholy-Nagy started using photomontage and made his first photomontages or photolastics, as he called them, around 1924. Artists who invented the technique, especially Hausmann and Höch, emphasized its innovative character and claimed that it allowed them to create a new type of artistic meaning by manipulating photographs.[1]

In this article I distinguish between visual collage and photomontage based on their artistic meanings and the type of reference they create, and not on the actual acts of cutting and pasting which both techniques employ.[2] Moholy-Nagy made Constructivist collages in 1920–1922 and was familiar with Schwitters's collage technique[3] but his pho-

[1] Raoul HAUSMANN, *Am Anfang war Dada*, Hg. Karl RIHA and Günter KÄMPF (Giessen: G. Kämpf, 1972); Hannah HÖCH, "Erinnerungen and Dada", in *Hannah Höch 1889–1978: Ihr Werk, Ihr Leben, Ihre Freunde*, Hg. Elisabeth MOORTGAT et al., 207–208 (Berlin: Argon, Die Galerie, 1989).

[2] This is one of the claims I make in my PhD thesis (*Intermediality in the Early Avant-Garde 1900–1930: Collage and Montage*, dissertation director Professor Jacob Emery) I am currently finishing at Indiana U Bloomington, so I explore this full argument in this other text. For the purposes of this essay, it is enough to specify that meaning formation and the nature of the media used (papers, newspaper for collages versus photography for photomontages) is at the basis at my distinction between the techniques of visual collage and photomontage, and by extension montage. As a whole I relate collage with principles of heterogeneity and photomontage as homogeneity, both in terms of form and meaning.

[3] In a letter addressed to Iván Hevesy from April 5, 1920, Moholy-Nagy wrote about Schwitters's collages: "In the latest exhibition of the Sturm, a man called Kurt Schwitters is exhibiting pictures made from news-

toplastics are a response to Dada photomontages. Moholy-Nagy distinguished his photomontages from Dada heterogeneous photomontages and intended to create in his photoplastics "clarity", "presentation of ideas", and a form of reduced simultaneity.[4]

The word "Photoplastik" Moholy-Nagy chose for his photomontages suggests a rigorous organization of photographs in vertical and horizontal spaces, similar to De Stijl pictures. As Lucia Moholy-Nagy indicated, Moholy-Nagy chose the German word "plastik," translated as "sculpture," to refer to the plasticism, or neoplasticism of *De Stijl*.[5] For Eleanor Hight this reference to *De Stijl* neoplasticism translated into the "organizing of different parts into a synthetic image with an independent meaning".[6] Although Hight's interpretation supports my own reading of Moholy-Nagy's photoplastics, i.e. the emergence of a unique meaning, I would argue that the emphasis on geometrical and repetitive spatial organization of form which characterizes De Stijl pictures resurfaces in Moholy-Nagy's photoplastics. *De Stijl* pictures were abstract and they couldn't trigger the same type of meaning as that of a photoplastic.

In my view, and relying on the artists' own interpretations of it, photomontage differs from collages (including photocollages) through its particular use of photographs. A photomontage generates artistic meaning by manipulating photographs. A photograph, unlike a hand-made picture such as a collage, is an indexic sign which is "transparent" and directly points to reality. The effect of a photograph on the viewer is much stronger than that of a drawn or a painted scene of the same event, philosophers of the analytical tradition, such as Kendal Walton (1984), Gregory Currie (1999), Mikael Pettersson (2011) and Dan Cavedon-Taylor (2015) claimed in their theories of the photographic image.[7] According to Cavendon-Taylor,

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paper articles, luggage labels, hairs and hoops. What's the point? Are these painterly problems? Aside from this, it is not even new." (Moholy-Nagy's Letter to Iván Hevesy, Berlin, 5 April 1920, in *Moholy-Nagy*, ed. Krisztina PASSUTH, 388 [London: Thames and Hudson, 1985.]) This letter proves that Moholy-Nagy was familiar with the technique of collage and he started using it in a couple of years in his own collages, but instead of the chaos of Schwitters's Dada collages, Moholy-Nagy opted instead for the Constructivist order and simplicity. For Moholy-Nagy's connections with the Constructivism of El Lissitzky and Alexandr Rodchenko see Victor MARGOLIN, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy 1917–1946* (Chicago–London: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

[4] László MOHOLY-NAGY, "Fotographie ist Lichtgestaltung", *Bauhaus* 2 (1928): 2–9. In English: "Photography is Manipulation of Light", trans. Frederic SAMSON, in *Bauhaus Photography*, 126–129 (Cambridge, Mass.–London England: MIT Press, 1985), 128. The page numbering I am using for the quotes belongs to the English version of Moholy-Nagy's 1928 article.

[5] Lucia MOHOLY-NAGY, *Marginalien zu Moholy-Nagy: Moholy-Nagy, Marginal Notes* (Krefeld: Scherpe, 1972), 70.

[6] Eleanor HIGHT, *Picturig Modernism: Moholy-Nagy and Photography in Weimar Germany* (Cambridge, Mass. – London: The MIT Press, 1995), 150.

[7] See Kendall WALTON, "Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism", *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984): 246–277; Gregory CURRIE, "Visible Traces: Documentary and the Contents of Photographs", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (1999): 285–297; Mikael PETTERSSON, "Depictive Traces: On the Phenomenology of Photography", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 69 (2011): 185–196 and Dan CAVEDON-TAYLOR, "Photographic Phenomenology as

the viewer "endorses the contents of such [photographic] experiences in a psychologically-immediate, non-inferential manner".[8] In other words, we "assent" to the content of the photographic experience just as we assent to real life perceptual experiences.[9]

A photomontage distinguishes itself from collage, a hand-made picture, because it constructs pictorial space around a photographic image which points to a concrete reality. According to this definition I do not view Moholy-Nagy's *25 Bankrupcy Vultures* (25 Pleitegeiter 1922–1923, Fig. 1. on Plate VII.) as a photomontage or a photoplastic, as Elizabeth Otto did in her 2009 article on Moholy-Nagy's photoplastics,[10] because it consists exclusively of cut and pasted papers and does not contain any photographic images. Photography and cinema share a "transparent" nature and Moholy-Nagy commented on the indexical nature of cinema in *Painting Photography Film*: "The camera as a technical instrument and the most important productive factor in film-making copies the object in the world around us in a manner that is "true to nature".[11] In 1928 Moholy-Nagy described the effects of the photographs contained in photoplastics along similar lines: "One has confidence in the objectivity of photography of a type that does not seem to permit the subjective interpretation of an event".[12]

Critics and avant-garde artists alike have agreed that there are two main stages in the development of photomontage in the second decade of the past century. The first stage, associated with Dada photomontage was described as heterogeneous, using "contradictory structures",[13] highlighting an "increased degree of simultaneity and unruliness".[14] Although these Dada photomontage exhibited "biting sarcasm"[15] in attacking the political events of the day, their message was not very clear. In this first type of heterogeneous photomontage I identify the manifestation of the principles of collage which imply heterogeneous forms. In the second type of photomontage, which emerged around 1926–1927 or even earlier, in 1925, illustrated by "political and commercial propaganda" meaning had to emerge with clarity and thus earlier Dada photomontages had to release their "playfulness" claimed Hausmann in his influential article "Photomontage" from 1931.[16]

Although artists and critics (mainly Benjamin Buchloh) agreed that there were two types of photomontage in the 1920s, there are very few attempts at explaining what triggered the transition from one type of photomontage to the other. Buchloh, in his analysis of Gerhard Richter's *Atlas* (1962),

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Cognitive Phenomenology", *British Journal of Aesthetics* 55, No. 1 (2015): 71–89.

[8] CAVEDON-TAYLOR, "Photographic Phenomenology…", 76.

[9] Ibid. 78.

[10] Elizabeth OTTO, "A »Schooling of the Senses«: Post-Dada Visual Experiments in the Bauhaus Photomontages of László Moholy-Nagy and Marianne Brandt", *New German Critique* 107 (2009): 89–131, 95. [Dada and Photomontage across Borders.]

[11] László MOHOLY-NAGY, *Malerei, Photographie, Film*, Bauhausbücher 8 (Munich: Albert Langen Verlag, 1925). In English: *Painting, Photography, Film*, trans. Janet SELIGMAN (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1969), 34. The page numbering I use belongs to the English edition.

[12] MOHOLY-NAGY, "Photography is Manipulation of Light", 128.

[13] Raoul HAUSMANN, "Fotomontage", *a bis z* (Cologne), May (1931): 61–62. In English: "Photomontage", trans. Joel AGEE, in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940*, ed. Christopher PHILLIPS, 178–181 (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 179.

[14] MOHOLY-NAGY, "Photography is Manipulation of Light".

[15] HAUSMANN, "Photomontage", 178.

[16] Ibid. 179–180.

claimed that the new perception of the photograph as "archive" around 1925 and New Objectivity photography were responsible for the shift towards homogeneous photomontage in the works of both Constructivist artists, Gustav Klutzis, El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko as well as John Heartfield.[17] I do not agree with his claim, mainly because photomontage developed in parallel with film montage and not photography. Photomontage emerged from visual collage whose principles are also manifest in film montage. Instead the emergence of homogeneous political photomontage in the visual works of Rodchenko and Lissitzky after 1926–1927 is related to Vertov's and Eisenstein's film montages, as I prove somewhere else.[18]

As far as Moholy-Nagy's homogeneous photomontages or photoplastics are concerned, I claim that they emerged under the influence of his film experiments. Movement and clear development of ideas which are characteristic of film and film montage are also suggested or expressed through Moholy-Nagy's homogenous photoplastics. Unlike the Russian homogenous photomontages, which are mainly political posters and advertisement panels, photoplastics could be used for many artistic purposes claimed Moholy-Nagy: "for the scenic intensification of whole sequences in theatre and film, plays and film scripts can be condensed into a single picture. Another kind of use: the illustration of a concept or a feeling. As illustration for propaganda, advertisements, posters, as topical satire".[19]

By closely analyzing the connections between Moholy-Nagy's photoplastics and movies, I will show that his homogeneous photoplastics emerged under the influence of his movie experiments, especially those contained in the film script *Dynamic of the Metropolis* included in his volume *Painting, Photography, Film* (1925) which employs a form of film montage anticipating Eisenstein's intellectual montage. Furthermore Moholy-Nagy's definition of the photoplastics from his article "Photographie ist Lichtgestaltung" (Photography is Manipulation of Light) further echoes Eisenstein's montage. By 1928 when Moholy-Nagy wrote "Photographie," all Eisenstein's movies using montage had been released in Germany: *Strike* (1925), *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1927), so Eisenstein's influence on Moholy-Nagy cannot be excluded.

Within several years, Moholy-Nagy's artistic style rapidly evolved from figurative painting to abstract Constructivist pictures. During 1919–1920, Moholy-Nagy made his first abstract Constructivist pictures, *Perpe* (Fig. 2. on Plate VII.) and *The Big Railroad Picture* (Fig. 3. on Plate VII.). Around 1920–1921, he made his first collages which outlined constructivist principles, as well *Red Cross and White Balls* (1921; Fig. 4. on Plate VII.) and *F in Field* (1920; Fig. 5. on Plate VIII.). He also made assemblages, such as *h Construction* (1921; Fig. 6. on Plate VII.) which, he claimed in his late essay *Abstract of an Artist*, allowed him to consider the effect of "light falling on objects".[20] Around 1922 he started working with photograms either under the direct influence of Man Ray or of other photograms he had seen.[21]

Moholy-Nagy's first photoplastics date from the year 1924. In his 1925 volume *Painting, Photography, Film* he reproduced four of his photoplastics: *Circus and Variety Poster* (Fig. 7. on Plate VII.), *Militarism* (Fig. 8. on Plate VII.), *Pneumatik* (Fig. 9. on Plate IX.),

[17] Benjamin BUCHLOH, "Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive", *October* 88 (1999): 117–145.

[18] My PhD dissertation. See note 3.

[19] MOHOLY-NAGY, "Photography is Manipulation of Light", 128.

[20] László MOHOLY-NAGY, "Abstract of an Artist", in László MOHOLY-NAGY, *The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist*, 65–77 (New York: George Wittenborn, Schultz, 1946), 72.

[21] HIGHT, *Picturig Modernism…*, 56–90.

Leda and the Swan (Fig. 10. on Plate IX.) as well as a photoplastic called "Boxing" (Fig. 11. on Plate IX.), included in the typophoto *Sketch for a Film: Dynamic of the Metropolis.*

Despite the fact that the film *Dynamic of the Metropolis* was never realized, the succession of the photographs contained in this script suggests a form of montage between the city and the animals which play an important part in the film; from the very beginning the script opposes images of tall buildings and industrial machines with savage animals, such as a lion, an angry lynx, while the final scenes take place at the Zoo (Fig. 12–13. on Plate X.). The city versus animal/zoo montage may suggest either opposition (nature opposes technology) or analogy (new technological devices may be as savage as the animals themselves and they may elicit the same awe and admiration). Surprisingly, in his first film *Berlin Stilleben* (1931–1932)[22] there are no animals and the movie consists exclusively of scenes showing architecture, people on the streets, filmed from abrupt constructivist angles. Just like in Vertov's movie *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), in *Dynamic of the Metropolis* there is a section on sports and people's entertainment but less extended than in Vertov's movie.

In *Painting, Photography, Film* (1925), Moholy Nagy briefly commented on the nature of photoplastics, and connected them to the technique of the movies. He claimed that photoplastics illustrate "simultaneous representation," "compressed interpenetration of visual and verbal wit, weird combinations of the most realistic, imitative means which pass into imaginary spheres",[23] pointing thus to art's productive values, a central concept to his artistic thinking. But they may also "tell a story" (and become thus reproductive), illustrating thus the other concept central to Moholy-Nagy's artistic theories.[24] Moholy-Nagy then pointed out that such innovative techniques were already used in film practices and mentions cinematic techniques such as "transillumination; one scene carried into the other; superimposition of different scenes".[25]

In 1928 Moholy- Nagy defined the photoplastics as "organized apparition" with a "well-defined meaning and a central idea," having "unity" (which may have various effects such as "amusing, moving, despairing satirical".[26] They have "clear meaning" and display "moderate simultaneity," different from Dada simultaneity overlapping too many events. In a photoplastic, vision is accompanied by "intellectual association of ideas" and the connections between ideas and images become "accessible in a moment if the effect is to be achieved." A photoplastic "points to a given end, that of presentation of ideas".[27] His definition of photoplastic bears resemblances to Eisenstein's film montage, because Moholy-Nagy claimed that the meaning of the photoplastic resides only in the whole and not in the separate units: "As a result of this confidence and by the combi-

[22] Many of Moholy-Nagy's movies became available on DVD through the Moholy-Nagy Foundation in 2008. See www.moholy-nagy.org. For a review of these DVDs see Oliver BOTAR, "Films by László Moholy-Nagy", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 67, No. 3 (2008): 460–462.

[23] MOHOLY-NAGY, *Painting, Photography, Film*, 36.

[24] For the terms productive-reproductive see Moholy-Nagy's article "Produktion-Reproduction", *De Stijl*, 1922. For a critical interpretation of the two concepts see Oliver I. A. BOTAR, *Sensing the Future: Moholy-Nagy, Media and the Arts* (Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2014), 41–58.

[25] MOHOLY-NAGY, *Painting, Photography, Film*, 36.

[26] MOHOLY-NAGY, "Photography is Manipulation of Light", 128.

[27] Ibid.

nation of photographic elements with lines and other supplements, one obtains unexpected tensions which reach far beyond the significance of the single parts".[28]

Moholy-Nagy's photoplastics relate to movies in many other ways throughout his career, going from explicit references and intermedial transpositions to the cinematic organization of the photoplastics.

One of his earliest photoplastics directly evokes the world of the movies. The *Farewell* photoplastic (1924, Fig. 14. on Plate IX.) relates to the "melodramatic farewell scenes [...] seen in popular postcards and the movies of the 1920s".[29] But unlike the traditional farewell scenes from postcards of the time (Fig. 15. on Plate XI.),[30] Moholy-Nagy introduced two abrupt diagonals, seen in the intersecting bridge and the train, which suggest the rhythm and the movement of the filmic image. The *raccourci* diagonal is a typical element of Moholy-Nagy's photoplastics and he will use it to suggest temporality in many of his photoplastics from this time. The angle of vision is elevated, as if the film camera records the scene from above. The industrial landscape at the back as well as the two dogs flanking the couple balance the composition. The silhouettes of the man and the woman come from different visual sources and it is apparent that they do not form a unity, the woman looks away while the man looks down. Thus Moholy-Nagy subverts the traditional image of the parting couple and turns this early photoplastic into an experiment with cinematic vision. The homogeneity Moholy-Nagy theorized in connection to his photoplastics is apparent in this early photomontage: it tells the obvious story of a departure, but at the same time it contains a cinematic reference represented thematically (the farewell) as well as structurally (the temporal diagonal).

Painting, Photography, Film contains several film stills from the actual movies, such as *Zalamort* (1924), *Dr Mabuse* (1922) or photos taken during the actual filming of the movies, from behind the stage, such as a photograph taken during from the filming of *The Marriage Circle* (1924) and a photograph Gloria Swanson taken for the advertisement of her movie *Zaza* (1923). By placing the photoplastics in a photo book made of photographs and film reels as well as containing a film script, Moholy-Nagy implicitly commented on the nature of the photoplastics, placed at the intersection between photography and film. The photograms complete the picture, engaging with the technical nature of vision. The volume *Painting, Photography, Film* constantly opposes static and moving images by reproducing film stills and film reels; movement is triggered by the spatial repetition of the static image, a principle Moholy-Nagy later used in the photomontage he created for the prospectus of the 1929 *Film and Foto* exhibition, by repeating the same photograph taken in a convex mirror four times (Fig. 16. on Plate XI.).

Although Moholy-Nagy pointed out that the meaning of these photoplastics is clear, deciphering them may be a complex process. *Jealousy* (Eifersucht, 1925, Fig. 17. on Plate XI.) is one of these intricate photoplastics. Elizabeth Otto interpreted this photomontage in cinematic terms, claiming that the two rectangular forms repeated at regular intervals suggest two "upended film screens." She added that the repetition of the figures and the diagonal line tying the two screens together are other elements with suggest both the "melodramatic narrative" characteristic of films as well as the very medium of film. The photoplastic represents three male figures, shown as a photographic negative, a black and a white silhou-

[28] Ibid.

[29] *László Moholy-Nagy* (Malibu, California: Paul Getty Museum, 1995), 14.

[30] The postcard is reproduced from Irene-Charlotte Lusk's volume of Moholy-Nagy's photomontages, *Montagen ins Blaue* (Fulda: Anabas, 1980), 96.

ette with the legs cut and replaced with those of a woman. As Otto claimed, they are all based on a photograph of Moholy Nagy.[31] The woman in the white man silhouette's heart is connected through a line to the New Woman in bathing suit, which may be the cause of the jealousy suggested in the title. Eleanor Hight went even further and read this photomontage as a comment on Moholy-Nagy's ending marriage with Lucia.[32] Compared to Dada and Russian photomontages of the time, this photomontage is homogenous both as far as form is concerned, because it cuts out several silhouettes against a white background and as well as content, since it tells a clear story of jealousy between the characters involved. True to his program from 1928, when he claimed that a photoplastic may condense the subject of a movie, "plays and filmscripts can be condensed into a single picture (i.e. a photoplastics), Moholy Nagy made the *Jealousy* photoplastic the topic of his *Do Not Disturb* movie from 1945 which tells the story of two couples and the jealousy it ensues.

Eleanor Hight identified the word "Filmplakát" or film poster written on the back of some of Moholy-Nagy photoplastics, such as *A Chick Remains a Chick* (1925), *Rape of the Sabines* (1927) or *Love Your Neighbor. Murder on the Railway Line* (1925) and rightfully claimed that the artist wanted to make movies based on their subjects (1995, 165). In one instance, Moholy-Nagy wrote a film script for the photoplastic *A Chick Remains a Chick* (1925), dated 1925–1930, which develops a Surrealist narrative around the woman turned into a hen at the end of the movie, as Hight pointed out. Still, as my analysis showed, the photoplastic encapsulated the main idea of the movie plot, but the movie developed techniques and elements characteristic to the movie alone. For example, Moholy-Nagy talked of poly-cinema, which consists of the "simultaneous projection of films on different subjects".[33] The effects of such a projection would be quite disorienting for the viewer and it reminds one of the verbal collages of the Dada artists who read three poems simultaneously, *L'amiral cherche une maison à louer. Poème simultan par R. Huelsenbeck, M. Janko, Tr. Tzara*.[34] Such simultaneity is reduced in the photoplastic, claimed Moholy-Nagy, so that its meaning may emerge with clarity. But Eleanor Hight, who analyzed the connections between Moholy-Nagy's photoplastics and his films, claimed that both the movies and the photoplastics display the same qualities of increased simultaneity. She based her claim on the analogy between the circular shape of the photoplastic *Love Your Neighbor* (Fig. 18, left side, on Plate XII.) which probably accidentally resembles the schema Moholy-Nagy used to illustrate poly-cinema in *Painting, Photography, Film* (Fig. 18, right side, on Plate XII.). But Hight's interpretation ignores the definition of photoplastics which according to Moholy-Nagy reduced the excessive simultaneity of the Dada photomontage to allow for the idea to manifest itself with clarity: "photoplastics try to remain moderate in its presentation of simultaneity. It is clear, arranged lucidly, and uses photographic elements in a concentrated way, having di-

[31] OTTO, "A »Schooling of the Senses«...", 110.
[32] HIGHT, *Picturig Modernism...*, 169.
[33] MOHOLY-NAGY, *Painting, Photography, Film*, 41.
[34] *L'amiral cherche une maison à louer. Poème simultan par R. Huelsenbeck, M. Janko, Tr. Tzara* (*The Admiral seeks a house to rent. Simultaneous poem by R. Huelsenbeck, M. Janko, Tr. Tzara*, fig. 28; Tristan TZARA, *Œuvres completes 1: 1912–1924* [Paris: Flammarion, 1975], 492–493), first performed by Richard Huelsenbeck, Marcel Ianko, and Tristan Tzara in March 1916, the verbal collage manifests itself in various ways.
The text consists of three different poems recited at the same time by the three poets and printed as a musical score

vested itself of all disturbing accessories. It shows situations in a compressed state which can be unwound very quickly by the process of association".[35]

From the analyses of the two photoplastics, *Farewell* and the *Jealousy*, the homogeneity of Moholy-Nagy's photomontages and their connections to film techniques became apparent. The photographs used in photoplastics enter in complex relations with each other to bring forward clear meaning, a central idea. The photoplastics are condensed plots which may be used in movies. Some photoplastics, such as *Farewell* and *Jealousy*, bear direct references to the movies, while others, such as *Militarism*, *Pneumatik* and *Circus and Variety Poster* develop a "filmic temporality" as our eyes move on the picture surface.[36] Moholy-Nagy's experiments with the filmic medium led to the emergence of homogenous photomontage or photoplastics well before the 1927–1928 shift to homogeneous political photomontage. The emergence of homogeneous photomontage in Moholy-Nagy's photoplastics marks the departure from the heterogeneity characteristic of visual collage and turns montage into a technique whose inherent purpose is to articulate clear meaning in a way similar to language, both in film montage and photomontage.

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[35] MOHOLY-NAGY, "Photography is Manipulation of Light", 128.

[36] OTTO, "A »Schooling of the Senses«...", 104.

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PLATE VII

Fig. 1. Moholy-Nagy László:
25 Bankrupcy Vultures
(25 Pleitegeiter, 1922–1923)

Fig. 3. Moholy-Nagy László:
The Big Railroad Picture (1919–1920)

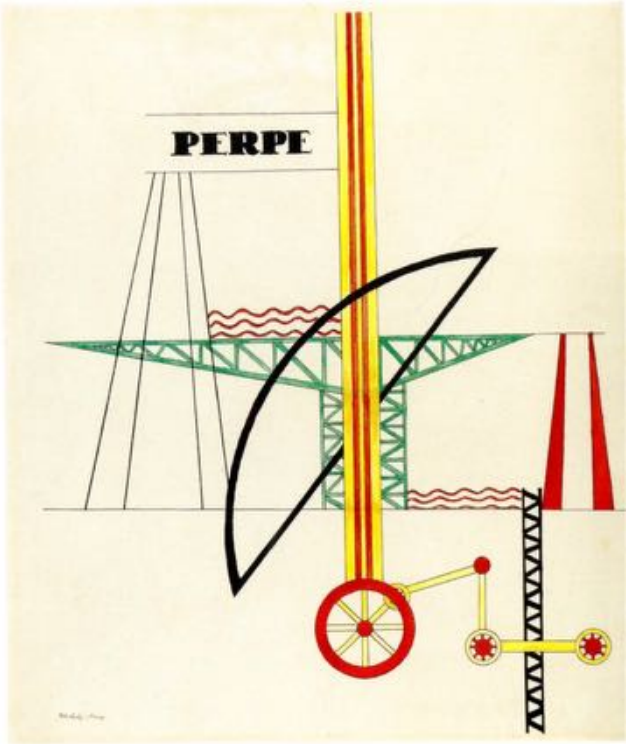

Fig. 2. Moholy-Nagy László: *Perpe* (1919–1920)

Fig. 4. Moholy-Nagy László:
Red Cross and White Balls (1921)

PLATE VIII

Fig. 5. Moholy-Nagy László:
F in Field (1920)

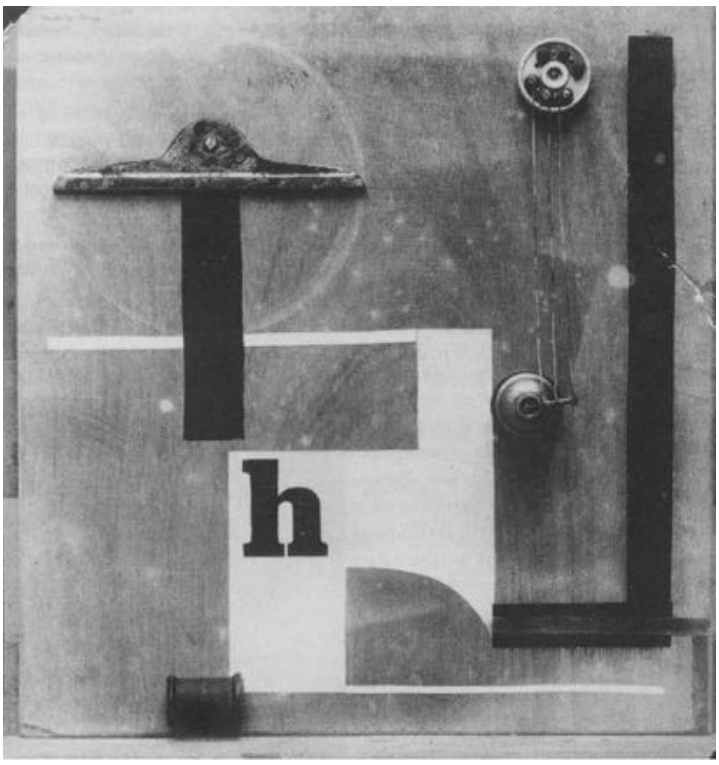

Fig. 6. Moholy-Nagy László:
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Circus and Variety Poster
from *Painting*, *Photography*, *Film*, (1925)

Fig. 8. Moholy-Nagy László:
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PLATE IX

Fig. 9. Moholy-Nagy László:
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***Farewell*, photoplastic (1924)**

PLATE X

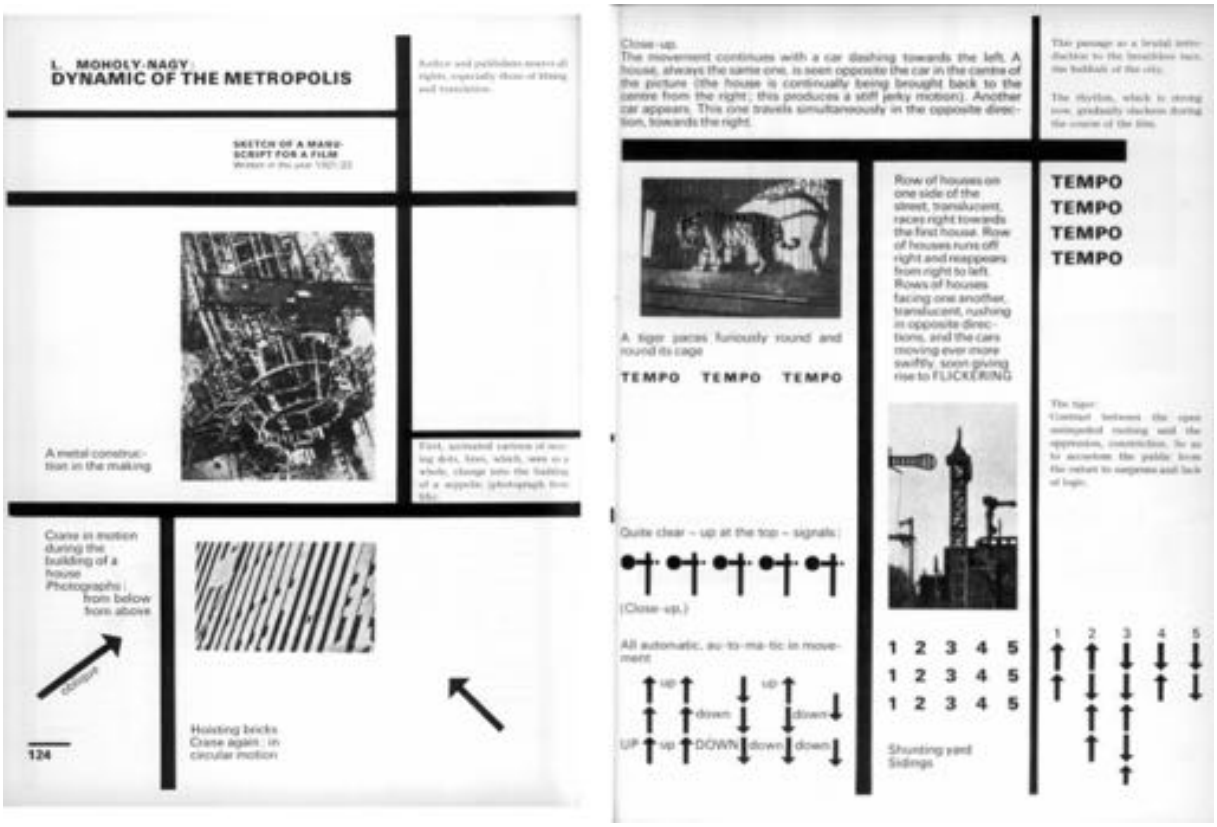

Fig. 12. Moholy-Nagy László: Samples from *Sketch for a Film: Dynamic of the Metropolis*

Fig. 13. Moholy-Nagy László: Samples from *Sketch for a Film: Dynamic of the Metropolis*

PLATE XI

Fig. 15. Traditional "farewell" postcards from the 1920's

Fig. 16. Moholy-Nagy László: Cover for the prospectus of the 1929 *Film and Foto* exhibition

Fig. 17. Moholy-Nagy László: *Jealousy* (Eifersucht, 1925)

PLATE XII

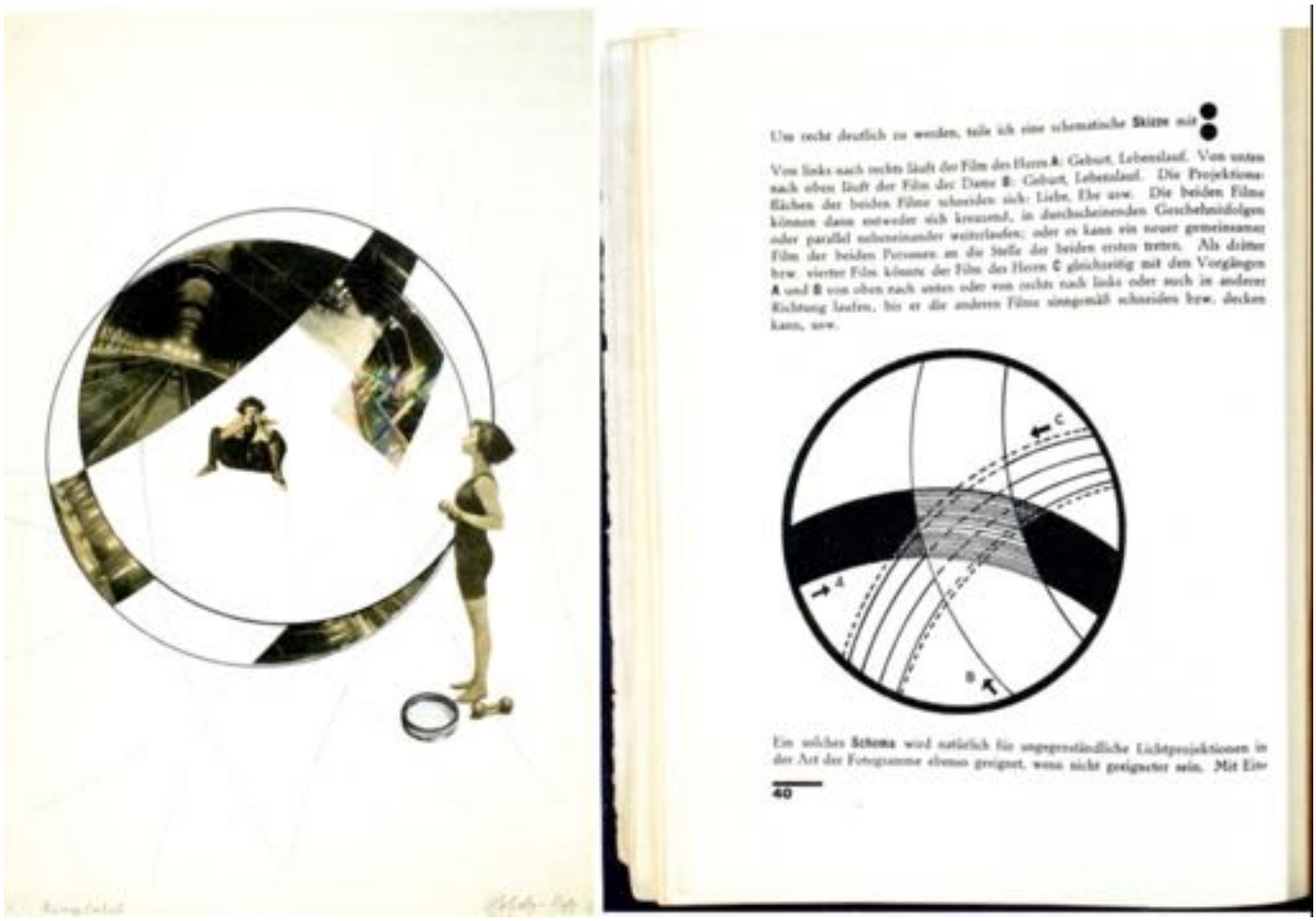

Fig. 18. Left: Moholy-Nagy László: *Love Your Neighbor*;
right: Moholy-Nagy László: illustration from *Painting*, *Photography*, *Film* (1925)

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Rudolf von Laban's Concepts in Embodiment

SELENE B. CARTER

Abstract: I will present the foundations of Laban Movement Studies and its theoretical framework as theorized by Hungarian dancer-scientist-artist Rudolf von Laban (1879-1958). The four centers of his work that systemize and articulate human movement in relationship to the mover's environment; the body, effort (antrieb), shape and space, aided by members of the Indiana University Contemporary Dance Theater. I will explicate his notation system for movement, Labanotation, and provide an historic locus for his work in the context of the Hungarian avant-garde.

College Dance Programs in the United States retain a strong strain of Austro-Hungarian performer, and movement philosopher, Rudolf Van Laban's concepts of embodiment. Courses that involve the process of analyzing and articulating body movement are historically emblematic of contemporary university dance curricula. Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is offered as a foundational course to support study in choreography and dance pedagogy. Laban's roots in the Hungarian Avant Garde are not often featured in these praxis classes, yet the ideas underpin Laban's original theories of the interaction of human body movement in space. LMA concepts are distilled around a framework of Body, Effort, Shape and Space (B.E.S.S.) The work is taught in college dance programs to discuss, analyze and more deeply understand and express human movement. (All photographs by Anjali Varma.)

1. Classes for undergraduate students in a Bachelor of Fine Arts BFA) degree in dance at Indiana University, Bloomington taught by Selene Carter, MFA, are offered in the third year of the curriculum. Students are introduced to the concepts in a lecture format, and then led to explore the concepts physically in an improvised setting. (Fig. 1. on Plate XIII.)
2. Students work together in small groups applying Laban theories to their movement and becoming familiar with terminology. Here the students are performing a simple choreographed phrase and identifying Laban's 'still form' of familiar shapes that he identified as commonly coming to rest in. Wall, Ball, Pin, Sphere, Screw, Pyramid are still forms in the Shape category of LMA. The dancers are finding the process of shaping from one still form to the next in their common dance phrase. They identified that this was a moment of pin becoming wall, moving from narrow and elongated to wide and stable. (Fig. 2. on Plate XIII.)
3. In the Effort framework, dancers discover a range of movement qualities, the 'how' of the movement that is both functional and expressive. The dancers are exploring combining the Effort factor of focus in space, on the spectrum of indirect or multi-focus to direct or pin-point focus, with the idea of shaping to the still forms. (Fig. 3. on Plate XIV.)
4. The Effort Factors of Focus in Space; direct/indirect, attention to Time; sudden/sustained, Attention to Flow; bound/free, and use of Weight intention; light/strong are combined to create States (the pairing of two effort factors for example Weight plus Time) and Drives (the pairing of three effort factors for example focus in Space, Flow and Weight). Dancers are exploring Effort Drives and pairings of effort intentions. (Fig. 4. on Plate XIV.)

5. Focus in Space and the focus of vision of Eye Tracking, coordinating the movement of eye focus in space or on a specific body part is an integrating and organizing factor to synchronize body movement in space. (Fig. 5. on Plate XV.)
6. The pairing of concepts in lemniscate relationships is often used to learn concepts. Finding the opposites in a thematic polar frame is helpful to discover the range of expressive and functional possibilities in movement. Here the dancers are exploring strong/light weight application and direct/indirect focus in space. (Fig. 16 on Plate XV.)
7. Indirect focus in space, the experience of scanning and seeing everything at once is both perceptual and creates a dynamic quality to the movement. (Fig. 7. on Plate XVI.)
8. Exploring the Effort qualities in all parts of the body, embodying the feeling through the macro or smaller unites parts of the body, with the macro, finding the state of being in the whole self is helpful to find embodiment versus imitating or acting. (Fig. 8. on Plate XVI.)
9. When exploring LMA concepts the individual dancer explores a specific idea in their own way, yet the overall group focus contributes to the learning. Building and layering the understanding through witnessing and being with a larger group mind approach. (Fig. 9. on Plate XVII.)
10. The dancers are encouraged to utilize poetic and visual images to access states of Effort exploration. Where move with direct focus in space and sustained time might not be as effective, the cue to move as if you are emitting a surgical laser beam out of the ends of your limbs, and you are moving through thick syrup might engage the movers with more embodied imagination. (Fig. 10. on Plate XVII.)
11. Concepts of body function always in relationship to space, or the mover's immediate environment are intrinsic to the movers' choices. (Fig. 11. on Plate XVIII.)
12. In the Laban studies the dancer can break out of learned, habitual training modes and find new possibilities for expression and deep discovery of more efficient ways of patterning their movement. (Fig. 12. on Plate XVIII.)
13. When an approach is seeded in the body based on Effort the movement often feels physically effortless. The dancer air bound is exploring the Lightness in the Effort factor of Weight. (Fig. 13. on Plate XIX.)
14. Creative, imaginative, playful narratives emerge when dancers explore the concepts of embodiment. Dancers are playing with finding Halloween Characters in the States and Drives of the Effort work. (Fig. 14. on Plate XIX.)

PLATE XIII

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

PLATE XIV

Fig. 3.

Fig. 4.

PLATE XV

Fig. 5.

Fig. 6.

PLATE XVI

Fig. 7.

Fig. 8.

PLATE XVII

Fig. 9.

Fig. 10.

PLATE XVIII

Fig. 11.

Fig. 12.

PLATE XIX

Fig. 13.

Fig. 14.

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Bartók's Hungarian Musical Avant-Gardism

LÁSZLÓ VIKÁRIUS

Abstract: According to Lajos Kassák's recollections in 1961, Bartók found elements in his poetry that lay close to his own experiments in music. In a 1926 interview, however, in which he emphasized the closeness of his art to that of poet Endre Ady, Bartók unambiguously stated that the idea of Kassák and his circle to link his music with their journal was founded on a mistake. Was Bartók then really close to those few representatives of Hungarian avant-garde in the later 1910s when his art was enthusiastically propagated in the periodical *MA* [Today]? Bartók's changing attitude to musical modernism and the meaning of a "Rembrantian concept," almost casually mentioned in the same 1926 interview and obviously meant to refer to an idea markedly different from that of the so-called "activists," are discussed in the essay with reference to the composer's public and private writings as well as the stylistic development of his music especially between 1908 and 1926.

On 20 April 1926 Bartók had a piano recital in the Czechoslovak town, Košice, the former Hungarian Kassa (now in Slovakia), playing Beethoven, Scarlatti, Chopin, Debussy and his own music composed between 1908 and 1918.[1] An interview made after the concert was published in the Hungarian language *Kassai Napló* [Kassa Journal] on 23 April.[2] Following a discussion of his classification of Hungarian folk songs, his general interest in peasant music also manifested in his trip to Biskra, Algeria, and jazz, Bartók mentioned his most important contemporaries, Schoenberg and Stravinsky.

> Modern music is not following the road of folk music. Two of its outstanding figures, Stravinsky and Schoenberg, are taking divergent paths. Of the two, Stravinsky stands closer to me. I barely know the younger generation [...] Stravinsky's recent works, which he calls neoclassical and which indeed resemble the music of Bach's time, seemed dry to me at first reading, though after his concert in Budapest I found a lot more in them. Stravinsky's switch to neoclassicism is intimately bound to current developments in other arts. Although Stravinsky stands under the influence of Picasso, I do not believe things can be explained so simply; the arts have been developing concurrently ever since romanticism.[3]

The reference to contemporary art and especially Picasso is surprising in Bartók's ar-

[1] See DEMÉNY János, „Bartók Béla megjelenése az európai zeneéletben (1914–1926)" [Béla Bartók's Appearance in European Musical Life (1914–1926)], in *Zenetudományi Tanulmányok 7*, szerk. SZABOLCSI Bence és BARTHA Dénes, 5–426 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1959), 394.

[2] See ibid. 395; for a more recent edition of the interview, see *Beszélgetések Bartókkal: Interjúk, nyilatkozatok 1911–1945* [Bartók in Conversation: Interviews, Statements 1911–1945], szerk. WILHEIM András (Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 2000), 73–74.

[3] "A Conversation with Béla Bartók", trans. David E. SCHNEIDER and Klára MÓRICZ, in *Bartók and His World*, ed. Peter LAKI (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), 237.

gument, as he generally avoided such casual remarks about the history of art. It is also unusual among the known interviews, that the composer mentions his own connection to Lajos Kassák's journal, *MA* [Today]. Another unexpected reference to the visual arts plays a role here, again.

> As to me, I think that I strongly belong to [Endre] Ady's generation. The opinion of Kassák and his circle that they put my music into the service of their journal was based on a misunderstanding; for the guiding principle in my art is after all a "Rembrandtian" concept.[4]

According to the late Ferenc Csaplár, former director of the Kassák Museum and author of two important studies on Bartók and Kassák, "All in all, Bartók was significantly more sympathetic an observer of the activities of *MA* than the interview [...] would suggest."[5] The interview was reprinted in the voluminous collection of reviews from Bartók's life by János Demény, editor of the composer's correspondence. Csaplár quotes Demény's comment on the interview in which the latter warns that "there are some passages and phrases that we should not take at face value."[6] The authenticity of or skepticism about this interview seems to me crucial in understanding Bartók's position. One clue could be the journalist, whose identity remained unknown for a long time as the interview was simply signed with the interviewer's initials. It was Csaplár who revealed the full name: Ödön Mihályi.[7] Mihályi was a young Hungarian writer from Kassa/Košice who himself had been connected to Kassák's circle. It may have been he who directed the conversation to that particular subject, and Bartók's probably spontaneous reaction seems to me perfectly credible. What he says does not mean that he had not been interested in Kassák's artistic movement and publications. But it certainly suggests his lack of conviction in fully identifying himself with them. If so, this could reliably represent his views of 1926, views that were necessarily different from those of a decade before. Indeed, Bartók was on the threshold of a very significant stylistic change at the time, his individual absorption and reinterpretation of the neoclassicist aesthetics. Furthermore, the growing distance from their overlapping shared hopes and disappointments in social change in Hungary after the First World War could also have played a part in the urge to distance himself from the artistic movement with which he had become associated.

Kassák and his circle actually did propagate Bartók's music enthusiastically. A special issue was devoted to his art in 1918 (see Fig. 1.).[8] It included three facsimile pages of Bartók's compositions, a poem by Kassák dedicated to the composer, and significantly,

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[4] "Magamról is azt hiszem, hogy erősen hozzátartozom az Ady generációjához. Kassákéknak az a vélekedése, hogy zenémet lapjuk szolgálatába állították, tévedésen alapul; hiszen művészetemben végeredményben egy rembrandti elgondolás vezet." My translation. A slightly different translation appears in LAKI, *Bartók and His World*: "I believe that I belong to the generation of Ady. Kassák and his circle, however, are mistaken when they consider my music to be in the spirit of their journal, since the driving force behind my work is a Rembrantesque conception."

[5] CSAPLÁR Ferenc, *Kassák Lajos Bartók-verse* [Lajos Kassák's Bartók Poem] (Békéscsaba: Magyar Helikon, 1981), 52.

[6] Cf. DEMÉNY, „Bartók Béla megjelenése...", 396.

[7] CSAPLÁR, *Kassák Lajos Bartók-verse*, 51.

[8] *MA* 3, 2. sz. (1918). The complete set of issues is available on the internet cite of the Österreiches Nationalbibliothek, see http://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno-plus?aid=maa.

Róbert Berény's still famous portrait of the composer. As a contemporary review by Aladár Bálint clearly shows, by 1913 when the portrait was painted and exhibited in Budapest, the composer himself had already become an iconic figure of modern Hungarian art.[9] The painting by a member of the artistic group "the Eight" was thus understandably included in the special Bartók issue of *MA* five years later.[10]

This singular attention devoted to Bartók was, however, far from occasional or exceptional on Kassák's part. Bartók had already been the dedicatee of a folklore-inspired expressionist poem by Mátyás György, "Legény gajdol" [Young man's humming] published in the predecessor of *MA* called *Tett* [Action] in early 1916.[11] And an earlier issue of *MA* in 1917 also included a complete facsimile of one of Bartók's compositions, perhaps not as a mere coincidence, one of his *Five Songs* based on Endre Ady's poems.[12]

Furthermore, in 1921 and now an *émigré* in Vienna, Kassák approached Bartók once again to obtain a facsimile of a composition and Bartók appeared forthcoming.[13] Bartók did not only enumerate what he could offer but also advised Kassák to turn to Emil Hertzka, director of his new publisher, Universal Edition in Vienna, with whom he had an exclusive publication contract for his musical compositions. He even alerted Hertzka in an unpublished letter of 26 May 1921 about Kassák's enquiry:

> A Hungarian writer, who is just working on an anthology of modern art (literature, music, painting, etc.), asked me to offer him something that he would be allowed to publish in it. I have no objections to it but the last decision falls on you. [...] Possible would be: movement III of my 2nd string quartet, or one of my studies for piano, perhaps No. 3 or 4 of the Ady Songs.[14]

What Bartók's music represented for Kassák's circle might be gleaned from the long and detailed article by Miklós Náray, published in the special issue of *MA*.[15] Despite its highly mannered modernist literary style, Náray's article shows intimate knowledge and sound judgement of Bartók's published or performed oeuvre up to *The Wooden Prince*, which had premiered quite recently in May 1917. The author repeatedly refers to M.D. Calvocoressi's Paris lecture on Bartók that seems to be an important source for his discussion, even though he occasionally contradicts his source (as in the case of the significance of Schoenberg, which Náray considers less relevant and rather occasional). Náray emphasizes the "monumentality" in Bartók's art and works as well as the significance of the "primitive," originating in Bartók's exceptional and idiosyncratic use of folk music in his modernist works. The decisive caesura of the oeuvre is correctly set after the First Suite for Orchestra. The significance of the books of piano music such as the *Fourteen Bagatelles*, the *Two Elegies*, the *Four Dirges* and the *Esquisses (Seven Sketches)* is rightly defined. Náray mentions the First String Quartet as probably the most important work of European significance. And despite the greatness of the ballet *The Wooden Prince* and the excellence of its orchestration, he also correctly points out the

[9] BÁLINT Aladár, „Három kiállítás", *Nyugat* 6 (1913): 1:786–787.
[10] *MA* 3, 2. sz. (1918): 21.
[11] CSAPLÁR Ferenc, *Bartók Béla, Kassák Lajos* (Budapest: Kassák Múzeum, 2006), 2.
[12] *MA* 2, 8. sz. (1917): 119–21.
[13] See Bartók's letter to Kassák, 24 May 1921, quoted and reproduced in facsimile in CSAPLÁR, *Bartók Béla, Kassák...*, 17–19.
[14] Unpublished letter, Bartók to Emil Hertzka, original in German, photocopy in the Budapest Bartók Archives.
[15] NÁRAY Miklós, „Bartók Béla", *MA* 3, 2. sz. (1918): 19–25.

problematic relationship between the more German and more backward-looking literary libretto (by Béla Balázs) and the original and modernist music in it. Bartók is called "naturally a 'revolutionary'" (p. 25), a term the composer himself later decisively contrasted with what he considered clearly more valuable, "evolutionary."[16] In the article, most of Bartók's musical "innovations" are touched upon: in rhythm, instrumentation or harmony. He is compared only to the most outstanding innovators of the period (e.g., Scriabin, Schoenberg and Stravinsky [p. 25]), but at the same time his work is contrasted to "romanticism" and, what appears a surprisingly early use of the term, "neo-classicism" (p. 20). Instead of further discussing Náray's essay, however, it seems even more important to see what Bartók actually offered to include in *Ma* and what these compositions meant to him.

As mentioned before, it was one of Bartók's five Ady Songs that was reproduced in the first facsimile in 1917, "Nem mehetek hozzád" [I Cannot Come to You], with its refrain form inculcating the desperate phrase "And I shall die."[17] In his setting, the refrain is immediately recognizable but at the same time it is continuously varied. The song was one of those "death songs" the composer mentioned in a letter of 26 February 1916 to an acquaintance to whom most of his surviving letters are addressed in this period:[18] "I have found 3 Ady-songs, which almost surely I'll be able to set to music. [...] Az őszi lárma [Autumn Echoes], Három őszi könnycsepp [Autumn Tears]. These, too, are autumn death songs."[19]

What Bartók probably composed last, "Az ágyam hívogat" [My Bed Calls Me] obviously represented for him the essence of that desperate mood, now in the centre of his thinking. On 4 March he intimates his idea to set this particular poem to music as well.

> The order is significant with Ady because his poems are an actual autobiography or at least diary-like pieces of writing in verse. It seems that this "Szeretném ha szeretnének" [I'd Love to be Loved] and the subsequent Poems of All Secrets stem from the period of a great crisis [...] I have marked in the two volumes the stanzas that lie especially close to me – which almost seem to emerge from me. But there is one I could not even mark: "Az ágyam hívogat" [My Bed Calls Me]. [...] I should so much love to set it to music. [...] The simplest and yet so deathly sombre words. "Oh my bed, my coffin [...] I'll lie down." He ends with what he began. Only the greatest poet of all times can write such a thing. We

[16] See Bartók's late Harvard Lectures (1943), in Béla BARTÓK, *Essays*, ed. Benjamin SUCHOFF, 354–355 and 360–361 (London: Faber & Faber, 1976).

[17] Cf. Péter LAKI, "Les mélodies op. 15 et 16 de Bartók", *Schweizer Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft* Neue Folge 27 (2007): 105–120, 108.

[18] See my article, László VIKÁRIUS, "Intimations through Words and Music: Unique Sources to Béla Bartók's Life and Thought in the Fonds Denijs Dille (B-Br)", *Revue Belge de Musicologie/Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap* 67 (2013): 179–217. The article includes selected passages from letters to Klára Gombossy related to his *Five Songs* op. 15, four of whose texts set poems by her. The important quotations related to Ady are not quoted there.

[19] Bartók's letter to Klára Gombossy, 26 February 1916, original in Hungarian, photocopy in the Budapest Bartók Archives: "találtam 3 Ady-dalt, amelyet majdnem biztos, hogy meg tudok zenésíteni. Vér és aranyból: Az őszi lárma, Három őszi könnycsepp. Ezek is őszi haláldalok."

> should be glad that we can read such masterpieces in our mother tongue.[20]

It is here that the generally reticent Bartók recalls, in an astonishingly vivid manner, his encounter with Ady's poetry.

> What a sensational event in my life the first volume of Ady [...] was! It happened in the spring of 1908. *The* friend of mine (my only friend) brought it [...] to me, "Read this!" And I read feverishly till late after midnight – it was almost impossible for me to part with it. I had not been particularly interested in poetry before, though. But these appeared to have emerged from me – yes, had I not been born for music but for writing poetry, I should have written them – this was what I felt.[21]

The eventual completion of "My Bed Calls Me," announced in a letter of 14 April, effectively rounded off the set, although at the time Bartók seems to have been undecided about an occasional extension of the cycle with more songs. He suggested the following in a later letter: "I had succeeded in making 'Ó ágyam' [Oh, my bed]. It's a great joy – for the time being only for me. I have 5 Ady songs so far. They are strange and good."[22]

Following a "fallow" period in the wake of the repeated refusals of his 1911 opera, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, Bartók produced a significant number of works during the First World War.[23] Most conspicuous among them is *The Wooden Prince*, Bartók's ballet that was staged in Budapest's Royal Opera House in 1917 effectively paving the way to the stage for the opera as well, finally premièred the following year in May 1918. An interesting pattern can be observed in the list of war-year works: within this pattern, different types of works follow one another with a varying degree of creativity and significance. The period as a whole and each of the newly emerging genres were introduced by works based on folk material, first Hungarian then Romanian and, finally, reflecting his most recent collections, Slovak. The composition of

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[20] Bartók's letter to Klára Gombossy, 26 February 1916, original in Hungarian, photocopy in the Budapest Bartók Archives: "Adynál fontos a sorrend, mert költeményei valóságos életrajz vagy legalább is naplószerű írások versben. Ugy látszik ez a 'Szeretném ha szeretnének,' meg az utána következő minden titkok versei nagy krízis idejéből származik [...] Megjelöltem ebben a két kötetben a különösen hozzám – szinte belőlem szóló – strófákat. De egyet – már megjelölni sem lehetett: 'Az ágyam hivogat.' [...] A legszimplább és mégis olyan halálosan szomorú szavak. „Óh ágyam, koporsóm... lefekszem." Végzi, a mivel kezdte. Minden idők legnagyobb költője tud csak ilyet irni. Boldogok lehetünk hogy anyanyelvünkön olvashatunk ilyen remekműveket." Cf. Judit FRIGYESI, *Béla Bartók and Turn-of-the-Century Budapest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 211–215, quoting from the same letter within an extended discussion of Bartók's setting of this poem.

[21] Bartók's letter to Klára Gombossy, 26 February 1916: "Mekkora szenzációja volt életemnek az első Ady-kötet [...]! 1908 tavaszán volt. *A* barátom (az egyetlen emberem) hozta [...], 'ezt olvasd!' És én olvastam, lázban, késő éjfelutánig – alig tudtam megválni tőle. Pedig nem igen érdekeltek mindaddig versek. De ezek mintha belőlem kerültek volna ki – igen ha nem zenére termettem volna, hanem versírásra, én irtam volna meg ezeket – ezt éreztem."

[22] Bartók to Klára Gombossy, 14 April 1916: "sikerült az »Ó ágyam«-at elkészíteni. Nagy öröm, – egyelőre csak számomra) Eddig már 5 Ady dalom van. Furcsák és jók."

[23] See László VIKÁRIUS, "*Inter arma moderna non silent musae*: Bartók during the Great War", *Revue Belge de Musicologie/Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Muziekwetenschap* 71 (2017): 209–225.

the Second String Quartet also belonged to the war years. In contrast to the string quartet genre, which spanned his whole career, the composition of the two cycles of songs proved to be as exceptional as the choice of contemporary poetry for setting, as opposed to his later vocal works in which he would always use texts of folk origin.

Bartók's selection of an enigmatic passage, eleven bars of what appears to be instrumental music for the title page of the 1918 Bartók special issue of *MA* deserves a commentary of its own. The passage concludes the first of ten songs composed in 1916. "Tavasz" (Spring) is based on a poem by Klára Gombossy, recipient of the letters in which Bartók so profusely discusses Ady's poetry. This young but precocious girl from Kisgaram, Upper Hungary (now Hronec in Slovakia), who accompanied Bartók to help to collect folk songs in Slovak villages, showed her adolescent poetry to him, which interested the composer and effectively instigated the whole "period of songs." In his first known letter of 6 January 1916 to her, in which he mentions the composition of "Spring," Bartók explains the passage before the conclusion, in which he focuses on the word "mámor" (i.e., ecstasy, from the phrase "mámora a vérnek" [the ecstasy of blood] as "truly descriptive": "It conveys the surreal, unearthly, inexpressible experience of ecstasy." And, referring to this, he observes about the the piano epilogue which concludes the song and is reproduced on the title page of *MA*: "Something similar is expressed, while the ecstasy would be withering away, by what is basically the final chord, a vague trembling."[24] This graphic passage reappears in a slightly recomposed form in the chef-d'oeuvre of the period, the ballet, just before the final return of the opening "nature" music.[25] The choice of this passage for a facsimile, thus, might have had more than one reason. Finally, the last facsimile in *MA* represented yet another "death song," this time for piano and without words: the unexpected slow last movement of the Suite op. 14.[26]

The most puzzling detail in the text of the 1926 interview is the "Rembrantian concept." Apart from a general knowledge of the painter from school and museums, Bartók might have had an added source which may explain why he was thinking of Rembrandt when speaking about Endre Ady's art on the occasion of a chance interview. His friend, Zoltán Kodály, Bartók's *only* friend, who famously discovered Debussy as a suitable model for modern Hungarian music in Paris in 1907, had previously studied a semester at the University in Berlin. He was also a pupil of Heinrich Wölfflin, a particularly important theorist of baroque art.[27] On the one hand, Ady's poetry and Rembrandt's art could indeed be somehow linked due to Kodály's mediation. On the other hand, Bartók's mention of Rembrandt obviously emphasized his reserve towards some tendencies in contemporary art. Discussing avant-garde compositions of extremely reduced means in one of his late Harvard lectures, for instance, he voiced his doubts about some of

[24] Cf. VIKÁRIUS, *Intimations through Words and Music…*, 191–94.

[25] The relationship between the facsimile and the ballet was first identified by András WILHEIM, see "Zu einem Handschriften-Faksimile aus dem Jahre 1917", in *Documenta Bartókiana 6*, ed. László SOMFAI (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó 1981), 233–234.

[26] *MA* 3, 2. sz. (1918): 22–23.

[27] See Kodály mentioning his experience of Wölfflin's lectures as late as a 1956 speech, entitled „Ki az igazi zeneértő?" [Who is the True Expert in Music], in KODÁLY Zoltán, *Visszatekintés: Összegyűjtött írások, beszédek, nyilatkozatok* [Looking Back: Collected Papers, Speeches, and Statements], szerk. BÓNIS Ferenc, 3 köt. 1:299–301 (Budapest: Argumentum Kiadó, 2007), 299.

Piet Mondrian's works as "less than satisfactory artistic communication."[28] While Rembrandt's realism, intensity of expression and, probably, depth of feeling represented more than just "satisfactory artistic communications," the almost obsessive artist of self-portraits might have appeared in Bartók's mind naturally comparable to Ady's "diary-like" poetry. As it seems from his 1926 interview, he undoubtedly considered himself and his art essentially related to this tradition.

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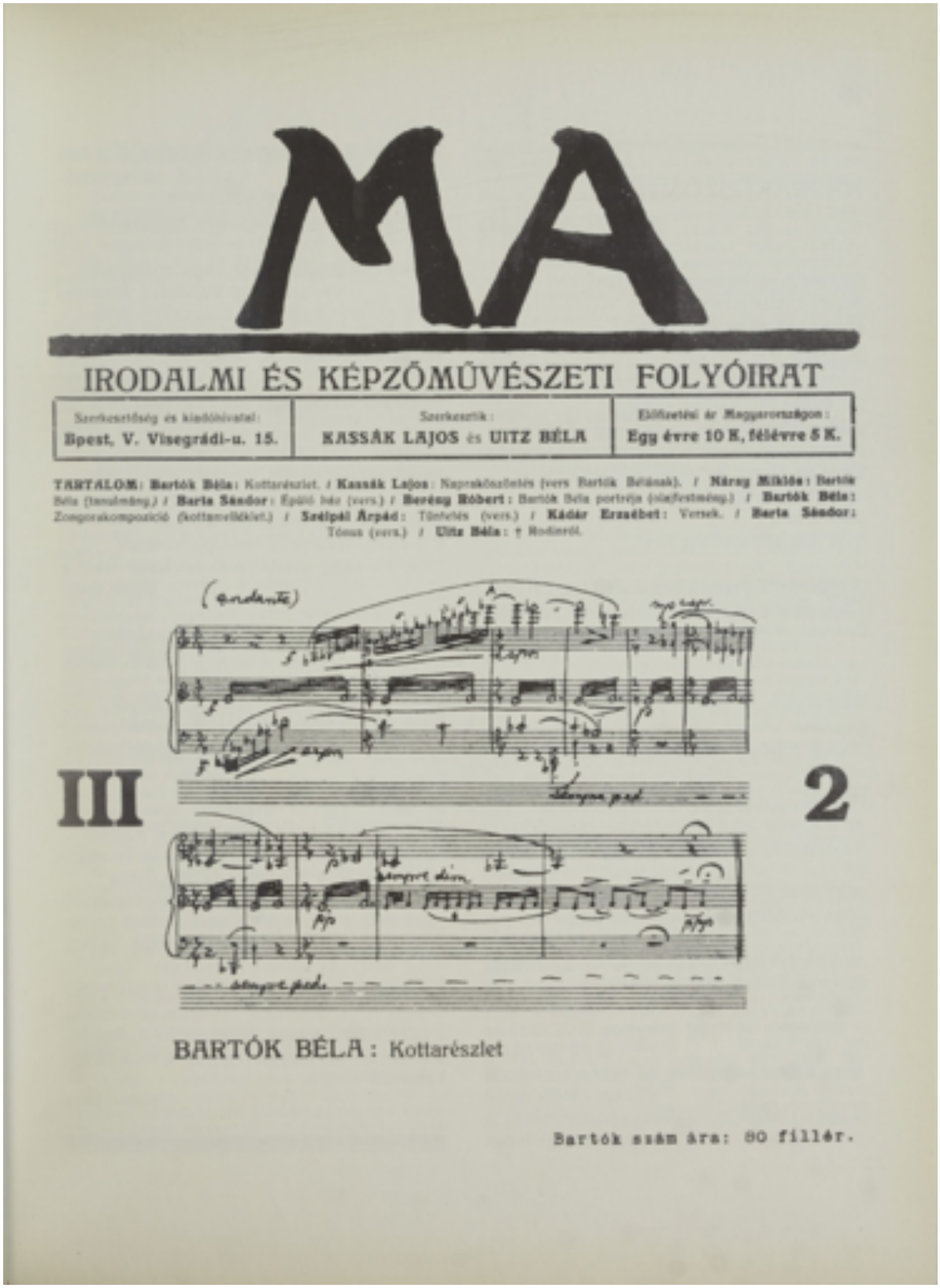
[28] BARTÓK, *Essays*, 358.

PLATE XX



MA

IRODALMI ÉS KÉPZŐMŰVÉSZETI FOLYÓIRAT

Szerkesztőség és kiadóhivatal: Budapest, V. Visegrádi-u. 15. | Szerkesztik: KASSÁK LAJOS és UITZ BÉLA | Előfizetési ár Magyarországon: Egy évre 10 K, félévre 5 K.

TARTALOM: **Bartók Béla**: Kottarészlet. / **Kassák Lajos**: Naprakőzuhatás (vers Bartók Bélának). / **Náray Miklós**: Bartók Béla (tanulmány.) / **Barta Sándor**: Épülő ház (vers.) / **Berény Róbert**: Bartók Béla portréja (olajfestmény.) / **Bartók Béla**: Zongorakompozíció (kottamelléklet.) / **Szélpál Árpád**: Tűnődés (vers.) / **Kádár Erzsébet**: Versek. / **Barta Sándor**: Tónus (vers.) / **Uitz Béla**: † Rodinéről.

III 2

BARTÓK BÉLA: Kottarészlet

Bartók szám ára: 80 fillér.

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The Great Béla Bartók: An International and Interdisciplinary Perspective

DAVID MICHAEL HERTZ

Abstract: A 21st century review of Béla Bartók's cultural position in the early twentieth century from an interdisciplinary point of view, first beginning with Bartók's early musical training, then his theatre works, which involved the collaborations of such figures as Béla Balázs and Melchior Lendyl. Bartok's familiarity with their thinking documents the impact of international Symbolist and Art Nouveau culture in his own formation, as well as the common interest in the folkloric elements incorporated by Bartók and others in this era. Also, Bartók's achievement will be considered in relation to other significant composers on the international scene in the first half of the twentieth century, including figures such as Igor Stravinsky, Charles Ives, and Arnold Schoenberg. With special mention of Mihály Szegedy-Maszák's writings on Béla Bartók, including his "Bartók's Place in Cultural History."

I. Where did Bartók Come From?

Béla Bartók (1881–1945) descends from minor Hungarian nobility, but his musical line goes back, via his piano teacher, to the great Franz Liszt, the most fantastic of all the romantic pianists and one of the most innovative musical minds of all time. In truth he was an absolute musical noble.

His teacher was István Thomán (1862–1940), who knew Liszt extremely well, even touring with him. Thomán was a pallbearer at Liszt's funeral. Later Thomán also taught Ernő Dohnányi, George Cziffra, and Fritz Reiner, along with Bartók. Taken together, these Hungarian musical giants push Thomán and Liszt's impact on music, from a pedagogical point of view, well into the twentieth century.

Bartók's connection to the greatest of the nineteenth century virtuoso pianists runs deep, and yet he is arguably the greatest pianist/composer of the twentieth century. This is obvious to any experienced musician who has studied the piano repertoire seriously. It is not just in the musical scores. It is in the movement of the human hands needed for a full realization of his remarkably original piano works.

II. Bartók and his Culture

It is hard to relate music, the most abstract of the arts, to the cultural world at large. It can always be done, but it is a bit tricky. So let us begin with the most difficult and consider the cultural forces outside the purely musical. Here is where we discover Bartók's interconnections with such Hungarian figures as playwright and literary gadfly Béla Balázs, architect Ödön Lechner, poets Endre Ady and Mihály Babits, and larger clusters of internationally related artists who are gathered under the rubrics of Symbolism, Impressionism, Romantic Nationalism, two terms I increasingly link together. Bartók was touched by all these. The great Germanic composers still dominated music in the late nineteenth century, but the fresh scent in the air was French culture in every sense. Bartók's most important precursor may have been Debussy, who was not just an Impressionist, but an important intellect who invented everything modern in music. But also, Debussy was in touch with intellectual trends, including the innovations of the Symbolist poets and phi-

losophers, the great painters of the era, the allure of Orientalism in the arts, and more. Debussy knew well the great poets Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarmé, setting them to music in his innovative songs. and more writers up through one of the most famous playwrights of the period, the Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck, who gave Debussy his text for his one major opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande.*[1]

Ady and Balázs imported the French intellectualism that came out of the Symbolist Movement. in their work. We find Art Nouveau and native folklore in Lechner's architecture, placing him, from an international perspective, somewhere in the family of Louis Sullivan and Antoni Gaudi. Bartók and his friends received all this. You can see that Ady and Balázs and Lechner and others were attracted to things that also interested Bartók and therefore both directly and indirectly Bartók was in an international cultural flow of ideas that had considerable impact on all of the most brilliant European artists and intellectuals of the early twentieth century. Balázs may have first noticed the Bluebeard tale because he was interested in a play by Maeterlinck, *Ariane et Barbe-bleu*, which plants him firmly within the hothouse context of the late Symbolist movement, and which always displayed a fascination with myth, both in poetry and visual art. The libretto he produces for Bartók has qualities of stillness and mystery we find in similar short plays by Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Yeats and others. It is of the period. (Maeterlinck's play about Bluebeard was also the basis for an opera by Paul Dumas.) Very little happens in a symbolist play. Action is less important than atmosphere, but what does occur is important and suggestive, and Bartók makes an intense psychodrama out of the material in his musical score.

Leon Botstein, college president and conductor, has an impressive essay on Bartók in *Bartók and his World*, his Bard Festival book edited and published by Peter Laki in 1995, laying out the cultural context of the composer's milieu in rich detail.[2] But English language readers would do well to compare and contrast Botstein's writing on Bartók with leading Hungarian literary critics and cultural historians such as the late Mihály Szegedy-Maszák (1943–2016), who had a great interest in the music of Béla Bartók and who wrote quite extensively about the composer's literary and cultural context.[3] With Botstein and Szegedy-Maszák in mind, I want to take a brief look at Bartók's music that used extrinsic theatrical or literary elements. Most of it was composed relatively early in Bartók's career, written between 1910 and 1924.

First, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, written with a libretto prepared by Balázs, was composed in 1911, but completed and performed in 1918, just after the great Stravinsky ballets and shortly before the end of the First World War. It was premiered at the Hungarian Royal Opera on May 24, 1918.[4]

The Balázs version was a symbolist play with two actors: Duke Bluebeard, owner of the castle, and Judith, the latest of his many wives. The woman, Judith, opens the doors in the castle of her new husband, Bluebeard,

[1] For a more extensive examination of Debussy's connections to the Symbolists, see my book *The Tuning of the Word*. David Michael HERTZ, *The Tuning of Word: The Musico-literary Poetics of the Symbolist Movement* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987).

[2] Peter LAKI, ed., *Bartók and His World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

[3] Mihály SZEGEDY-MASZÁK, "Bartók's Place in Cultural History", *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 41, no. 4 (2000): 457–465.

[4] This was a few months before the armistice was signed between Germany and the allies on Nov 11, 1918. The Treaty of Versailles was about a year later.

one by one. Every time she opens one she sees something terrifying. Bartók provides richly imaginative music for each door. Eventually the last one opens and she knows she is doomed. With this last door opened, a newly bejeweled Judith ominously follows all of Bluebeard's zombie wives off the stage and the opera ends. Some of the scariest music ever written was composed by Bartók for this. Balázs and Bartók made the ultimate opera about the woman who has picked the wrong husband.

While, as Professor Szegedy-Maszák has mentioned, some scholars have posited that Bartók may have been attracted to the story because of problems relating to his own first marriage, the original plot of *Bluebeard's Castle* goes back to French folklore, long before Maeterlinck, and it had been stylized into literary form by Charles Perrault (1628–1703) in the 17th century. So, while Bartók prepared something like a symbolist play for Bartók, the original story is folkloric in origin, but it is from French folklore, not Hungarian, and, most significantly, not Teutonic in origin. Szegedy-Maszák sums this important cultural change most eloquently when he writes: "In many respects the music of *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* is the expression of a desire to distance Hungarian from German culture, a desire that was shared by the poets Babits and Ady, as well as they the composers Bartók and Kodály."[5] The swerve toward the modernistic innovations of Debussy and the French is also connected to the choice of dramatic material for the libretto.

Following *Bluebeard*, Bartók composed the ballet/pantomime *The Wooden Prince* (1916–17), also with material from Balázs. It concerns a princess who falls for a wooden prince, but then finally is allowed to have a real one.

Finally, and not least, there is *The Miraculous Mandarin* (1918–24), another ballet / pantomime, with a story by Melchior Lengyel. It is a truly scandalous story, even today. It is about a band of robbers who prey on lonely men, using a beautiful woman to entrap them: she is a prostitute, or, worse, really a woman posing as a prostitute, her thieving collaborators posing as pimps, and the male victims they trick into their trap. First, they ensnare a lecherous old dandy, then a young student. Finally, they tempt the miraculous mandarin, a customer who literally lights up in living color with desire. As they beat and stab him, he simply won't die, but continues to chase his temptress. He only bleeds and then expires after he is able to satisfy his longing for the prostitute! The plot is somewhat reminiscent of Stravinsky's puppet hero *Petrushka*, but even more shocking. Petrushka longs for a puppet ballerina that he cannot have. He too is murdered. It also is reminiscent of *Le Sacre du printemps*, which, based on a myth shaped by Nicholas Roerich, concerns the sacrifice of a young virgin. I like the explanation provided by Bartók's son, Peter, for this wild story: "the basic theme [...] centers on the enormous physical force possible between man and woman. When the Mandarin is lured into the robbers' den by the captive girl used as a decoy, soon a force becomes established that defies extinction. Attempts to kill him are futile until he can possess the object of his longing; only after his desire is quenched do his wounds start to bleed enabling him to find peace in death. Passion alone sustains life against overwhelming odds; the force of nature triumphed."[6]

Bartók composed fantastic music, filled with rich harmonic and rhythmic innovation, for this provocative theatrical material.

[5] Mihály SZEGEDY-MASZÁK, "Bartók and Literature", *Hungarian Studies: A Journal Of The International Association For Hungarian Studies And Balassi Institute* 15 (2001): 245–254, 246.

[6] Peter BARTÓK, *My Father* (Homosassa, Florida: Bartók Records, 2002), 244.

What is the take-away from all this? This was dangerous literary subject matter to use, and even still somewhat disturbing, but very much in the spirit of the adventurous topics taken up by Diaghilev and his Ballet Russes and to some extent reminiscent of Alban Berg and his *Wozzeck* (1926) and *Lulu* (1937), in gestation at around the same time and afterward (Lulu even features a prostitute who brings home Jack the Ripper). Like Stravinsky, Bartók was aware of the daring impulses of modern art, particularly the tendency to explore un-sentimentalized aspects of the human being in an anti-humanistic and anti-romanticist context, even using sordid and offensive settings. His willingness to use material created by writers such as Balázs and Lengyel, both Hungarian writers of Jewish descent who were willing to take a modern approach to symbol and myth, is an indication that he wanted to push into the future, not the past. This is indicated as well by Bartók's alliance with the intellectuals of the arts magazine *MA*, something also noted by Professor Szegedy-Maszák.[7]

Also, Bartók evolved into a composer chiefly for instruments and instrumentalists, not for opera or theater. In this he was more like Beethoven, say, than Wagner or Stravinsky. Beethoven was not a committed writer of opera and song, but we will always go to *Fidelio* or *An die Ferne Geliebte* to find out more about him. Similar to Beethoven, Bartók's fertilization from the literary fields of endeavor is not to be underestimated, even though, according to Szegedy-Maszák, Bartók did not have a systematic education on the level, say, of his colleague, Zoltán Kodály.[8] If you take these three theater works together, you see that Bartók composed a huge amount of richly rewarding and beautifully crafted music for them, but most important, the literary choices he made link him in both obvious and subtle ways to the culture of his time. Also, I prefer Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* to its model, *Pelléas and Mélisande*. I simply think it is a more successful piece, though it is shorter. *Pelléas*, because of Debussy's determination to explore the musicality of language, is simply too thin in terms of harmonic and melodic inventiveness. Bartók's musical texture in *Bluebeard*, filled with Debussyian devices such as whole tone scales, and peppered with Hungarian types of pentatonic melodic motives has a more fully rounded texture.

III. Bartók and the Great Modernist Composers from an International Perspective

Bartók (1881–1945) *did not sound like* Dvorak or Tchaikovsky or Strauss or Rachmaninoff (1873–1943). He sounded completely *new*. Also, like all great composers who do something new, he still sounds completely fresh even today. Bartók did not choose to sound like a nationalist romantic. This is what makes him modern. But he is also closely related to the elemental sounds of Hungary. This the miracle.

Bartók gave us the best way out of the crisis of musical modernism. This crisis might best be described as an attack on the audience by the composers who felt increasingly that they had to challenge it with more and more innovative and anti-Romanticist music.

I would like to briefly contextualize Bartók in relation to other great modernists from around the world, figures such as the French Claude Debussy, the Russian Igor Stravinsky, the American Charles Ives, the German-Jewish Arnold Schoenberg, and even Paul Hindemith (the teacher of Bernhard Heiden, my teacher). Bartók, Stravinsky and Ives each used folkloric elements. Stravinsky did not advertise his borrowings for Russian folk music, but today they are documented by

[7] Mihály SZEGEDY-MASZÁK, "From Text to Music: Bartók's Approach to Literary Works", *Hungarian Heritage* 7 (2006): 30–34.

[8] SZEGEDY-MASZÁK, "Bartók and Literature", 252.

scholars such as Richard Taruskin.[9] Schoenberg opted out of all traditional tonal expression, including folkloric elements, and went for atonal expressionism and serialism. This made his music the most cerebral and appropriate for professorial study in the academy. (In this way, he is similar to his American student, John Cage, whom he discouraged). Charles Ives was inspired, but, though a composer of real genius, he was an artist who worked in isolation apart from the professional world of music. Bartók, who made enormous contributions to the modern discipline of ethnomusicology (many would say he even invented it), was the most scholarly in the way he employed folk music as a point of departure for the modernist composer. After all, he actually went out into the Hungarian countryside and wrote down what he heard, an early user of Thomas Edison's then recently invented recording device with its unwieldy wax cylinders. But as a practicing composer, Bartók was unsurpassed in the 20th century. Also, he may have been the greatest craftsman of the three important modernists who incorporated folk elements in fragmented forms (again, the first being himself of course, but also Stravinsky and Ives). There is a remarkable and historic photograph of Hindemith and Bartók in Turkey in the 1930s. Both had been invited there to improve the musical culture. Hindemith kept away from folk music, even though he did create a kind of free-floating tonal language that might be profitably compared to Bartók. But his music is not performed as much now as it once was. The only other composer pianist who could touch Bartók was Rachmaninoff, who became a highly successful virtuoso and perhaps the greatest pianist of the early 20th century. But Rachmaninoff's music, while wonderful in many ways, was much more linked to the Romantic past and, in its weaker moments, borders on kitsch.

Of the great modernist composers, Bartók's music is the most played by actual performing musicians, who in the end decide what they will play. The ballots are in. Musicians have decided to play Bartók. Bartók's sonatas, concertos, and chamber music are very present in the world's concert halls. While they are still challenging to people who want easy listening, they are standard. Charles Rosen has pointed out that Beethoven has always had his critics, but musicians always insist on playing him, despite periodic objections from the audience. The same with Bartók. His music is difficult and adventurous, but great musicians insist on performing him and the audiences are brought along.

IV. Bartók's Changing Reputation Over Time

Many years ago, the famous Frankfurt school sociologist and music critic, Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno wrote an influential book, *The Philosophy of Modern Music*, which featured a Manichean view of modern music, with just two main characters, Stravinsky and Schoenberg.[10] Today this book, while still fascinating to read, seems more and more dated as we move farther and farther away from the 20th century. Schoenberg was not the savior Adorno made him out to be, Stravinsky not the devil. Adorno was correct in realizing the importance of these two, but they are only two in a much longer list of significant contributors of a much more diverse sort. To be fair, Adorno has some positive and insightful things to say about Bartók, yet I find his remarks on Bartók as a re-

[9] Richard TARUSKIN, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, Vol 1. (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

[10] Theodor Wiesengrund ADORNO, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne MITCHELL and Wesley BLOMSTER (New York: Continuum, 1973).

cycler of folklore to be supercilious. Today, in 2017, I would put Bartók high up on the list of challengers to the primacy of this duo, but I would also add such figures as Duke Ellington (1899–1974) and many of the great Russians, such as Scriabin (1871–1915), Prokofiev (1891–1953), and Shostakovich (1906–1975). I would keep Schoenberg and Stravinsky, but add a lot of diverse characters to the mix. Their prominence may have been less unchallenged than we thought.

Today, Stravinsky (1882–1971), while still a giant looming over twentieth century composers, seems to have been on a downward trend after his great ballets, which were all written before WWI. His music became a bit arid later. He tried neoclassicism. He tried to emulate Schoenberg' serialism. He did this, he did that… But none of these later works had the originality and residual influence of his Diaghilev-era ballets: *Firebird*, *Petrushka*, and *The Rite of Spring*, the greatest of them all and which provoked a riot (some say, maybe more because of the choreography than the music) when it was premiered in Paris on May 29, 1913. Whereas Stravinsky treaded water, or even declined, Bartók simply got better and better until he died, one of the signs of the truly greatest of the great composers (of course, poor Bartók never figured out how to make money, while Stravinsky did).

Was Bartók a kind of country bumpkin modernist when compared to the Second Viennese School? Certain disciples of Adorno and Schoenberg would have said yes in the last century. I would say not. Absolutely.

For example, in the Botstein article, I find some discussion of Schoenberg and Adorno's views on the difference between music in a peripheral or central nation, such as Germany, say, which was central, and Hungary and Poland, for example, as peripheral. This was important for the "universalist" claims of the new serialism developed by Schoenberg and his followers. These claims of universalism seem unrealistic as musicians currently pick and choose their repertoire in the 21st century. Bartók now looms as just as important or central to repertoire as Schoenberg. Both remain highly significant figures, but I think Bartók will penetrate farther into the future. That is how it seems in 2017, looking back at some of the arguments advanced in the late 20th century by Adorno and others.

V. Bartók's Lyricism

I would like to close by mentioning what I hear as Bartók's lyrical voice. When I hear Bartók's greatest moments I am reminded of what his American contemporary Charles Ives said: "dissonances are becoming beautiful." What is dissonant and disturbing and what is consonant and pleasing is a matter of culture and taste and both Ives and Bartók expanded our ability to understand this.

Today we don't need the percussive and abrasive Bartók only. We can reinterpret him to hear his softer, gentler side as well. An obvious example of Bartók's subtler side is to be heard in the hypnotic and mysterious *"Az éjszaka zenéje"* (The Night's Music) with its unusual polytonality. This is the softer penultimate piece in the *Szabadban* (Out of Doors) suite of 1926. It is touchingly mentioned in Peter Bartók's book about his father and Peter specifically mentions the specifically Hungarian frog sounds (the frogs of the *Szöllös*) in the score, singing out, but also occasionally jumping into the water, and which become more and more haunting as the piece develops over time.[11] Here Bartók expands musical vocabulary, taking us closer to natural sound in the world around us than even Debussy managed to do, and incorporates echoes of the characteristic Hungarian peasant culture that fascinated him. His use of polytonality and modal scales is much less crude than what we find, say in Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, in which the Petrushka puppet is

[11] BARTÓK, *My Father*, 163.

evoked by white and black notes, C and F-sharp chords, played simultaneously. And the sounds of human-made music, heard from a distance, as if by a listener absorbed in a natural setting amidst the woods and ponds, music played back in the village, mixes in with the natural sounds of the frog ponds in the most haunting way. Human music and natural music are in completely different keys, but, after sounding out separately, toward the end of this remarkable piece, they combine fluently together all at once. Here we have, not merely bitonality, but rather, one of the loveliest examples of tritonality in music. Frogs (repeatedly in the same ostinato pattern) and bird sounds, supporting "nature" chords, and human village music all exist in three separate but equally important musical spheres of activity, each with a distinctly different tonal center.

It is a great technical achievement and completely charming. Only a great master could have put this all together. It is not driving and percussive, attributes commonly attributed to Bartók at the expense of many other qualities in his music. Instead it is ethereal, delicate, extremely atmospheric, and yet at the same time far more radical than anything Debussy or Stravinsky invented. Also, Bartók the master pianist, here creates a unique new expansion of explicitly pianistic vocabulary. Going beyond the innovations of Stravinsky, Debussy, and Darius Milhaud, Bartók's multi-layered composition for "The Night's Music" is much more complex, and it creates a haunting and lovely effect never heard before in the piano repertoire. Sublimely modern, sublimely beautiful, sublimely new.

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Marcel Breuer: Last of the First Moderns / First of the Last Moderns

ROBERT McCARTER

Abstract: Marcel Breuer (1902–1981) is one of the most important architects and designers of the second generation of Modernism. Yet today, more than 35 years after his death, Breuer is most often remembered for his furniture designs, while his architectural works have largely disappeared from disciplinary discourse. Breuer may be said to have stood between the first generation of modernists, such as Mies van der Rohe, whose accomplishments he matched, and the second generation of modernists such as Louis Kahn, who were his true contemporaries. Yet Breuer could be said not to belong either to the first or second generation, never embracing what he characterized as the dogmatic modernism of the glass curtain wall, but also rejecting the idea that modern architecture was a monolithic conception. Having begun his career with his 1934 lecture critiquing modernism from the inside, Breuer consistently rejected the critiques of modernism coming from the outside during the last 25 years of his career, when modernism was declared to be dead, and practitioners such as Breuer were labeled "late modernists." Standing between the first and the last moderns, Breuer may be understood as the last of the first moderns and the first of the last moderns.

At the Beginning of Modernism

In spring 1920, Marcel Breuer left his hometown of Pécs to attend the Akademie der bildenden Künste in Vienna. Despite his high expectations, Breuer was deeply disappointed when he arrived to the school, finding everyone occupied with discussions of aesthetic theory and not with the actual making of art. He walked out of the Academy the same day, and two months later his architect friend from Pécs, Fred Forbát, gave Breuer "a little brochure from the Weimar Bauhaus."[1]

When Breuer, then 19, arrived in Weimar to join the Bauhaus, the school was only a year old, and his arrival also coincided with the first time Bauhaus students were taught the *Vorkurs* or Preliminary Course, a six-month course of instruction required of all Bauhaus students that imparted the fundamentals and principles of form, material and design process. Arguably the most important contribution to art and architecture education of the Bauhaus, the *Vorkurs* was initially taught by Johannes Itten, who left the Bauhaus before Breuer had completed his studies, at which time the Hungarian László Moholy-Nagy took over the teaching of the *Vorkurs*, joined a few years later by Josef Albers, who entered the Bauhaus as a student at the same time as Breuer.

Paul Klee joined the Bauhaus faculty as a Master in 1920, the same year that Breuer enrolled. In his courses Klee endeavored to teach students "how to see" and how to shape movement through space, and Breuer considered Klee to be one of the most influential teachers he ever had. Breuer later recalled how, during a lecture at the blackboard, Klee "drew an arrow pointing to the right, wrote over it 'Movement,' then another one pointing towards the left with the

[1] Isabelle HYMAN, *Marcel Breuer, Architect: The Career and the Buildings* (New York: Harry Abrams, 2001), 39–41.

caption 'Counter Movement.' It took the audience some time to discover that with the second arrow he changed the crayon into his left hand and wrote 'Counter Movement' from right to left."[2]

From the beginning, Breuer's Bauhaus furniture designs indicated his interest in the shaping of forms to the structural and functional demands of occupation, and the way the weight of the human body caused the frame to flex was a foremost reason for his favoring cantilever spring steel tube chair structures. In contrast to the chairs, Breuer's wood cabinetry and tables were characterized not so much by lightness and literal transparency as by complexly interwoven rectangular volumes of layered thickness and mass, their surfaces clad in rotating, pinwheeling, asymmetrical compositions. Breuer's later architecture was ordered by the same principles as his chairs and cabinetry—forms boldly shaped to structural and functional demands, which were often enclosed by surfaces composed of dynamically interlocking patterns.

In his preface to Klee's notebooks from his Bauhaus courses, posthumously published as *The Thinking Eye*, the art historian Giulio Carlo Argan wrote:

> It was Breuer who perceived the real significance of Klee's teaching at the Bauhaus. [...] The tubular furniture invented by Breuer in 1925, thread-like, suspended in improbable yet faultless equilibrium [...] animated by a silent and vaguely ambiguous vitality [...] is certainly born of Klee's nervous and intense graphics, and the currents of strength which he infuses into his lines. The furniture inhabits man's space like Klee's images inhabit the space of his slanting and oblique perspectives, and of the mobile depths of his tonal layers. The furniture too is born of an invisible dynamic of space, and whilst fulfilling its function with impeccable accuracy, traces a new dimension in which relations are clarified."[3]

Making a Modern Tradition

Peter Blake began his book, the first on Breuer's work, with a story: "One day, in the late 1920s, Marcel Breuer and Le Corbusier were talking together about southeastern Europe and its architecture. When Breuer mentioned that he had been born in Pécs, Le Corbusier at once began to describe the [Hungarian vernacular] buildings in that area as he recalled them from his travels."[4]

Breuer gave a lecture at the Swiss Werkbund in Zurich in 1934, entitled "Where do we stand?," in which he argued against the "traditional" works of academically-trained architects, and for vernacular architecture, which he maintained shared with modern architecture two common traits; "the impersonal character of their forms; and a tendency to develop along typical, rational lines that are unaffected by passing fashions." Breuer held that vernacular works are the result of "their uninterrupted transmission through local and family associations, which conditions their development and ultimately standardizes them as type-forms." Arguing against architecture as fashion, he stated; "We are not out to create something new, but something suitable, intrinsically right and as relatively perfect as may be. [...] Though we have no fear of what is new, novelty is not our aim. We seek what is definite and real, whether old or new." Breuer went

[2] Marcel BREUER, *Buildings and Projects, 1921–1961* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), 256.

[3] Paul KLEE, *Notebooks: The Thinking Eye*, 2 Vols. (London: Lund Humphries, 1961), 1:17. [1956 German original.]

[4] Peter BLAKE, *Marcel Breuer: Architect and Designer* (New York: Architectural Record Books and Museum of Modern Art, 1949), 7.

on to say, "Architecture seems worthy of notice to me only in proportion as it produces an effect on our senses. I care a great deal whether I feel at ease in the finished building."[5]

In 1938, one year after hiring Breuer to teach at Harvard, Dean Joseph Hudnut organized an exhibition of Breuer's work, inviting Henry-Russell Hitchcock, America's foremost modern architectural historian and co-curator (with Philip Johnson) of the 1932 Museum of Modern Art "International Style" exhibit, to write a critical essay. In "Marcel Breuer and the American Tradition in Architecture," Hitchcock argued that, unlike American modernists, the European modernists were able to look past the historicist "traditional" architectural styles typically applied to American architecture built of wood, brick and stone, and to see the potential of these materials to be used to construct modern architecture:

> Breuer, working from the special facilities of modern civilization, was ready to use rough stonework and timber construction with the ease and simplicity of a rural American carpenter-builder, and yet with all the technical imagination and aesthetic purity of the modern.[6]

As an example of this modern use of wood, in 1948-9 Breuer designed two vacation cottages at Wellfleet, Massachusetts, for his family and that of his friend, György Kepes, a Hungarian-born visual designer who taught at the Institute of Design in Chicago before being appointed as Professor of Visual Design in the architecture school at MIT. Kepes was the author of a series of important books on visual thinking, such as *The Language of Vision* (1944) and *Structure in Art and Science* (1965), which built on the Bauhaus educational legacy.

Breuer's 1949 MoMA model house, with its fusion of contemporary forms and traditional materials, served as his definitive answer to the debate that ensued at the February 1948 MoMA symposium, entitled, "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?" The symposium included presentations by the historians and critics Henry Russell Hitchcock, Frederick Gutheim, Peter Blake, Talbot Hamlin and Lewis Mumford, and the architects Walter Gropius, George Nelson, Ralph Walker, Gerhard Kallmann, Breuer and the landscape architect Christopher Tunnard. In a "Skyline" article in the *New Yorker* magazine, Lewis Mumford, the American historian and critic, set the main themes of the discussion by arguing against "the impersonal and the aesthetically puritanical," which he said were characteristics of the "mechanical rigorists" who practiced International Style architecture. He charged that, by ignoring "the non-formal elements" of architecture, the "rigorists [...] neglected the feelings, the sentiments, and the interests of the person who was to occupy" the building they designed. Rejecting Le Corbusier's famous aphorism, Mumford said "the modern accent is on living, not on the machine," and he championed the "native and humane form of modernism" represented by the architecture of the San Francisco Bay Region that he said "took root" fifty years ago.[7]

Breuer's talk responded almost point by point to Mumford's article, and was also a forceful statement of what he believed about architecture:

> I don't feel a very strong impulse to set

[5] Ibid. 119–122.

[6] Henry Russell HITCHCOCK, *Marcel Breuer and the American Tradition in Architecture* (Unpublished manuscript, Harvard University Archives, 1938), 2, 17.

[7] Lewis MUMFORD, "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?", *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 15, No. 3 (1948): 2.

'human' (in the best sense of the word) against 'formal.' If 'human' is considered identical with redwood all over the place, or if it is considered identical with imperfection and imprecision, I am against it. [...] If 'international style' is considered identical with mechanical and impersonal rigor-ism, down with international style. [...] However, this controversy was in order, I am afraid, about 25 years ago. Since then, many things have happened. For instance, just as Sullivan did not eat his functionalism as hot as he cooked it, Le Corbusier did not build his machine for living: His houses are not so much machines for living as, for instance, the three thousand family housing developments of the West Coast, the same pseudo-prefabricated houses, hill up, hill down, in rigid rows or in rigid curves. [...] 'Human' it seems to me should mean more that just a pleasant tolerance of imperfection and an easygoingness as to the precision of thinking, as to the quality of planning, as to the consequences of materials, details, and construction. [Rather] the most contrasting elements of our nature should be brought to happiness at the same time, in the same work. [...] The drive towards experiment is there, together with and in contrast to the warm joy of security at the fireplace. [...] The perfection of construction and detail is there, together with and in contrast to simplicity, broadmindedness of form and use. The courage of conception is there, together with and in contrast to humble responsibility towards the client. The sensation of man-made space, geometry, and architecture is there, together with and in contrast to organic forms of nature and of man.[8]

Perfecting the Types

Breuer began his 1934 Zurich lecture by stating; "In the past I have been opposed to much of this theorizing about the New Architecture, believing that our job was to build, and that our buildings sufficed, since they speak plainly enough for themselves. [...] The danger of all theorizing is that, by carrying one's arguments too far, one is apt to leave the world of reality behind." Breuer argued for a kind of autodidactic approach to engaging contemporary reality that comes directly from his Bauhaus beginnings; "What we believe is what we have perceived, experienced, thought, proved and calculated for ourselves." Yet Breuer noted that, rather than clarifying common principles and passing them on to the younger generations:

> The protagonists of the Modern Movement have been occupied with the classification and development of their own intellectual principles and the carrying out of their individual designs.[9]

The most important characteristic of modern architecture, according to Breuer, was "the principle of clarity," which was reflected in a building's structural precision, appropriate enclosure of practical functions, and simplicity and rationality of form. In arguing for the close relation between vernacular works and modern architecture, Breuer found that both involved the search for typeforms that were appropriate to the task and perfected through repeated refinement over time:

> One element of such clarified architecture is the type. That is an object or building that can be said to have been established and relatively perfected

[8] Marcel BREUER, "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?", *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 15, No. 3 (1948): 4–20, 15.

[9] BLAKE, *Marcel Breuer...*, 119–122.

> through a comparatively large number of decisions. The Modern Movement has tenaciously pursued the type, the standard.[10]

In this, Breuer was following the lead of, among others, Frank Lloyd Wright, whose early Prairie Houses, from 1900-20, later Usonian Houses, starting in 1930, were developed from a few primary plan-types. Many other characteristics of Breuer's architecture were inspired by Wright's ways of conceiving and constructing what he called "the space within," as can be heard in Breuer's 1955 definition of architecture as "the art of space:"

> The nature of the space within our buildings and between them is indeed the reality of architecture. [...] The eye is the only receiving instrument in the experience of painting. But we have seen that the experience of architecture is received by the whole body, by all our senses—including our sense of logic. It is not only an eye aesthetic, it is a *physical aesthetic*.[11]

It should be remembered that the large majority of Breuer's houses were built during the period in which Wright, the greatest American architect of houses, was still actively practicing. Despite working in Wright's shadow, Breuer's house designs nevertheless exercised considerable influence on his contemporaries (including Louis Kahn) because they offered, alongside the houses of Wright and very few other architects, a materially rich, spatially varied and place-based alternative to the stultifying uniformity of typical suburban developer housing.

Clarifying the Themes

In the religious, institutional and commercial buildings that were built to his designs starting in the 1950s, Breuer evolved his characteristic emphases on the expression of structure, and on surface depth and modulation of the building skin, stating in 1964:

> To us clarity means the definite expression of the purpose of a building and a sincere expression of its structure. One can regard this sincerity as a sort of moral duty [and] a very basic instinct.[12]

The emergence of visible structure, and its "sincere expression" in Breuer's work, was paralleled and made possible by his engagement of reinforced cast-in-place structural and finish concrete, as well as precast concrete façade components. In this way, as Breuer said; "The structure itself became art."[13] Regarding reinforced concrete, Breuer believed; "no other material has the potential of such complete and convincing fusion between structure, enclosure and surface."[14] Breuer engaged his remarkable skills as a maker of plastic form, first developed at the Bauhaus, in the construction of folded and faceted concrete enclosures:

> The art of architectural composition lies in assembling simple, elemental forms [...] The space bounded by such elements can be free and fluid [...] but the components encompassing it will be crystalline.[15]

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[10] Joachim DRILLER, *Breuer Houses* (London: Phaidon Press, 2000), 40.

[11] Peter BLAKE, ed., *Marcel Breuer: Sun and Shadow: The Philosophy of an Architect* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956), 64.

[12] BREUER, *Buildings and Projects...*, 258.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Tician PAPACHRISTOU, *Marcel Breuer: New Buildings and Projects* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1970), 22.

[15] Paul HEYER, *Architects on Architecture* (New York: Walker and Co., 1966), 267.

Breuer described his reasoning for employing precast concrete for facades:

> The glass wall—as an expression of modern technology—seems to conflict with technology itself. The search for an exterior that would integrate the demands of an enclosure goes parallel with a new approach to the technique and aesthetic of precast concrete. Both lead us to architectural solutions that can be called 'molded,' and which have the characteristics of a façade unattainable in any other familiar modern material. The large prefabricated panels can be designed for a variety of technical requirements: they may be load-bearing and structural; they may offer chases and hollows for pipes and ducts [...]; they may form projections for sun protection [...] What about aesthetics? A new depth of façade is emerging; a three-dimensionality with a resulting greatly expanded vocabulary of architectural expression.[16]

Starting in the early 1960s, Breuer characterized the often highly praised office buildings by many of his leading contemporaries, particularly those following the glass curtain wall and skeletal structure school of Mies van der Rohe, as being dogmatic *modern* architecture, as opposed to what he called *good* architecture that achieves a balance between solid and void, thick and thin:

> The ancient temples could be considered sculpture. So could Stonehenge and the Maya buildings of Yucatan. [...] [Today] space itself is again sculpture into which one enters. [...] 'Sculpture' has not signified in this talk a three-dimensional decoration of a building, but rather the three-dimensional nature of the whole and of its organic details—the sun and shadow of its modulation, the contours of its structure, the surface relief and texture of its material. [...] We are now in the flow of transition from *modern* architecture to *good* architecture, from transparent architecture to one that sets solid elements next to transparency, and a new plasticity next to lineal purity. An architecture unifying vivid contrasts and demonstrating a much broader vocabulary.[17]

Last of the First Moderns / First of the Last Moderns

When Breuer died on 1 July 1981, he was hailed in *Newsweek* as "the last modernist." (August 17th 1981). While this is an accurate assessment of his unique place in the modern movement, it does not capture the complexity of his position in relation to his contemporaries. Breuer was preceded in death by all of the first generation of modernists, including Wright, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and Gropius, as well as by many of the second generation, including Saarinen, Kahn, Aalto and Scarpa. As an architect, Breuer was caught between the first generation of modernists, whose accomplishments he matched, and the second generation of modernists such as Kahn, who were his true contemporaries. Yet Breuer could be said not to belong to either generation, having never been willing to embrace what he characterized as the dogmatic modernism of the glass curtain wall, but also rejecting the idea that modern architecture was a monolithic conception. Having begun his career with his 1934 lecture critiquing modernism from the inside, Breuer consistently rejected the critiques of modernism coming from the outside during the last 25 years of his career, when modernism was declared to be dead, and practitioners such as Breuer were la-

[16] PAPACHRISTOU, *Marcel Breuer...*, 13.

[17] DRILLER, *Breuer Houses*, 216–218.

beled "late modernists." Standing between the first and the last moderns, Breuer may be understood as the last of the first moderns and the first of the last moderns.

Breuer was the last of the first moderns in his attitude towards the history of the discipline. Reflecting less the historically engaged approach of those who taught at the Bauhaus, where students analyzed historical examples, and more the "scientific" approach taken by Gropius at the GSD Harvard, where the history of architecture was banished from the curriculum, Breuer's design process centered on function, structure and modern form, not historical precedent; "The architect of our day works without formal precedents. His methods are analysis, synthesis, invention, and experiment."[18] Yet in later years Breuer voiced reservations about the modernist refusal of history:

> A great many tendencies are emphasized today: inventiveness, structure, plastic modulation, preoccupation with scale, and regrettably, the all-is-permissible-to-the-genius tendency. This is due partly to the original emphasis of modern architecture on freedom from traditional precedents.[19]

Breuer was both the last of the first modernists and the first of the last moderns as regards environmental tempering. While in the early European work, he employed passive methods of heating and cooling that today would be called "sustainable," when the scale of his work increased starting in the 1950s, the solar-glass and louver sunshade systems he deployed repeatedly failed. Breuer claimed it was his abandonment of the thin lightweight materials typical of modernism, and his adoption of massive precast concrete facades that made for better climate tempering in his later buildings, but in fact it was the universal application of air-conditioning that made interior comfort possible.

Breuer was the first of the last moderns in that, after his death, Klaus Herdeg characterized Breuer and his Harvard students' works as "decorated diagrams," where simple building volumes are given facades with strong formal patterns and material textures. But Breuer was hardly alone in this emphasis on the formal patterning of the façade, particularly of office buildings, and in fact this debate goes back to the beginning of modern architecture in the US; to the contrast between the focus on the shaping of facades and parallel lack of plan development in the office buildings of Louis Sullivan, and the focus on the shaping of interior space in plan, with the exterior facade as later resultant, to be found in the designs of Sullivan's protégé, Frank Lloyd Wright.

In Breuer's case, critics and historians have argued it was his repetitive use of precast concrete elements on building facades that was the problem. However the repetition of façade elements underlies both the neo-classicism with which the post-modern historicists wished to replace late modernism in the 1970s, an idea for which Breuer had only contempt, and the prefabricated terra-cotta façade panels cladding Louis Sullivan's early modern office buildings, which are the primary precursors for Breuer's precast cladding. Repetition alone is not the problem, and Breuer's facades are closer in spirit to those of Sullivan than to those of the post-modernists primarily because of their capacity to represent the functional variations of the spaces within the building. In this last case, it was the uniformity that characterizes the space within bureaucratic office buildings challenged both Sullivan and Breuer, as there is quite literally nothing on the inside to re-present on the outside.

Breuer, not having the stature of the first generation of modernists, such as Wright, Le Corbusier or Gropius, was criticized for the

[18] BREUER, *Buildings and Projects…*, 252.
[19] HEYER, *Architects on Architecture*, 269.

failings of all of them. While Mies van der Rohe, when accused of repeating designs, forms and details, could dismissively—and quite accurately—state; "You don't invent architecture every Monday morning," Breuer remained remarkably balanced in his assessment of modern architecture, often pointing out both the strengths and weaknesses of what, to his way of seeing, was not and had never been a monolithic movement. He was also balanced in his assessment of his own stature and achievements as an architect, pointedly stating that his goals were to make what he defined as "good" architecture and, equally important, to run a successful professional architectural practice. Breuer succeeded at both, a rare feat virtually unmatched by any of his contemporaries, who tended to choose between these goals, considering them mutually exclusive.

Breuer's remarkable dual success went largely unnoticed by the architectural critics and historians of his time, who, never having practiced architecture, often failed to recognize that, while they were free to select which buildings to critique, the architects they criticize rarely if ever had the chance to select which commissions they were given, which buildings they were asked to design, and which designs that circumstances will allow to be built. Yet, as the years pass, the criticisms of Breuer's works have faded, while the larger lessons the buildings teach, and their exemplary qualities as places of inhabitation, have grown ever stronger. Breuer's goal of "good" architecture, and his concomitant refusal to use the word "great" to describe the architecture he was endeavoring to make, were paralleled by his self-deprecating humor, evidenced in a letter to his client and friend Jacques Koerfer; "All my life I have been wondering how somebody can be a genius from morning to evening."[20]

[20] HYMAN, *Marcel Breuer, Architect…*, 19.

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From the Bauhaus to My House: Migration of Ideas – a Personal Account

PETER MAGYAR

Abstract: By paraphrasing Tom Wolfe's title, I am risking the accusation, that this talk is about myself. However, I intend to use my example, as a case study.

Institutions and ideas – related to, and subjects of, this conference – played very important part in my life, from the beginning of my education up to the present time. The cyclic voyages of people and ideas travelled from east to west, and vice versa. Sometimes, their directions of movements coincided, other times pointed in opposing destinations.

Born as a Hungarian, at first I learned, that people, who wanted to obtain a special education, traveled to the West. Between the two world wars, more often – as my father also did – to Germany.

Farkas Molnár, a Weimar Bauhausean, was born forty years earlier than I. Yet, one if my professors – as a young architect – was in the same circles with him, after his return. Also, one of my high-school classmate, János Fájó, was and still is the most important follower of Lajos Kassák. And for the last 18 years, at least once, but many times twice, I am serving as guest critic at the Dessau International Architecture School, which is the anointed heir of the Bauhaus. So, my second-hand experience with the Bauhaus ideas during my education are promoted to personal involvement with them in the present time.

I hope, these outlined conditions enable me for presenting a short summary of the transferences and mutations of the Avant Garde credos, locus of their origin might have been in Germany, but their influence has been always International.

From The Bauhaus to My House…

The proper way to begin this short presentation is, to start with a disclaimer. As a Hungarian architect, I do not consider myself a scholar, but only a person, who observed certain recurring elements in his extensive works in architectural design, and applied these in his academic involvement in different universities in Europe, Africa and the Americas. Considering these facts, maybe the personal aspects of my references will be forgiven.

Accordingly, I start with describing some events, happened within the last twenty years. During my stay at the Florida Atlantic University, where I was the founding director of the School of Architecture (between 1996 to 2007), I came to know Professor Alfred Jacoby, who in 1999 became the director of the Dessau Institute of Architecture, today the Dessau International Architecture School (DIA). It is an internationally accredited Graduate School, active on the site of the Bauhaus, but has a new campus there. In the year of its maiden voyage, 7 of the 12 first year students came from my school. Consequently, for the last 18 years, I have participated in its educational process, as an external examiner, or in some cases, as the chair of the jury of the graduate thesis competitions. There was the opportunity to come across and become friends of Attilio Terragni, the grand-nephew of Giusseppe Terragni, the latter, one of the main characters of Italian modern Avant-Garde.

My presentation to this 34th György Ránki Hungarian Chair Conference, (See Fig. 1. on Plate XXI.) happens through the inter-

vention of my esteemed friend, Ruth and Norman Moore Professor of Architecture, Robert McCarter, so I was invited by Professor Dr. András Kappanyos. May I express my sincere thanks and appreciations to both of them, and for the University of Indiana!

Bartók, Moholy-Nagy, Kassák and Breuer, all Hungarians. With my next Image (Bartók in Dessau), I would like to tie them, directly or at least indirectly, to my education. (See Fig. 2. on Plate XXI.) On the left, stands Walter Gropius, the director of the Bauhaus in Dessau. In the middle, is Béla Bartók. On his left, Paul Klee, painter, pedagogue, guiding spirit of the establishment of the educational process of the Bauhaus.

Architecture, music and painting, three important fields of the avant-garde! It is not too inappropriate to mention the role of Hungarians in all of these three fields. Marcell Breuer, Béla Bartók, Lajos Kassák and László Moholy-Nagy – names, all on the poster. All of them – in an important but indirect way, on the second-tier level – played important roles in my life.

Some of my professors at the Technical University were educated at the Bauhaus and many were taught by Dessau educated persons. Interesting to note, that although all were involved in social issues, they were not all socialists, or communist.

During the communist system, due to the governmental support of everything "folks…", Zoltán Kodály, the folks-musicologist, Béla Bartók's compadre, received a nationalized castle in the vicinity of my town, for an Institute of Music Education. Consequently, in the music school of our town, the best of the best taught willing and able students (I had the will, but it was not enough, to learn my favorite instrument, the violin-cello).

My classmate, János Fájó, was the only pupil of Lajos Kassák. Even today, he continues to evolve his master's artistic direction, and participates on exhibitions, as we speak.

To bring in the fourth name on the poster to my presentation, after this short introduction, I will show mostly the works of another Hungarian architect of the avant-garde, Farkas Molnár. He was working with Marcell Breuer several instances in his life, and also started out in the Bauhaus, however not at Dessau, but at its first location, in Weimar.
This is the point, where I will continue with images, explaining quickly their relevance to the topic of this conference. Architecture is a non-verbal communication, therefore the images are absolutely necessary, to convey the essence of my presentation.

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Figure 11: Drawing and photo from another exhibition in 1931, of the works of Farkas Molnár, in Budapest

Figure 12: Some of the houses of a group of villas, influenced by Farkas Molnár, and other works from the Bauhaus. They were quite similar to the contemporary Weisenhof Siedlung in Germany – at the time and in the same location, around the early Thirties.

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Figure 15: Photo of the young Antal Lázár and Péter Reimholz, who designed together the much awarded "Domus" department store in Budapest.

Figure 16: The Photo of the recently completed Sports and Cultural Center, Budapest. Co-designed by Antal Lázár, DLA and Dr. Péter Magyar.

Figure 17: Photo of Antal Lázár and Ernő Rubik (Yes, the Rubik-Cube) – Partners and owners of the A&D Studio, which produced the construction document of the previous project.

Figure 18: Architect Attilio Terragni, in front of one of his paintings.

Figure 19: Cultural Center and Museum to Como, Italy (at the center of the picture), designed by one of the students in Attilio Terragni's studio at the Dessau International Architecture School, in 2016. At the right edge of the image the famous "House of Fascism," designed by Giuseppe Terragni.

Figure 20: The atelier of Janos Fájó, the only pupil of Lajos Kassák; his paintings are meant to be the variation on, and evolution of the works of his master.

Figure 21: The medal of "Pro Architectura Hungarica," received by author from the Association of Hungarian Architects (AHA) in 2011. Sculptor Tamás Vigh. Interesting revival of the style of the early Avant-Garde, after 100 years.

PLATE XXI

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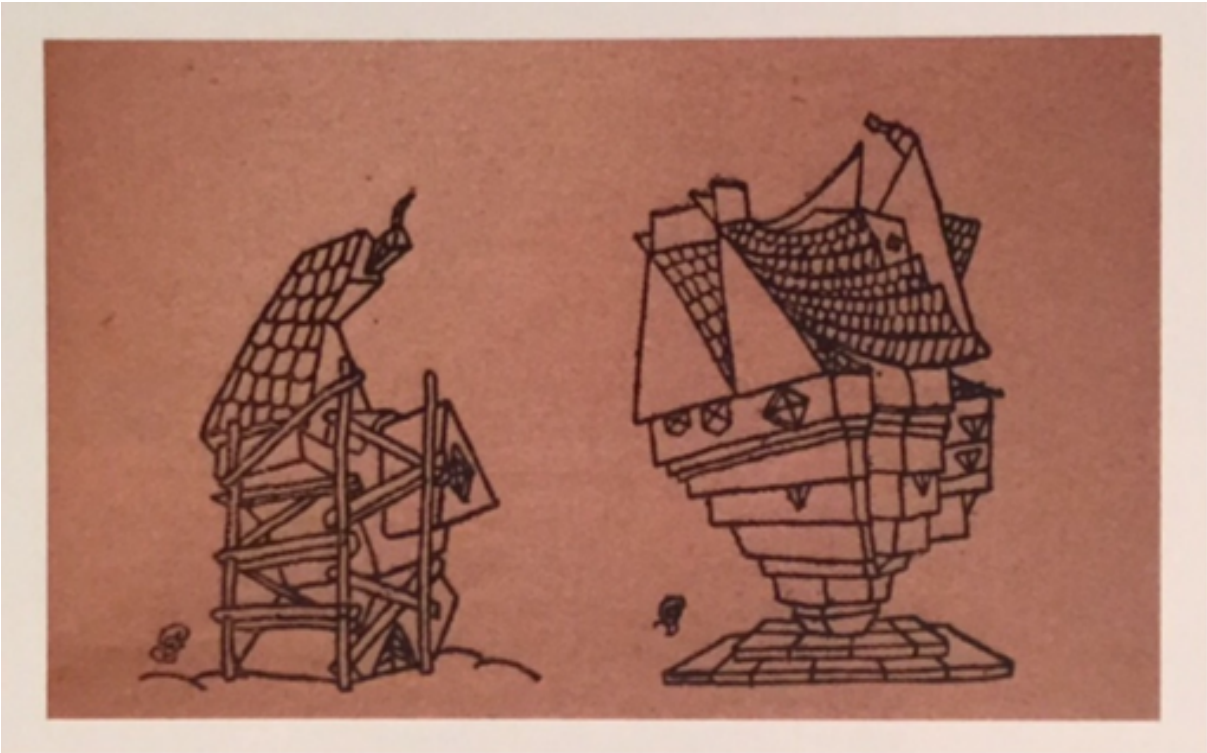
PLATE XXII



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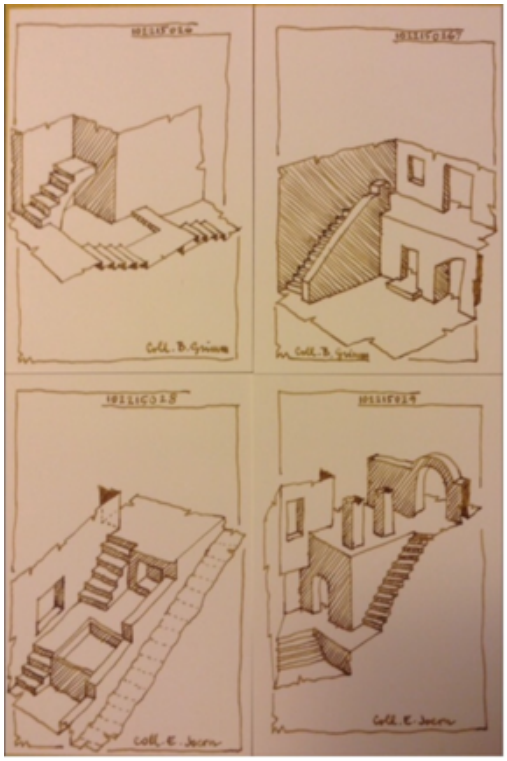

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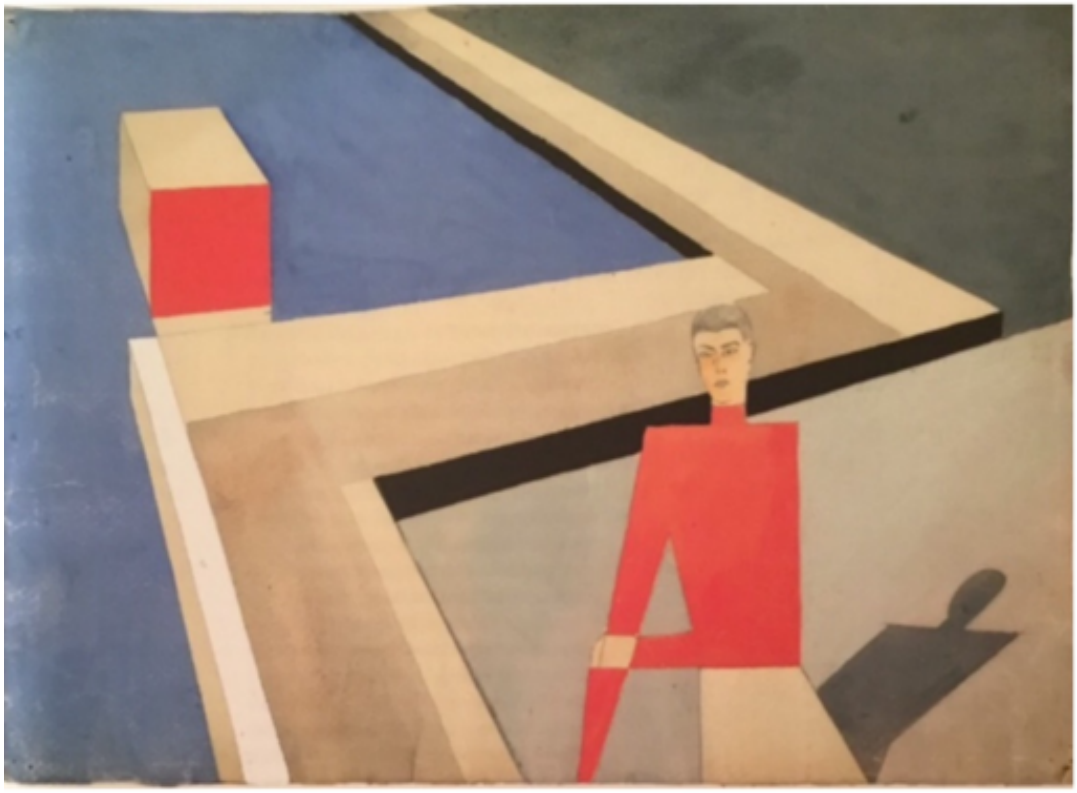

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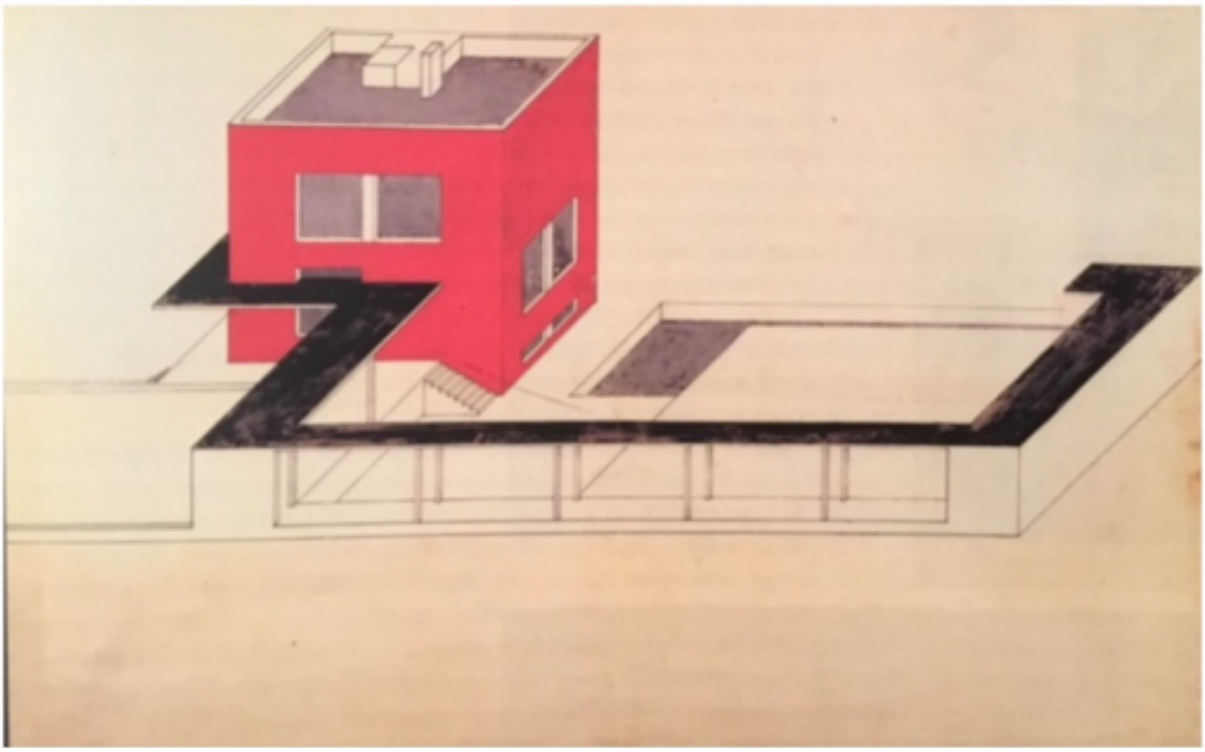

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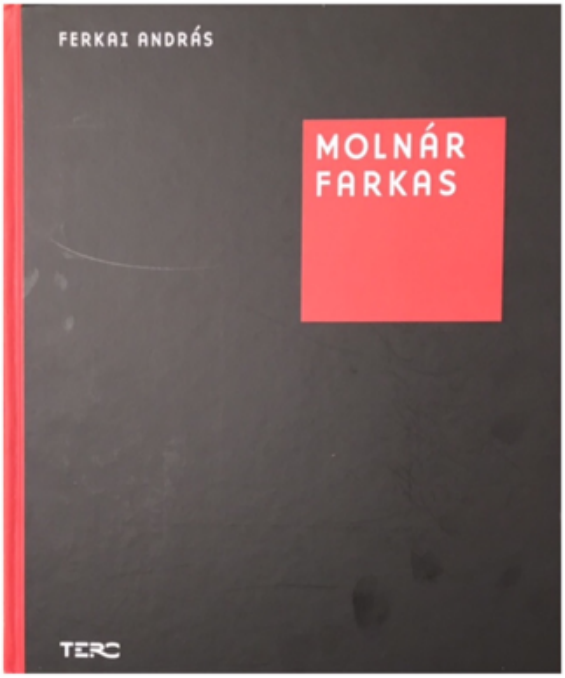

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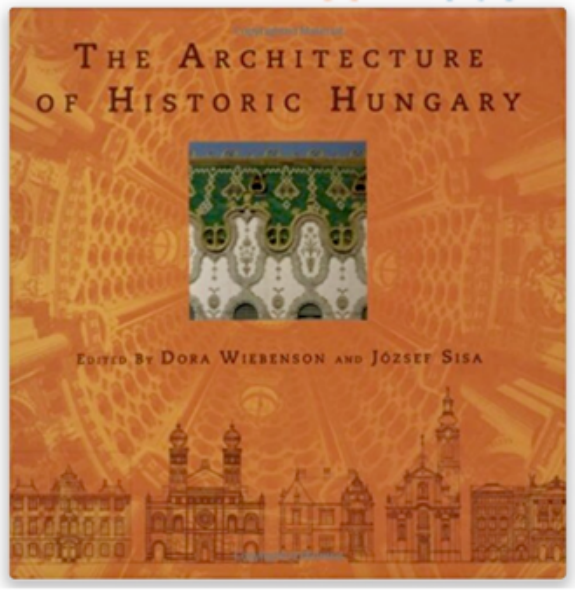

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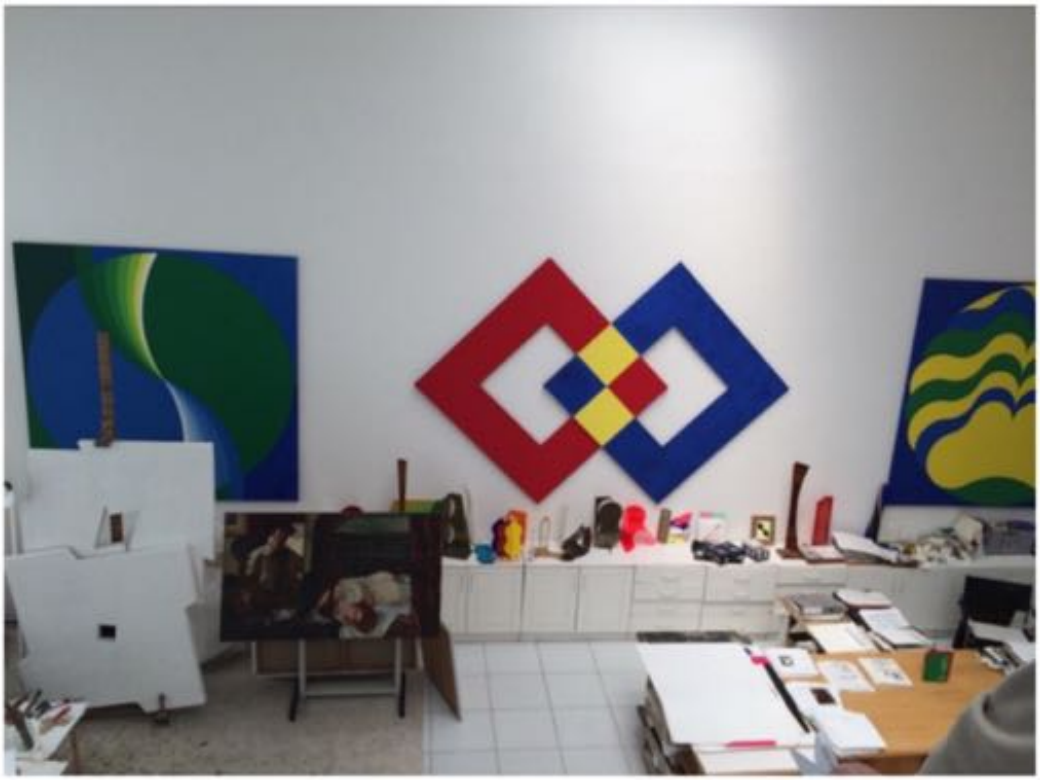

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The *MA (Today)* and Tomorrow. Film Theory and Practice in the Classical Neo-avant-garde

GÁBOR GELENCSÉR

Abstract: MA ('Today') published only a few articles and documents about films, but these were the most important ones in the period of silent cinema. These articles concentrated around 1921, the starting point of international avant-garde cinema (German Expressionism, French Surrealism, the Soviet montage film). The most important ones are Victor Eggeling's fundamental essay on moving picture (published first in Hungarian in Kassák's periodical 1921 No. 8) and László Moholy-Nagy's illustrated film plan (written in 1921/22, published in an extra issue of 1924). The paper examines the theoretical and historical context of the two texts and their influences to the next avant-garde period in Hungarian cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. It seeks to find connections between the classical and neo-avant-garde period, among others, in the fields of intermediality and political sensibility, which are the most particular attributes of the two periods, except the fundamental difference, namely that the classical period produced only theoretical works and plans, and no (Hungarian) films, while the neo-avant-garde period had both theoretical and practical outcomes, as it can be seen in the life work of Gábor Bódy.

In this paper I examine the film theory of Lajos Kassák's journal entitled *MA* [Today] in the context of the classical avant-garde movement of the 1920s and the neo-avant-garde movement of the 1960/70s. I first place the texts on film published in the journal in the context of the film theory and film history of the 1920s, then I seek their influence on later periods. Thus, on the one hand, we can have an insight into the results of the classical avant-garde represented by *MA* at that time, on the other hand, we can trace its impact within the Hungarian neo-avant-garde, evolving half a century later. In my view the classical avant-garde and its historical impact is well illustrated in light of these artworks and ideas on film art.

First of all, let us see the facts. Three texts on film art were published in the journal *MA*, all of them in the first half of the 1920s, already in the issues of the journal published in Vienna. The first one is Pál Acél's short theoretical writing entitled *Collective Motion (Kino-Mechanics)* in issue 1921/5. The second one is Victor Eggeling's article entitled *Theoretical Arguments on Motion Picture Art* as well as his drawings created for his planned film, the 1924 *Symphonie Diagonale* in issue 1921/8. Finally, the third one is László Moholy-Nagy's script entitled *Film Sketch—Dynamic of the Metropolis* in the special issue 1924/8–9. All this does not seem like much in the journal's history of nine volumes and a series of special issues between 1916 and 1925, however, the theoretical coherence and historical context of the three writings deserve special attention. The fact that the articles are from the beginning of the 1920s is equally important (Moholy-Nagy's script was also written around 1921–1922). This era gave rise to the first avant-garde period of silent film, among them German Expressionism, which greatly influenced these writers. And finally, it is worth mentioning that all the three articles were published in Vienna, in the issues of the international status of *MA*, appearing in the scene of the European avant-garde. Furthermore, just like the journal itself and its editor-in-chief, the two Hungarian authors of the film texts also lived in emigration from 1919–1920.

Let us take a closer look at the theories and historical context of the three articles.

The film director Pál Acél (1885–1949) had been making feature films in his country since 1914. His most important work was a film made from the narrative poem *The Apostle* by the 19th century poet Sándor Petőfi; this film was lost, just like the majority of the Hungarian silent film heritage. In 1920 he emigrated to Austria. From his short, one-page writing entitled *Collective Motion (Kino-Mechanics)*, which can be regarded as a definitive manifesto in the spirit of the art theory of the age, rather than a discursive argumentation, it is worth highlighting the ideas referring to the relationship between Expressionism and motion pictures. His passion is visible in the language he uses: "expressive tool", "expressive mechanics", "monumental expressivity". Further on, the notion of "collectivity", also appearing in the title with political connotations, is a deciding element of the argumentation. The thesis of Pál Acél's writing is formulated around the genre of the "Metropolis film" which first appeared in the avant-garde film movement of the 1920s, and within that genre, of several filmmakers. For the avant-garde filmmakers of the age, the Metropolis film represented the possibility that the cinematographic idea of motion and the political thought of the mass can appear simultaneously. The metropolis is the place where the film medium is most at home, and respectively, film is the new medium which can most effectively express the new experience of metropolises (motion/speed, crowd). Although the word metropolis does not appear in Pál Acél's text, several expressions of his ("kino-mechanics", "collective motion", "force exerted on the mass, massified culture") point towards the notion of the metropolis. Thus it is not unfounded to assume that at the time of publishing Acél's article, Moholy-Nagy, working on the *Film Sketch—Dynamic of the Metropolis* at the time of appearance of Acél's writing, is influenced by his compatriot's ideas; his short script, as Éva Forgács writes in her essay, is just "indulging in the freedom of motion".[1]

The inclusion of Viking Eggeling's (1880–1925) article among the discussed materials deserves special explanation, as he was not a Hungarian artist (he was born in Sweden and carried out his artistic activity in Germany). However, Eggeling's fundamental article, considered as a classic in early film theory, was first published in *MA* in Hungarian (without mentioning the translator), and later translations were made based on this text. This mere fact indicates the significance of *MA* in the avant-garde scene of the time. The other important aspect is the publication of the drawings accompanying the author's writing, among others, on the front cover of the issue. Eggeling's drawings are preliminary studies for his later abstract film, *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924), also a classic. These drawings can also be associated with Moholy-Nagy's film plan, created at the time of publication of Eggeling's studies and drawings. It is worth supplementing all this with another illustration of the issue containing Eggeling's article, namely with the drawings of Eggeling's disciple, Hans Richter (1888–1976). *MA* published "themes" from Richter's *Fugue* series on four pages. These drawings can be regarded as the preliminary study for the artist's abstract etudes entitled *Rhythm* (1921, 1923, 1925). Besides Eggeling, Richter was another prominent artist of the German avant-garde film art of the 1920s, and within that, of the trend of abstract film (they signed together the 1920 manifesto entitled *Universal Language*). Even if he did not publish an article, his drawings appeared in *MA*. In the 1920s in Berlin, Richter worked together with Moholy-Nagy: they were both members of the Vienna Constructivist Group, they jointly selected films for the 1929 Stuttgart review of avant-garde film and photography, the FiFo, which would play an

[1] FORGÁCS Éva, „A megmozdított kép: Moholy-Nagy László", *Filmvilág* 38, 4. sz. (1995): 44–46, 46.

important role in shaping Moholy-Nagy's thinking about film and in the films that he started to make at that time.

Thus we arrive at the other determining figure, besides Kassák, of classical avant-garde, László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946). Moholy-Nagy was the "Berlin representative" of *MA*, the journal regularly published his artistic works; in 1921 a special issue was dedicated to his artistic activity. His only textual material published in *MA* is the *Film Sketch—Dynamic of the Metropolis*. The importance of this work in the author's oeuvre is indicated by the fact that he republished its revised version in German (*Dynamik Der Gross-Stadt: Skizze zu einem filmmanuskript* [Dynamic of the Metropolis: Sketch of a manuscript for a film]) in his 1925 volume entitled *Malerei, Photografie, Film* (Painting, Photography, Film), appearing in the Bauhaus books series.[2] In the version published in *MA*, the text is accompanied by drawings, graphic as well as typographical signs, while in the second version, published in the volume, drawings are replaced by photos. All this proves, on the one hand, Moholy-Nagy's *gesamkunstwerk* artistic endeavour; on the other hand, it illustrates the artistic path of his attachment to film, namely his process of approaching film through fine arts, then photography. Krisztina Passuth writes in her monograph on Moholy-Nagy: "The medium of film would have not only been an explosive expansion of artistic training, but an artistic self-realization for him."[3] Would have been..., as Moholy-Nagy could not make a film out of this plan and as he unfortunately never fully immersed himself in film. This was perhaps the decisive moment when Moholy-Nagy's career remained primarily in the domains of photography and fine arts. His reception also focuses on this aspect of his activity as well as on its connection with the Bauhaus, though recently more and more attention has been paid to his films.

From the perspective of the filmic materials related to *MA* it is of major importance that Moholy-Nagy's first film, *Marseille Vieux Port* (Alter Hafen in Marseille, 1929/32), and his further silent films related to the years in Germany, *Berliner Stilleben* (Berlin Still Life, 1931/32) and *Großstadt Zigeuner* (Gypsies, 1932/33), start from the conception of *Film Sketch—Dynamic of the Metropolis* and belong to the avant-garde Metropolis films of the 1920s. Only the abstract material of *Ein Lichtspiel schwarz-weiss-grau* (Light-Play Black-White-Gray, 1930/32) is different; it was inspired by his own Light-Space Modulator (Lichtrequisit).

Thus Moholy-Nagy's film plan published in *MA*, then in the volume, could not be completed, however, his later Metropolis films can obviously be related to *Film Sketch—Dynamic of the Metropolis*. It is also worth mentioning that *Light-Play Black-White-Gray* can be related to the constructivist works of Eggeling and Richter, publishing in *MA*. In the chapter entitled *Static and kinetic optical composition* of the introduction of *Painting, Photography, Film*, Moholy-Nagy devoted special attention to the activity of Eggeling and Richter and included the *Symphonie Diagonale* in the visual material of the volume as the example of "animated cartoon",[4] which he could watch at Eggeling's home projection in a friendly circle in 1924.[5] However, Moholy-Nagy had already published parts of Eggeling's and Richter's films in the album entitled *Book of New Artists*, jointly edited with Kassák and published in Hungarian and German in Vienna in 1922.

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[2] MOHOLY-NAGY László, *Painting, Photography, Film*, trans. Janet SELIGMAN (London: Publisher Lund Humphries, 1969), 124–137.

[3] Krisztina PASSUTH, *László Moholy-Nagy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 113.

[4] MOHOLY-NAGY, *Painting...*, 119.

[5] PETERNÁK Miklós, „A magyar avant-garde film", in *F.I.L.M.: A magyar avant-garde film története és dokumentumai*, szerk. PETERNÁK Miklós, 5–51 (Budapest: Képzőművészeti Kiadó, 1991), 9.

We can see that the filmic materials appearing in *MA* are coherent as long as they belong to the sphere of a) the Metropolis films of the 1920s; b) the theory and practice of abstract film. Moholy-Nagy represents the connection between the two: *Film Sketch—Dynamic of the Metropolis*, published in *MA*, is one of the forerunners of the genre of the Metropolis film, however, the drawings and typographical signs render the text closer to abstract signification. The above-mentioned fact that the later publication of the *Film Sketch* in the volume contains photos instead of drawings, brings Moholy-Nagy's plan much closer to the classical avant-garde Metropolis films created after 1925 (!), thus to his later films on Marseille, Berlin and the Berlin Gypsies.

MA's place in the context of film history also deserves special attention. The illustrations of Eggeling and Richter, the drawings and typographic signs of *Film Sketch—Dynamic of the Metropolis* as well as Moholy-Nagy's film entitled *Light-Play Black-White-Gray* are essential examples of the theory and practice of abstract film. Pál Acél's manifesto and Moholy-Nagy's film plan lay the groundwork for the representative avant-garde film genre of the 1920s; it will be completed through Moholy-Nagy, though only a few years later, when the classical pieces of Metropolis film, such as Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphonie of a Metropolis* (1927) and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), have already been made. He knew both films and both filmmakers at the shooting of his own films. In the second, 1927 edition of *Painting, Photography, Film*, Moholy-Nagy inserted a footnote into the introductory text of *Film Sketch—Dynamic of the Metropolis*:

> As I was reading the corrections for the second edition, I heard reports of two new films which seek to realize the same aspirations as those proposed in this chapter and the one on Simultaneous Cinema (p. 41). Ruttmann's film *Symphony of the Metropolis* shows the rhythm of the movement of a town and dispenses with normal "action".[6]

Besides, at the 1929 Stuttgart avant-garde film forum organized with Richter (FiFo) he had the occasion to listen to Dziga Vertov's lecture and watch his films.

As a closing thought of this argumentation, let me complete the film historical context of Metropolis films with yet another aspect related to *MA*. The editor-in-chief of the journal, Lajos Kassák, could no longer write about Ruttmann's Berlin film in *MA*, which ceased publication in 1925, before his return home from emigration. Therefore, his writing entitled *The Absolute Film* appeared instead in 1927 in the most significant journal in Hungary of that time, *Nyugat*. Kassák's analysis goes deep into Ruttmann's film and celebrates the "true", "absolute" film, which gets separated from literature and in which "[T]he clearest reality of life is present".[7] From among possibly related films, he highlights Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and from among the relevant artists he mentions, among others, the earlier authors of the *MA*, Eggeling, Richter and, of course, Moholy-Nagy. Kassák's main idea about *Berlin, Symphonie of a Metropolis*, that "It happens rather than narrates",[8] also applies to Moholy-Nagy's film plan and his Metropolis films. This is how the far-reaching intellectual sphere *MA* and its ideas become one.

In the second part of my paper I examine the impact of the writings on film appearing in *MA* and the film-related activity of their authors on Hungarian film history. The presentation of the contemporaneous impact is very simple, as there was virtually none. As mentioned above, thoughts and films formulating the idea of avant-garde art and within that, avant-garde film art, could

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[6] MOHOLY-NAGY, *Painting...*, 123.

[7] KASSÁK Lajos, „Az abszolút film", in PETERNÁK, *F.I.L.M...*, 98–107, 105.

[8] Ibid. 99.

only be born in emigration. The journal published in Vienna, Kassák and Pál Acél living in emigration in Vienna, Moholy-Nagy as the Berlin representative of the journal and his films made in Germany—all these signal that avant-garde filmmaking could not receive necessary institutional and spiritual support in Hungary in the 1920s. It has to be added that by the end of the 1920s, traditional feature filmmaking also fell into crisis in Hungary. While in 1918, mostly due to the war conditions, more than 100 films were made (and the country occupied the fifth position among the filmmaking great powers); ten years later, in 1928, only one feature film was completed. It is severely traumatic to Hungarian film that the most important period of silent film era, the 1920s, is almost left out from its history. And this particularly applies to avant-garde endeavours. This is also the reason for the unilaterally market-oriented, popular character of the period between 1931 and 1945 of early Hungarian sound film, as well as for the recurrent fate of artists with innovative views, such as Paul Fejos. He made a successful avant-garde film with the title *The Last Moment* in Hollywood in 1927, and as a result, he signed an agreement with the Universal Pictures, but after the failure of his films made in Hungary he left the country again, and this time once and for all. Thus, in the age of classical avant-garde the Hungarian authors could implement their ideas mainly in emigration.

The years following World War II, the age of socialist realism, did not favour avant-garde (film) art either. Kassák, who was living in Hungary again from 1926, and whose personality linked the classical and neo-avant-garde periods, was an isolated and prosecuted cultural figure in the political regime both before and after 1945. After the 1956 revolution he was a "tolerated" artist of the Kádár regime, whose reception would be possible again abroad, in the contemporary emigration; Kassák himself was actually forced into internal emigration. The Kádárian consolidation and one of its important measures, namely the foundation of the Béla Balázs Studio in 1959, gradually made possible the continuation of the avant-garde view and its connection to recent international developments.[9] After sporadic antecedents, starting from the 1970s, several avant-garde experimental films were made in the BBS in various groups and series. It is no exaggeration to say that the Béla Balázs Studio became the most important workshop of the neo-avant-garde of the 1960/70s, in which artists working in several other fields also carried out their activity, making one or even more films in the spirit of the Moholy-Nagy and Kassák type *gesamkunstwerk*. The most important artist, organizer and also theorist of this period was Gábor Bódy (1946–1985), who dedicated a short, unrealized (!) film plan of his *(Light and Sound)* to László Moholy-Nagy. Among his articles we can find a survey of the history of Hungarian experimental film, in which he writes the following:

> If we accept the division according to which the following great, influential generations developed in experimentalism: 20s–30s: French, Russian, German experimenters; 50s: American experimentalism on the East and West Coast; 60s–70s: international movement of independent cooperative filmmakers, then Hungary has the intellectual connections in the first and third generations. We took part in the first one with German intervention through Béla Balázs, László Moholy-Nagy, Dénes Mihály, Sándor László and through the unknown György Gerő who was regarded by Kassák and Imre Pán as early as the late 50s as the author of the »first, and so far, only Hungarian avant-garde film«. We can only talk

[9] KOVÁCS András Bálint, "The Experimental Cinema of the State: The Balázs Béla Studio", in *Experimental Film: The Missing Frames*, ed. Benjamin MEADE, 65–88 (Kansas City: Avila University Press, 2010).

> about the late effects of the second one, and perhaps the Hungarian underground of the 50s could be reconstructed from private libraries. However, a relatively strong and undoubtedly significant, peculiarly Hungarian cooperative experimentalism joined the third one which was made possible by the activities of the Béla Balázs Studio.[10]

If we examine the connection between the ideas on film of the classical avant-garde movement represented by *MA*, with Moholy-Nagy's filmic works in its centre, and the films of the neo-avant-garde period, then it is worth mentioning the partly distinctive character of Moholy-Nagy's Metropolis films as compared to the avant-garde Metropolis films of the time. What has not yet been emphasized is the author's social sensitivity, and as a result, the documentary style of his Metropolis films. We can read the following statement in the article of the Hungarian researcher Andrea Pócsik: "He draws his themes not simply from the bustle of the city, as it happened in the case of his early film plan entitled *Dynamic of the Metropolis*, but from the of reality mosaics of periphery existence, of being outcast."[11] In this respect, Pócsik's argumentation is based on the recent results of the research on Moholy-Nagy, among others, in the 2006 volume entitled *Filmische Sinneserweiterung: László Moholy-Nagys Filmwerk und Theorie* by the German Jan Sahli. Sahli writes about Moholy-Nagy's Metropolis films as follows: "However, besides the shared aesthetic starting point of the new filmic view, in the course of the cinematic approach to reality, certain poetic-documentarist ideas take shape in Moholy-Nagy's Metropolis films, which also contain political perspectives."[12]

This is most characteristic of the two Berlin films: the topic of *Gypsies* already makes clear Moholy-Nagy's social interest. The majority of the shots of *Berlin Still Life* are about workers, beggars and children playing in and around Meyer's Hof barracks. As a leftist, progressive, and also an emigrant artist forced out of fascist Germany, Moholy-Nagy could easily identify with these social outcasts. Therefore, it is not surprising that his films were banned from the German public of the time due to their socio-critical attitude.

The two versions of the *Film Sketch—Dynamic of the Metropolis*, first published in *MA*, and then in a later volume, as well as his Metropolis films, clearly shows his shift from Constructivism to documentarism. Following the film plan, Andreas Haus, together with his disciples, shot a constructivist film, faithful to the spirit of the original work, at the University of Art in Vienna in 2006. In *Berlin Still Life* only the high angles, the reflecting surfaces and the graphic patterns of the asphalt and paving stone evoke this style; in the *Gypsies* a few canted angles at most. In his Metropolis films Moholy-Nagy is interested in the issue of social freedom rather than in the abstract freedom of motion—just as to the neo-avant-garde art of the 1960–70s would be.

The most important connection between classical avant-garde (rooted in *MA* and Moholy-Nagy's works) and the experimental films of the neo-avant-garde period is the social awareness of abstract forms and Constructivism. Of course, in neo-avant-garde films, we can still find examples of the abstract style, continuing the tradition of Constructivism. But it is very clear how even the

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[10] BÓDY Gábor, "Creative thinking device: »Experimental film« in Hungary", in *Gábor Bódy 1946–1985: A Presentation of his Work*, eds. László BEKE and Miklós PETERNÁK, 265–270 (Budapest: Palace of Exhibitions–Central Board of the Hungarian Cinematography, Ministery of Culture, 1987), 267.

[11] PÓCSIK Andrea, *Átkelések: A romaképkészítés (an)archeológiája* (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó–Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem, 2017), 22.

[12] Jan SAHLI, *Filmische Sinneserweiterung: László Moholy-Nagys Filmwerk und Theorie* (Marburg: Schüren, 2006), 158.

most radical experimental films are related to political, historical, social and ideological issues. Let me bring just a few examples.

The closest to Moholy-Nagy's works was János Tóth's *Arena* (1970), which depicts the common man in both a documentary and an abstract style. Tibor Hajas has pedestrians pose as models in a city square in his *Self-Fashion-Show* (1976), and in doing so, he uses the documentary method while also criticizing it. Another example is Tamás Szentjóby's film *Centaur* (1975), which intentionally desynchronizes image and sound.

The most important artist of the neo-avant-garde scene is Miklós Erdély, who created several films in the Béla Balázs Studio. The most significant one of them is *Version*, shot in 1979, which almost piled up radical political meanings, juxtaposing the narratives of antisemitism and public persecution—that is, the two dictatorships of the 20th century: fascism and communism. The common feature of the two eras is reinforced by the circumstance, not unusual at that time either, that *Centaur* and *Version* were banned, and Tamás Szentjóby emigrated from Hungary in 1975.

And finally, let's also mention one of Gábor Bódy's films, *American Torso* (1975), made in the Béla Balázs Studio, which follows the fate of the Hungarian soldiers forced to emigration after the 1848–49 War of Independence, fighting in the American Civil War. Bódy's film depicts the fate of emigration, recurring again and again in Hungarian history. The fate which is also shared by the Hungarian classical avant-garde movement; the journal *MA*; its editor-in-chief, Lajos Kassák; and its Berlin representative, László Moholy-Nagy. Again, an intellectual circle comes to a close—together with my paper as well.

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Performing Agitation. László Moholy-Nagy and the 1924 Special Issue of *MA (Today)* on Music and Theater

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Abstract: *MA* [Today] reflects the heterogeneity of theater after World War I and its 1924 special issue is a comprehensive document of the avant-garde ambition to renew *mise-en-scène*. Although *MA* was not a theater journal, it regularly published dramatic texts, performance reviews and manifesto-like essays on recent forms of staging. László Moholy-Nagy supported *MA* and its editor Lajos Kassák from Berlin, where he got involved in staging contemporary plays and operas. This paper addresses the question why the performing arts were especially important for Kassák's circle and examines the relationship of *MA* to avant-garde theater movements. It also gives a brief survey of the *Musik und Theaternummer* with its introduction by Kassák before engaging with the theory and practice of experimental theater in Moholy-Nagy's oeuvre.

When we take a closer look at European theater between the world wars we face the heterogeneity of aspirations. Forces of division had become active in the last two decades of the 19th century and resulted in a divergence by the 1920s which had been mostly unknown before. Several new forms of performance had been experimented with and theater had become irreversibly plural. These forms differed not only in their methods of staging but in their artistic conception and worldview as well. Some were realized and some remained striking ideas but almost all had a considerably effective history.

The periodical *MA* [Today] reflected this heterogeneity and its 1924 special issue was a comprehensive document of the avant-garde ambition to renew theater. Although *MA* was not a theater journal, it regularly published dramatic texts, performance reviews and manifesto-like essays on recent forms of *mise-en-scène*. Its existence was crucial because Hungarian experiments in staging were preceded by the evolution of avant-garde performance theories. (Translations of avant-garde dramatic texts by Jean Cocteau, Tristan Tzara, etc. had also been published in *MA* well before their staging in Hungary.) Renewal had grown into an imperative outside of the institutional system of Hungarian theater and could be fully accomplished only in periodicals. *MA* was documenting this imperative by forming its principles mostly from abroad. Emigration caused serious hardship for some editors and contributors but also helped them obtain up-to-date information and get acquainted with new tendencies of theater from all over Europe.

MA had developed the radical modernism of similar periodicals (chiefly *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*) into a program of social agitation since its editors saw the possibility of recreating "homogeneous social spirit and public faith"[1] in communist society. Theater seemed to be an ideal terrain of forming community since Richard Wagner had chosen it as an ancient prototype of "public art"[2] and combined art and revolution some sixty years be-

[1] HEVESY Iván, „Tömegkultúra – tömegművészet", *MA* 4, 4. sz. (1919): 70–71, 70.

[2] Richard WAGNER, „Art and Revolution", trans. William Ashton ELLIS, in Richard WAGNER, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works: Vol. 1.: The Art-Work of the Future, &c*, 30–65 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1892), 48.

fore. So theater was the most appropriate art form for the purposes of activism and functioned as a substitution for political action, too, i.e. as an artistic tool of agitation, transformation and challenge to the status quo.

However, articles in *MA* did not offer an action plan and authors did not have the opportunity to put their ideas into practice when the political climate became favorable and the Communist Party in Hungary came to power for a short period in 1919. Most authors did not have experience in making theater either, but tried to make up for the lack of practice with an impassioned call for reforms. No wonder the articles of *MA* were Delphian writings full of manifesto-like statements and differed from the essays of theater people (like Erwin Piscator or Vsevolod Meyerhold) that gave the quintessence of things already tested on stage. Hungarian notions of avant-garde theater were full of idealism and mostly arose in an abstract theoretical context instead of in some concrete space of practice.

First and foremost Dadaism had a huge impact on the editors of *MA*, who gave an activist impulse to the initiatives of their fellow artists in Zurich. But by the time Dadaist *mise-en-scène* found its own stage in Budapest in 1925, the Kassák Circle had already turned to Constructivism whose followers were not satisfied with avant-garde antecedents. Preaching the necessity of a mechanical stage, Farkas Molnár complained that "the reign of optics and acoustics was replaced by empty decorations of awkward symbols and lunatic yammering of futurist poets".[3] Kassák's interest in Constructivism resulted in a break with his former colleagues (Iván Hevesy and Sándor Bortnyik) and the last issue of *MA* in 1925 condemned Dadaist experiments of the so-called Zöld Szamár Színház (Green Donkey Theater) as mere "bluff" and "an imitation of art under modern catchwords".[4]

Constructivism became widely known in Europe at the beginning of the 1920s and *MA* picked it up immediately to create its activist ideology. Kassák derived Constructivism from the necessary recreation of the social self. He saw the original sin in the lack of integration that could only be reestablished by "art striving towards collectivity", finding an expression in "a strict construction and synthetic architecture".[5] So for Kassák only Constructivism, i.e., "the present itself that represented man as an individual and a member of a collective at the same time" could lead art back to objectivity obscured by naturalism while trying to create an illusion of reality.[6] The 1924 special issue of *MA* combined the predilection for theater and this preference for constructivism explicitly.

The so-called *Musik und Theaternummer* (See Fig. 1. on Plate XXIX.) tried to demonstrate "objective reality" with more than 20 illustrations showing various theater designs by Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, George Grosz and Fernand Léger, among others (See Fig. 2. on Plate XXIX.), all compatible with Kassák's conception of "picture-architecture". The special issue was published a year before *The Theater of the Bauhaus* and almost at the same time as the catalogue of Friedrich Kiesler's Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik held in Vienna in September 1924. *MA* also aimed at internationalism since articles of the special issue appeared in four languages (in German, French and Italian as well as Hungarian) and its photos showed the most innovative examples of Russian, French and German scenic design. The articles and the illustrations seem extraordinary compared to those of Hungarian

[3] Molnár Farkas, „A mechanikus színpad", *MA* 8, 9–10. sz. (1923): 6.

[4] K–k L–s, „Bortnyik Sándor és Hevesy Iván vagy az elővezetett Zöld Szamár", *MA* 10, 3–4. sz. (1925): 19.

[5] Kassák Lajos, „Konstrukciótól a kompozícióig", *MA* 8, 9–10. sz. (1923): 5.

[6] Ibid.

theater magazines of the 1920s. *MA* had nothing in common with *Színházi élet* (Life in the Theater, a popular weekly) and did not intend to invigorate Hungarian theater with uncommon theories and practices. Taking its place among outstanding avant-garde periodicals, *MA* took sight of the great world instead of the homeland to display the context of the theories that had been evolving in its columns for years without a field of practice.

Kassák's opening essay[7] gave a logic to the whole issue by stressing that among all the arts, theater was the most apt to surmount the chaos of life and create order. Since Kassák defined space as the core element of theater and theater space as an artistic reality he found the Russian reforms of scenography (experimenting with stage constructions instead of painted flat scenery) the most successful. But he saw beyond scenic innovation and called for the undermining of the whole hierarchy of theater, i.e., the subversion of its logocentric structure. Poet, actress/actor, painter and director as well as light, sound, color and movement should occur in a sequence instead of a "theological order"[8] under the rule of an author as creator. Kassák seemed to fall back into logocentrism when he stated that only an "organizer" (Organisator) who created a new visual and collective order could realize a new theater. But he also stressed that he did not think of the director of contemporary theater. The "organizer" had more in common with the inventor-engineer and his creation could only be compared to a well-designed machine or a modern city. Kassák found the theater of construction fit for the age of architecture: as literature, music and the fine arts had been the means of expression for people of former ages, modern people could only be expressed by synthetic theater. So for Kassák the "organizer" was not the individual originator of a new theater but the conductor of a collective form of art.

Similarly to other writers of the *Musik und Theaternummer*, Kassák reformulated conceptual leitmotifs of renowned theater visionaries of his time but mostly left them in prophetic obscurity. Filippo Marinetti likewise argued for an abstract performance devoid of psychology, just as Kurt Schwitters emphasized the inner logic of his Merz stage free from the reign of rationality. Or Enrico Prampolini who preferred actor-gases created by vibrations and luminous forms, or Günter Hirschel-Protsch who praised the theater of completely mechanical movement. Some more concrete ideas came from the Russian director, Alexander Tairov, who described a stage that helped actresses/actors embody all the necessary forms; and from László Moholy-Nagy who published a sketch for a film *Dynamic of the Metropolis* without the intention to teach, moralize or tell a story. (See Fig. 3. on Plate XXX.)

Moholy-Nagy supported Kassák and *MA* from Berlin and got involved in editing the 1924 special issue as well. As far as theater is concerned, his ideal can be reconstructed from two essays and some photos of performances for which he designed scenery. His essay "Theater, Circus, Variety" appeared with Oskar Schlemmer's and Farkas Molnár's writings in *The Theater of the Bauhaus* only one year after the publication of the special issue of *MA*. While Schlemmer described the transformation of man/woman into a *Kunstfigur* so his/her movement could define the architecture of a performance, Molnár called for the transformation of the stage and the auditorium alike. Moholy-Nagy went beyond the relationship of space, actress/actor and movement (Schlemmer) as well as the theater building itself (Molnár) in order to outline a performance in which man did not occupy the center but became equal with all other elements—in which "light,

[7] Ludwig KASSÁK, „Über neue Theaterkunst", *MA* 9, 8–9. sz. (1924): 2.

[8] Jacques DERRIDA, "The theater of cruelty and the closure of representation", in Jacques DERRIDA, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan BASS, 232–250 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 235.

space, plane, form, motion, sound [and] man" had developed into an organism.[9] As we cannot ask a man/woman (an organism) what he or she means or represents, we cannot ask a performance or specifically a set design (organisms as well) what they mean or represent. Moholy-Nagy wanted to involve man/woman in the stage concentration of action without falling into the trap of reproducing nature i.e. with his/her physical and spiritual abilities and without his/her subjectivity. He proposed special mirrors to enlarge faces and gestures, megaphones to intensify voices and even the application of some techniques of the circus, the operetta and burlesque movies. (See Fig. 4. on Plate XXX.) He recommended choruses (nearly the same way Ödön Palasovszky and his friends used them in Budapest years later), i.e., the repetition of thoughts with the same words but with different intonation by a group of people. He called for a total theater determined by the tension of "concentrated activation"[10] and governed by the trinity of dynamism, rhythm and spectacle.

When we examine his ideas separately we might associate them with notions of other theater people. But it was not Moholy-Nagy's ideas that were unique, but rather his intention to join them in a Theater of Totality. He could not realize this theater, but he practically managed to extend the stage by various planes and areas as well as by their movement in all ways. His set designs were based on stage machines and lighting equipment that revealed intricate visual dramaturgy, similar to his sketch for a so-called "Mechanized Eccentric", published and described in *The Theater of the Bauhaus*. (See Fig. 5. on Plate XXXI.) Suggesting that his experiments with film and theater were closely related to each other, this sketch was called a score like his scenario for *Dynamic of the Metropolis*. (See Fig. 6. on Plate XXXI.) Scenes were composed in vertical lines or movements in both sketches as in the stage machinery applied in *The Merchant of Berlin* (Moholy-Nagy's set design for Erwin Piscator's *mise-en-scène*) and light played as crucial a role in them as in *Madame Butterfly* (his set design for the Krolloper in Berlin). Although his ideal theater as a whole remained on paper, some of its elements were incorporated in stage practice as far as the given circumstances let them.

Moholy-Nagy designed sets in two short periods before and after his teaching in the Bauhaus between 1923 and 1928. First he designed *Prince Hagen* based on Upton Sinclair's novel for Erwin Piscator's Proletarian Theater in Berlin in 1920. (He also designed the book cover of the German director's *Das politische Theater* that was published in Berlin in 1929. See Fig. 7. on Plate XXXI.) Unfortunately, we do not have much information about this production but Moholy-Nagy presumably tried to use a "dynamic-constructive system of forces" he was fascinated by at that time. Since he found that "constructivity as an organizing principle of human efforts" had generally resulted in "static form-invested procedure" (like in Russian theater) he aimed at the activation of space by "vital construction and force relations".[11] He thought there was a close correlation between this and "the problem of freely floating sculpture as well as of film as projected spatial motion",[12] all appearing in his next three theatre jobs, too.

Moholy-Nagy designed such kinetic sets again nine years later for *The Tales of Hoffmann*

[9] Laszlo MOHOLY-NAGY, "Theater, Circus, Variety", trans. Arthur S. WENSINGER, in Oscar SCHLEMMER, Laszlo MOHOLY-NAGY and Farkas MOLNÁR, *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, eds. Walter GROPIUS and Arthur S. WENSINGER, 49–70 (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 60.

[10] Ibid.

[11] MOHOLY-NAGY L[ászló] and KEMÉNY Alfréd, "Dynamic-Constructive System of Forces" [1922], in Krisztina PASSUTH, *Moholy-Nagy* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 290.

[12] Ibid.

produced at the Krolloper in Berlin. Photos show us screens and frameworks made of steel in a workroom-like space with sharp outlines of a special construction and formed by light as well. (See Fig. 8. on Plate XXXII.) There was also a backdrop for shadows of geometrical patterns and some forms hanging in the air: a head, an arm, a leg in the center and three more shapes with a human figure (or rather a *Kunstfigur*) among them. These emblems and some fantastic costumes helped the stage context of industrial design change into a witches' kitchen from time to time. When we compare still photos and imagine stage transformations, i.e., parts of the steel construction and shafts of light in movement it will become obvious that (unlike creations of Russian artists) this scenery was not static or installation-like but dynamic. For Moholy-Nagy – as for Robert Wilson, one of his most remarkable successors in contemporary theater – scenery was not really an arrangement but a process involving the spell-binding play of light as well.

For *Madame Butterfly* produced at the Krolloper two years later (in 1931) Moholy-Nagy also designed mobile elements that could be moved to the wings. (See Fig. 9. on Plate XXXII.) The backdrop with a huge photomontage of a bay in Japan became the surface of subtle lighting effects and suggested various times of day from sunrise to sunset. The network of lines and areas implied an organic interplay of light and movement, dark and illuminated parts of the stage. (See Fig. 10. on Plate XXXIII.) Mirrors and glass screens hanging high above the stage helped spotlights create a monumental construction of shadows with astonishing changes of atmosphere and transform Puccini's opera into a haunting vision. (See Fig. 11. on Plate XXXIII.) The elegant structures of *Madame Butterfly* and *The Tales of Hoffmann* were as refined as the Light-Space Modulator (Lichtrequisit) constructed by Moholy-Nagy at that time as a prop for an electric stage. (See Fig. 12. on Plate XXXIV.) Although this prop was not used in these opera productions, the scenography was functioning as a kind of Lichtrequisit in them since Moholy-Nagy was experimenting with the modulation of light not only on the canvas (as in his paintings) and in space but on stage as well. According to Krisztina Passuth, the inner beauty and the intensity of Moholy-Nagy's photograms matched the beauty of movement and constant change in his Light-Space Modulator.[13] But we must also put his sophisticated shaping of space in *Madame Butterfly* next to his photograms and Light-Space Modulator in order to connect his experiments with picture, sculpture and stage scenery. (See Fig. 13. on Plate XXXIV.)

Between these opera productions, Moholy-Nagy worked with Erwin Piscator again on *The Merchant of Berlin* at the Volksbühne in 1929. Walter Mehring's exuberant play is set in the German capital during the 1923 inflation and confronts us with all layers of society. The content of the play was represented by Moholy-Nagy in a constructivist way and social hierarchy was spectacularly indicated by stage hierarchy. Members of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie and the upper crust occupied three different platforms moving vertically and smaller areas (parts of a street, a flat, a bakery etc.) extended these stage places of social strata. (See Fig. 14. and Fig. 15. on Plate XXXIV.) Spotlights highlighted people and areas and stunning shadows multiplied stage forms and figures while the platforms i.e. levels of the tragic, the tragi-comical and the grotesque were continuously moving closer and farther away. (See Fig. 16. on Plate XXXV.) Screens were also important parts of the scenography as the hectic life of Berlin appeared on motion pictures and film was adjusted to the stage action in a unique way. (See Fig. 17. on Plate XXXV.) So constant movement became the soul of visual dramaturgy in *The Merchant of Berlin*, too, and transformed social critique into an exquisite mode of perception. Although the whole space of theater i.e. the building was

[13] PASSUTH, *Moholy-Nagy*, 58.

not remodeled and the ideal of the Theater of Totality could not be achieved, all these productions were significant results of Moholy-Nagy's lifelong aspiration to "translate Utopia into action".[14]

As regards Constructivism, experiments in Hungary remained much more sporadic, though *MA* could reach more theater people than a local production would ever have been able to. The spirit of the Bauhaus turned up in Sándor Bortnyik's mechanical *Green Donkey Pantomime* in 1929 when kinetics was determined by the shift of forms and colors through floating screens. (See Fig. 18. on Plate XXXVI.) Similarly, Ágnes Kövesházi's *Dance of the Machines* produced at a 1928 Cikk-Cakk Evening and Ödön Palasovszky's oratory choirs (e.g. *Oedipus's Hands* in 1926) used a larger group of people as a moving element actively forming space. (See Fig. 19. on Plate XXXVI.) Although Kassák criticized Palasovszky's theater, its programs were as immersed in agitation and activism as issues and events of *MA* had been some years before. Neither Kassák's nor Palasovszky's efforts could influence *mise-en-scène* in the 1920s, but their search for new forms had obvious results in neo-avant-garde and postmodern experiments some fifty years later. The relentless nature of their search is as attractive now as it was a century before when Herwarth Walden rejected the dominant forms of contemporary theater in the special issue of *MA*.

> "Theater as a work of art is an organism created by artistically logical relationships of sensuous movements. Anything else is just a pastime of the artist and the bourgeois captivated by culture."[15]

[14] Laszlo MOHOLY-NAGY, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago: Paul Theobald and Company, 1947), 361.
[15] Herwarth WALDEN, "Das Theater als künstlerisches Phänomen", *MA* 9, Nos. 8–9. (1924): 4.

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Fig. 1. Cover of the 1924 Musik und Theaternummer of *MA*

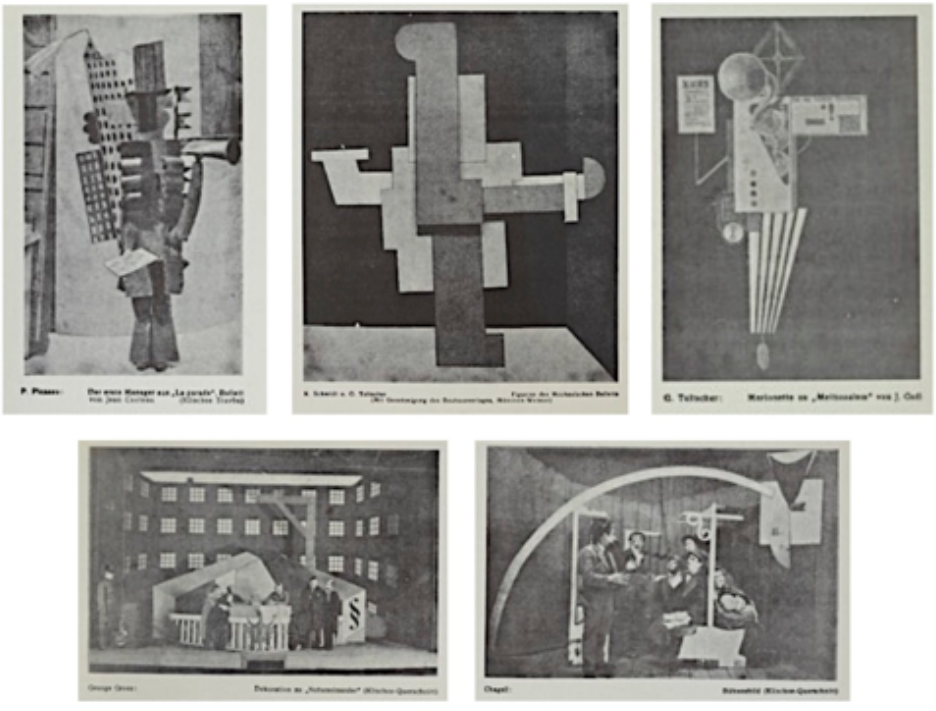

Fig. 2. Illustrations in the 1924 special issue of *MA*

PLATE XXX

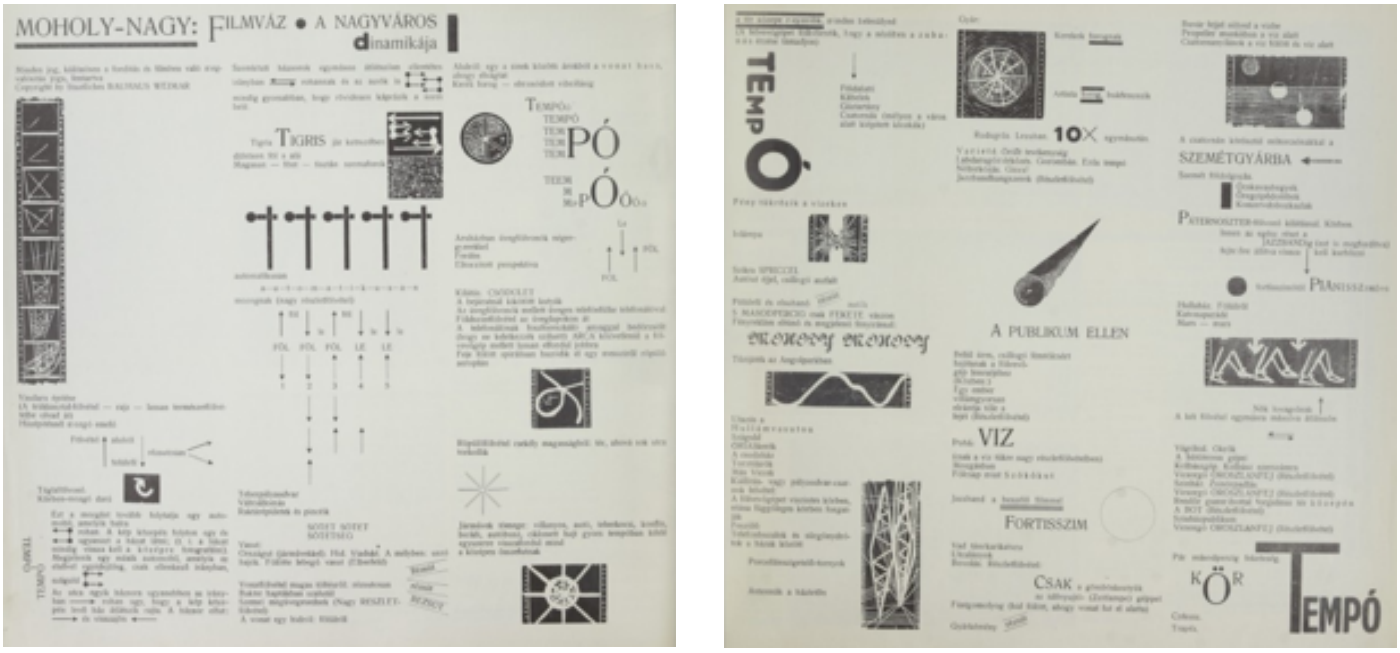

Fig. 3. László Moholy-Nagy's *Dynamic of the Metropolis* in the 1924 special issue of *MA*

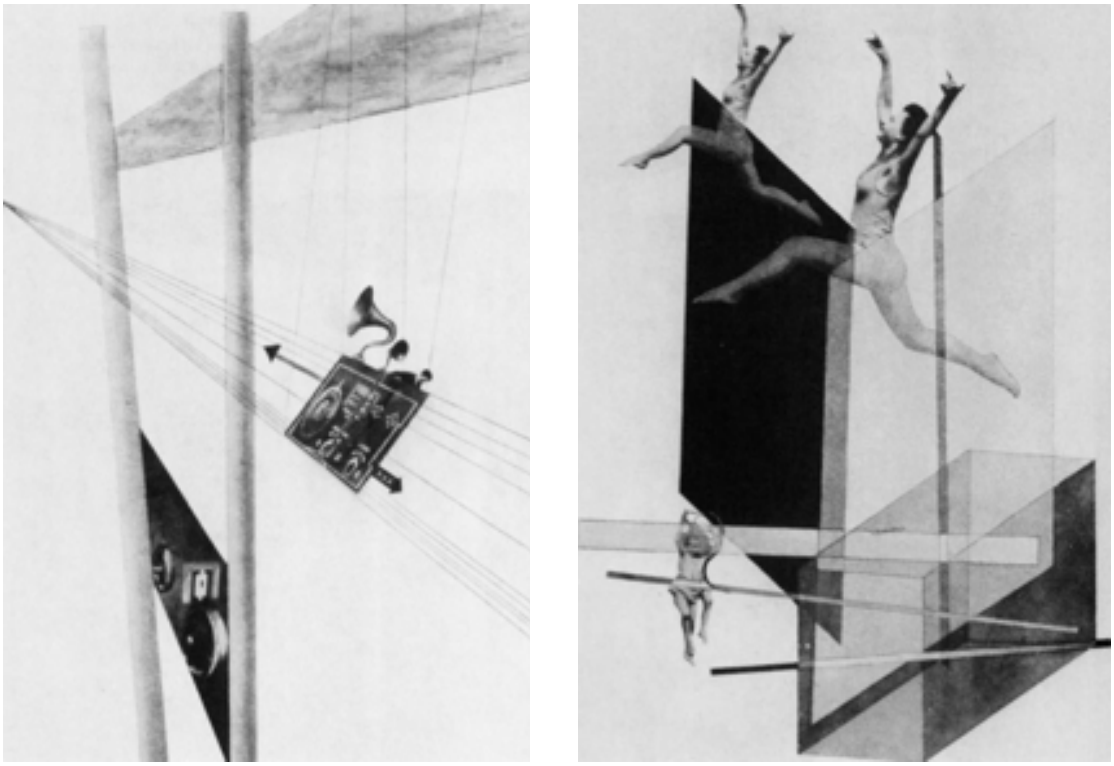

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PLATE XXXI

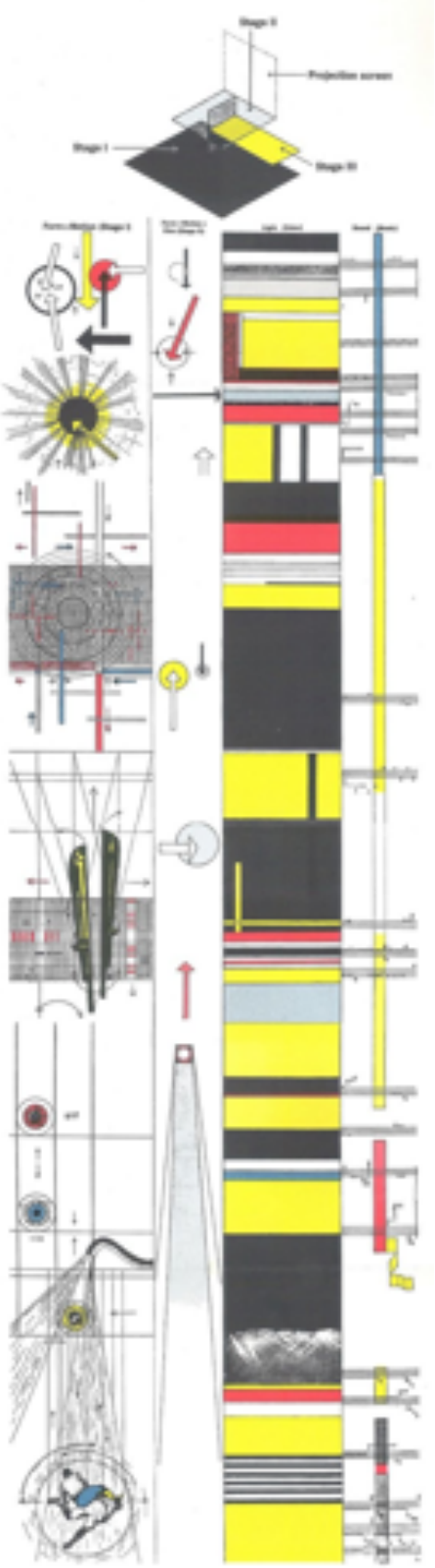

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Fig. 6. *Dynamic of the Metropolis*
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Fig. 7. Cover of Erwin Piscator's book
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Fig. 9. Puccini: *Madame Butterfly*, directed by Otto Klemperer and designed by László Moholy-Nagy. Berlin, Krolloper, 1931.

PLATE XXXIII

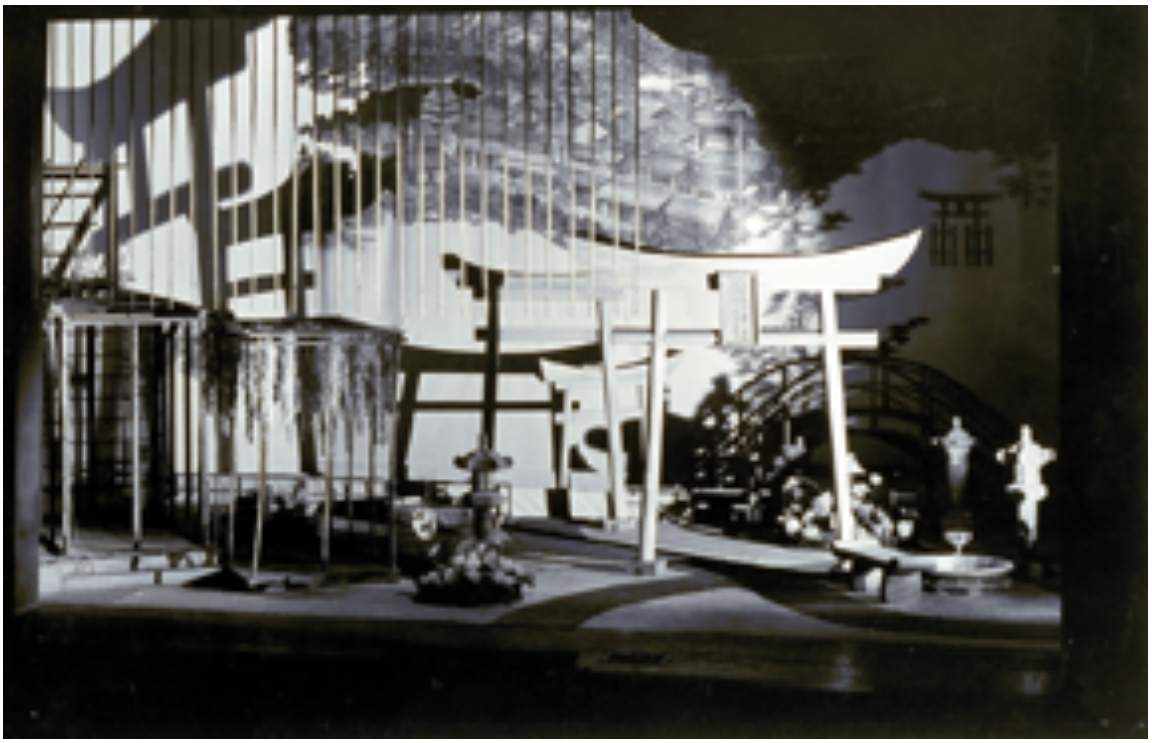

Fig. 10. Puccini: *Madame Butterfly*, directed by Otto Klemperer and designed by László Moholy-Nagy. Berlin, Krolloper, 1931.

Fig. 11. Puccini: *Madame Butterfly*, directed by Otto Klemperer and designed by László Moholy-Nagy. Berlin, Krolloper, 1931.

PLATE XXXIV

Fig. 12. Moholy-Nagy's Light-Space Modulator, 1930.

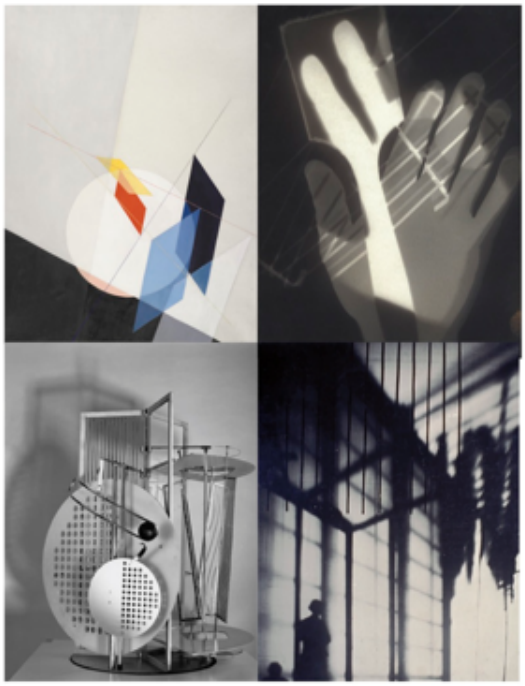

Fig. 13. Moholy-Nagy's experimenting with the modulation of light in various forms

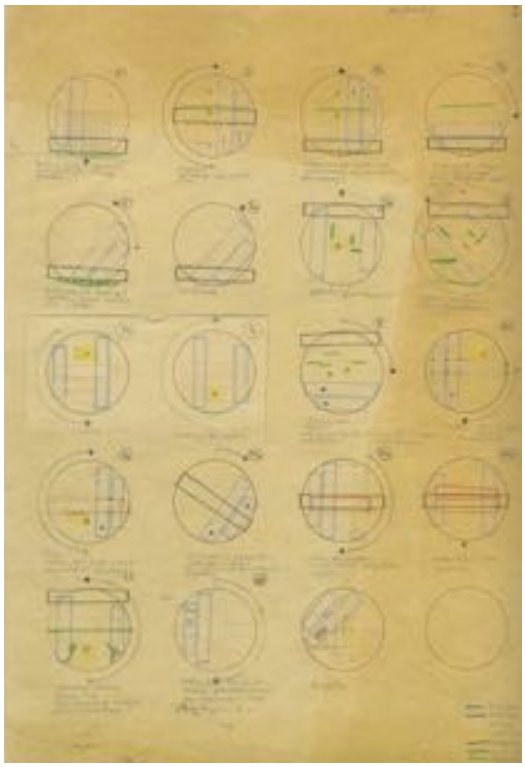

Fig. 14. Walter Mehring: *The Merchant of Berlin* directed by Erwin Piscator and designed by László Moholy-Nagy. Berlin, Volksbühne, 1929.

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Fig. 17. Projected backdrop by László Moholy-Nagy for *The Merchant of Berlin* (1929)

PLATE XXXVI

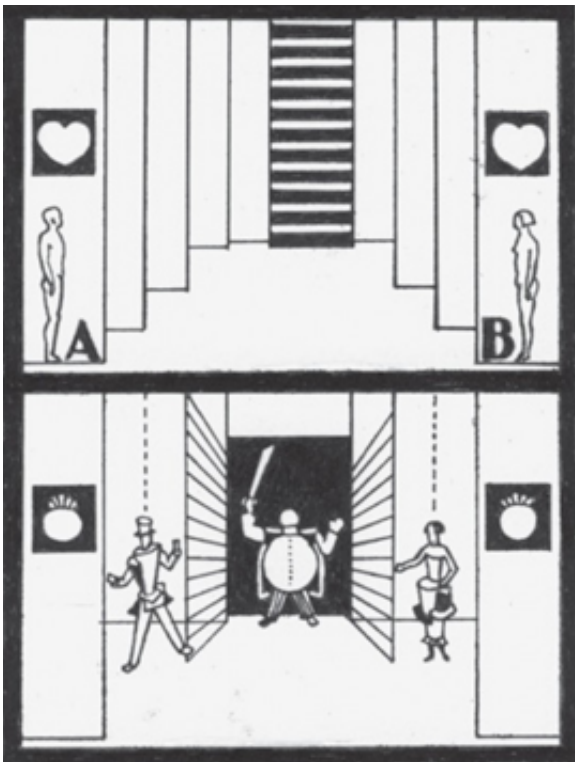

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Fig. 19. *Dance of the Machines*. Music by József Kozma, choreographed by Ágnes Kövesházi, Budapest, 1928.

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Political or Aesthetical Subversion? Strategies of Avant-Garde Speaking Choirs in Interwar Hungary

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Abstract: Speaking choirs were underground artistic groups of labor-class youth in Hungary in the period between the two World Wars. The groups, led mostly by Avant-Garde artists, were artistic and political communities also. Dadaism, Expressionism and Constructivism, Soviet Proletkult and revolutionary mass festivals had considerable influence on the speaking choir movement. Politically, a number of the choirs were influenced by the Social Democratic Party, others by the illegal Communist Party, but some of them, such as the choir of Kassák or the company of Palasovszky, were autonomous leftist groups that strove to remain detached from any kind of party influence.

In the paper I will give two examples of works written especially for speaking choirs. One is a poem by probably the best known twentieth century Hungarian poet, Attila József (*Tömeg* [Crowd], 1930). The other is a mass play of multiple choirs written for street performance. It is called *Punalua* (1926), it was written by a lesser known Avant-Gardist poet and stage director, Ödön Palasovszky, and due to its grand scale, it was never performed. The poem of Attila József, though a masterpiece of its genre, remains enclosed in its own sociocultural context whereas *Punalua* is still open to reinterpretations.

The Speaking Choir Movement

Speaking choirs were peculiar artistic groups of the Hungarian labor-class culture in the period between the two World Wars. These underground communities were comprised of young, mostly teenage industrial workers and intellectuals. The groups were led by Avant-Garde artists of the time such as Lajos Kassák, Jolán Simon, Ödön Palasovszky, Aladár Tamás, and also non-avant-gardists such as the acknowledged actor-director Oszkár Ascher. Speaking choirs were not only artistic communities, but political communities which had a certain informal educational role as well.

The first experiments with Hungarian speaking choirs were made by the Proletkult group of Kassa, otherwise known as Košice in 1922, led by János Mácza.[1] Mácza wrote, directed and organized a mass play called *Choir of Workers* for the May 1st festival, International Labor Day. But Mácza fled to Moscow and the Kassa Proletkult group broke up. The real spread of the Worker's Choirs began only after 1926 with the success of the *Új Föld* [New Land] Theatre project of Ödön Palasovszky, Aladár Tamás and Zsigmond Remenyik. The choir movement was growing very fast at the turn of the twenties and thirties. The speaking choir was seen as a cheap and democratic genre which was accessible to anyone. One did not need to master a musical instrument nor take expensive singing or acting lessons to join a choir. The only thing needed from the participant was that which everybody, even the poorest unemployed worker had: one's own voice and the ability to speak. The choir, as a group performance, was seen as a *par excellence* anti-individualistic art in a bourgeois age of emerging movie stars. The members saw the choirs as representatives of a new democratic or even a new communist age.

[1] BOTKA Ferenc, szerk., *Kassai Munkás 1907–1937* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969).

The practical advantages and good ideological reputation of the speaking choirs made them popular. The movement in its heyday had approximately ten thousand members in about a hundred different choirs throughout the country. The aggregation of a well-organized leftist, potentially communist, youth quickly reached the level of posing a considerable threat to the nationalistic government that was ideologically based on anti-bolshevism and anti-Semitism. The speaking choirs always functioned under strong political control until 1933 when the whole movement was banned by the Minister of the Interior.

The aesthetic and political debates inside the choir movement, which sometimes involved confrontations and denunciations of other members, reflected the debates of European avant-gardists and party theoreticians of the twenties about the revolutionary or reactionary role of Avant-Garde art. Dadaist cabaret, German Expressionism and Constructivism, Soviet Proletkult and revolutionary mass festivals had considerable influence on the rather heterogeneous Hungarian speaking choir movement. Politically, a number of the choirs were influenced by the Social Democratic Party, others by the illegal Communist Party, but some of them, such as the choir of Kassák or the company of Palasovszky, were autonomous leftist groups that strove to remain detached from any kind of party influence.

In fact, the question which divided the Hungarian labor cultural scene most during that period was the acceptance of what we now more or less call Avant-Gardism. One can easily note that many of Kassák's adversaries were once his disciples. Mácza, Aladár Tamás and others were easily and subsequently attracted by the call of the party, and turned their back on Kassák because of his stout resistance to accept any party intervention. And party theoreticians considered expressionism, constructivism etc. as anti-revolutionary artistic choices. They, like Georg Lukács among them, considered this to be the art of the Weimar Republic, that of the bourgeoisie decadence and not that of the labor-class. Based on a study of the five main speaking choirs, we can say that the stronger the party control was, the less subversive the performance of the choir became.

The Performance as a Political Ritual

There were, roughly speaking, two main types of speaking choir performances. The one I am discussing first can more easily be seen as a "political ritual" of a community rather than an artistic performance before an invited audience. As a political ritual it was a celebration of the union of the working class. The synchronized recitation and motion of the choir, which also engaged the audience, was a symbolic re-enacting of the messianic moment, a unity of the class consciousness, when all individual interest dies and transforms into one greater common will. This probably sounds like political populism, and as we know, cultural anthropology could be useful in the interpretation of modern political rituals. The choirs tried to veil the theatrical character of their performance, and the measure of success was if the audience ceased to be an audience and joined the choir in reciting the lines.

Mass festivals of the early Soviet republic were more similar to this kind of political ritual rather than that of theatrical symbolization. The best known among them was the *Storming of the Winter Palace* re-enacted in Saint Petersburg and directed by Nikolai Evreinov in 1920. It took place three years after the original events, partially by some of the same Red soldiers who participated in the battle on those same streets. Other examples can be found in the workers' theatres of Berlin. The actors used the same placards and flags that they used during the street protests against the government. The Hungarian review, called *100%* (Hundred percent), which was closely related to the communist speaking choir of the same name, often reported about contemporary worker's

theatres in Berlin. One review hailed the *Arbeiter-Theater*s for bringing the political placards and flags on stage.[2] Performances and rehearsals could be seen as a remembrance of former political acts, and also as preparation for the next street protest or revolution to come. Hungarian speaking choir members and leaders were familiar with these foreign examples. They also held that the first speaking choirs were spontaneous actions of street protesters who began to recite together, eventually becoming an independent genre on the workers' stages later on. So not only the placards and flags but the whole genre came directly from the street. It was thought that the performance on stage *preserves* the original political force, or at least a tiny spark of the revolution in a somewhat transcendental way. Just like in religious rituals: a communion of mortals with a transcendental force is possible.

Although the speaking choirs were proliferating in an extensive manner from the end of the twenties, the repertoire wasn't so varied. In most of the cases the new choirs learned the same pieces that they heard performed by others. The repertoire consisted of revolutionary marches, hymns of freedom, hymns of work, as well as political allegories. Not only the pieces performed, but also the mode of the performance was usually fixed. In fact, a speaking choir could be partitioned into male and female parts, also into "dark" and "light" voices (that was the name for low and high voices), often a solo voice was used, and rhythmical or illustrative motion of the choir members accompanied the recitation.

Despite all of the variability of the choirs, the most common vocal structure of a poem on stage was the simple *crescendo*, the rise of the voice and the dynamic from *piano* to *forte* or to *fortissimo.* This was the acoustic equivalent of the ritual union of the entire community. The forte of the choir could be intensified only if the audience joined the recitation.

This type of choir performance can be named the *crescendo structure*. By 'crescendo structure' I do not mean exclusively the constant and gradual increase in loudness; rather, only two criteria has to be fulfilled: 1. there should not be a decrescendo in the performance, 2. the ultimate line has to be the loudest. Battle marches and wartime verses were the best choices for this kind of interpretation. Poems like *Föltámadott a tenger* [The Sea has Revolted] by Sándor Petőfi, a nineteenth century revolutionary poet. This is a political allegory of the world's nations flowing together like a flood against kings, tyrants and aristocracy. The poem, which allegorizes the *crowd as the sea*, in return could easily be performed by a *group of people acting as if they were the flood*.[3]

There was no need for texts with open revolutionary meaning since the crescendo structure suggested the meaning *in itself*. The vocal structure of the crescendo was a tool of interpretation for any kind of text spoken by the choir. Even if one couldn't understand a single line from a poem recited by the choir, she or he would realize the main purpose. The texts performed on stage were not explicit politically; in fact, they couldn't have been because of censorship. We have documents from choir leaders about their work such as that of Oszkár Ascher, leader of the Nyomdászkórus (*Typographer's Choir*), which gives us a detailed description of how he used the voice of the choir. For example, his director's instructions for the interpretation of the poem by Richard Dehmel are full of metaphors. "The grumbling and moaning of dark voices repeat the chorus in a *threatening way*. [...] The solo of the soprano

[2] NEMES László, „A Th. B. D. [Arbeiter-Theater-Bund Deutschlands] (1927)", in *100%: A KMP legális folyóirata, 1927–1930*, szerk. LACKÓ Miklós, 160–163 (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1981), 162.

[3] ASCHER Oszkár, *Minden versek titka* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1964), 33.

sounds like *anticipation of victory*"[4] he writes. Another choir leader, Aladár Tamás from 100%, writes that "The expressive force of the choir gave a figurative sense to everything it performed."[5]

The Masses *by Attila József*

Probably the best example for a poem written for speaking choir performance is *Tömeg* (*The Masses*, 1930) by Attila József.[6] The poem's first two lines are a labor movement slogan of the time "Work and Bread!" ("Munkát kenyeret!") which is repeated. At the end of the poem there is also a slogan ("Éljen a munkásság parasztság / Nem fogja polgári ravaszság!"), "Long live worker and peasant / free from bourgeois cunning". We know that *The Masses* was written on September 1, 1930, which was the day of the biggest street protest during the period between the wars, in which József Attila took part.[7] Just after his escape from the cavalry policemen, he wrote the poem for his choir. So, the political slogans in the poem – just like the placards or the flags which were brought onto the stage from the street, are not an artistic representation of a political subject, but a part of a political action in the form of a little material piece (or a sound recording of it).

In the following I will analyze some parts of the text focusing on the possibilities of the human voice encoded in the lines. Although there's insufficient data on how it was actually performed, we still can develop a hypothesis about the possibilities of its performance. Let's start with the above-mentioned first lines. We hear the slogan "Work and bread!" repeated. It was usual that the choir started reciting *before* appearing onstage. The possibility is given in the text that at first the audience only hears the voice getting louder and louder before they actually see the source of the voice. The choir enters onstage resembling protesters who would pop up on any corner at a street demonstration.

During the first appearance the sound of a solo voice acting as a narrator can be heard proclaiming what we experience. "The masses are coming!" (In the translation of Nyerges this line is "The Masses! The Masses!") The word "masses" is repeated in the text. We can consider it a rule that repetition is always amplification in the crescendo structure. Thus we can suppose that the word "Masses" is repeated by the whole choir or by a section of it.

The breaking of lines in the poem shows us – so to speak – typographically, that the lines with a single word are intended for the choir. In the original poem we can see at first glance that there are only five single word lines (the translation has fewer). See Table 1. As we can see, the word "masses" is repeated from time to time and three times this word makes a whole line. In the last section there are even single vowels making a whole line twice. One is an exclamation "Óh", the other is the third person personal pronoun standing for the word "masses". Nothing can be more evident than that these one-word and one-letter lines are not for solo voices, but should be recited by the choir.

By repeating the word "Masses" the choir repeatedly refers to itself. One could say that this is a very tautological mode of using language. But one shouldn't forget about the ritual role of the speaking choir perfor-

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[4] ASCHER Oszkár, „Dehmel »Aratódal«-a a kórusban", *Munkáskórus* 1, 1. sz. (1933): 12.

[5] TAMÁS Aladár, szerk., *A 100% története* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1973), 110.

[6] JÓZSEF Attila, „Tömeg", in JÓZSEF Attila, *Minden verse és versfordítása*, 288–290 (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1983); for English translation, see: Attila JÓZSEF, "The Masses", in Attila JÓZSEF and Anton N. NYERGES, *Poems of Attila József*, 108–109 (Buffalo, N. Y.: Hungarian Cultural Foundation, 1973).

[7] SZABOLCSI Miklós, *Kész a leltár: József Attila élete és pályája, 1930–1937*, Irodalomtörténeti könyvtár 41 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1998), 70.

mance. The repeated lines of the choir are, just as the repeated parts of the Roman Catholic Mass, an opportunity for the audience to join the actual community by repeating the words out loud along with the performers. Common repetition of the word "masses" is like a profane communion. The analogy can be stated even if we know that illegal communists were supposed to be strict atheists. Joining the performance by repeating the word "the masses" means joining the *imagined community* of the workers of the world on the level of political symbolism. Benedict Anderson uses the concept of *imagined community*[8] to analyze the period of the birth of national identities during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But in the same period the making of the labor class was also in progress, and the emergence of a social class is a comparable to that half sociological, half imagined community of a nation that Anderson analyzed. A political ritual like a performance of a speaking choir symbolically fulfills the order of the *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels which is probably the most wide-known slogan of the labor movement. "*Proletarians of all countries, unite!*"[9]

The final lines also suggest a simple choreography of a workers' choir:

> All else [is]
> useless –
> bargain, curse, silence, words.
> The masses: building and builder,
> foundation and roof,
> maker and planner.
> Long live worker and peasant
> free of [bourgeoise] cunning.
>
> Millions of legs kick [it] up.
> Ho masses, onward, onward.

Here we can see possibilities for making a dialogue between the sections of the choir. Oppositions and parallelisms were usually performed in a responding manner. I have marked in italics and bold the two sections answering each other.

> All else [is]
> useless –
> **bargain**, *curse*, **silence**, *words.*
> The masses: **building and** *builder,*
> **foundation and** *roof,*
> **maker and** *planner*.
> Long live **worker and** *peasant*
> free of [bourgeoise] cunning.
> Millions of legs kick [it] up.
> Ho masses, onward, onward.

The final lines demonstrate a very typical ending of a choral poem. Two things are important here. The first is that the text guides us back to the class struggle, to the street. "Ho masses, onward, onward." When they repeat, "onward, onward", they could have started leaving the stage as if they were going back to continue the fight for freedom. The second is that there is a line what can be taken as a director's instruction for physical movement on the stage: "Millions legs kick it up". While it is being said, the members of the choir can all kick in the air at one time showing a collective force and frightening the bourgeoisie.

Both of these elements were very common in poems performed by choirs. *Szocialisták* (Socialists) by Attila József ends with this line "You go south, you west and I north, / my Comrade!"[10] We can imagine that by saying this, and pointing to the different directions, the leader of the choir is actually

[8] Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

[9] Friedrich ENGELS and Karl MARX, „Manifesto of the Communist Party", in *Marx/Engels Selected Works, Vol. One*, 98–137 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/index.htm.

[10] JÓZSEF, „Szocialisták", in JÓZSEF, *minden verse…*, 299.

sending the sections of the chorus offstage and eventually leaves himself. The closing is a symbolic act of making propaganda in all parts of the world. (Note that east is missing. Naturally, it is a hint: the only place on Earth where there's no need for more agitators is the Soviet Union.) An other example could be Vladimir Mayakovsky's Poem *The Left March* from 1918 which ends like this:

> Chests out! Shoulders straight!
> Stick to the sky red flags adrift.
> Who's marching there to the right?
> LEFT!
> LEFT!
> LEFT![11]

The Punalua by Ödön Palasovszky

Ödön Palasovszky took part in a variety of Avant-Garde theatrical groups of which the Zöld Szamár Színház (Green Donkey Theatre) was the first, founded by Sándor Bortnyik and Iván Hevesy in 1925. Palasovszky used speaking choirs in two different ways: he had two different repertoires as a theatre director, one for the workers' stages and another for a middle-class audience that could afford the ticket at the Academy of Music concert hall. While the first repertoire had a strictly revolutionary character, the latter, even though it had a certain oppositional and leftist touch, was in contrast more sophisticated, more up-to-date and more playful. It was also ironic, contained more foreign authors and was similar to a potential show in Cabaret Voltaire, Zürich. Palasovszky's repertoire for middle class stage involved works by Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Cocteau, Paul Éluard, Tristan Tzara, Yvan Goll, Franz Kafka, and music by Schönberg and Honegger, while on a workers' stage they recited Endre Ady, Walt Whitman, Alexander Blok, Sergei Yesenin, Vladimir Mayakovski, and others.[12]

From a historical point of view we can say that Palasovszky's choice was a wise consideration of the different cultural needs of the two audiences. Circles of the rich and perhaps snobbish middle-class youth found the scandalous and Dadaist provocation on stage trendy and spicy. Works and shows of Palasovszky were in fashion for a time, but it also seemed to be a betrayal of the working class from a political point of view. Even Kassák published a fervent critique of the Green Donkey Theatre in the Vienna-based *MA*.[13] (Kassák, 1925). As he suggests, one cannot represent the workers and be a pet of the ruling class at the same time. Kassák held that modernist art is a legitimate property of the working class. Palasovszky considered the middle-class stage to be a better place for the artistic experiment, and only a limited amount of the experimental art could be brought into the workers' stages.

The choral poems which Palasovszky wrote and directed for the workers' choir were similar to the *The Masses* of Attila József. For example his *Üvegfúvók* (Glassblowers, 1927)[14] and *A nyűgtelenek* (Without a Hobble, 1929)[15] were both performed by the "100 %" choir. They are based on the crescendo-structure, ending with a mobilizing slogan. ("Let's go glassblowers!" "Let's go, come on!"). They celebrate collectivity ("Look! We are all from the same flesh and blood!" "Nini! Mindnyájan vérrokonok vagyunk") and offer easily understandable hints of the revolution to come. ("Go and plant an island, / Where will be no more fear and con-

[11] Herbert MARSHALL, *Mayakovsky* (London: Dobson Books, 1965), 130.

[12] JÁKFALVI Magdolna, *Avantgárd, színház, politika* (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2006), 57.

[13] KASSÁK Lajos, „Horizont", *MA* 10, 3–4. sz. (1925): 205.

[14] PALASOVSZKY Ödön, „Üvegfúvók", in PALASOVSZKY Ödön, *Csillagsebek: Válogatott versek*, 77 (Budapest: Magvető, 1987), 77.

[15] PALASOVSZKY Ödön, „A nyűgtelenek", in ibid. 102.

straint!" "Egy szigetet ültessetek, / Ahol megszűnik a félelem és a kényszer")

But these are not the works Palasovszky is famous for. In his more significant performances he either left behind the simple and didactic tool of the crescendo structure or uses it in an ironic way. As we have seen, the crescendo in a speaking choir performance reinforces or even guarantees meaning. See the tautological structure of *The Masses*: the choir acts as "the masses" on the street and in the meantime the text repeats again and again the word 'Masses'. Palasovszky used several kinds of acoustic patterns, which are also shown in the musical notes of the published version of his texts.

In works like the famous *Punalua*, it is very hard to localize the central meaning. In the cited fragment from the beginning of the Punalua there is the solo voice of the priest, and there is a choir divided into male and female groups. Here we can see how the word Punalua was born from a repetition of meaningless voices. This scene is again an enactment of a ritual, with a priest and with the community of men and women.

PRIEST: I make Punalua visible.
(Starting the songs of u-*punalua:)*
U –
U – u u – u u!
MEN, *dancing the "breathing Punalua"*:
Ú –
U – u u – u u!
A ! u – a u -a u! u – a u – a a! a – a a – a a !
WOMEN, *with songs of the* iiya- aaya:
II -ya – aa – ya! ii – ya – aa – ya!
MEN, *with a double* u-aa:
UU! u – a u – a ó!
U –
PRIEST: Punalua!
MEN:Punalua! Punalua! Punalua!
Punalua! Punalua! Punalua!
ALL: (*crying after Punalua)*[16]

The process going on is a kind of transubstantiation, as the Priest makes something visible that was invisible before. We can notice that the crescendo structure is at work again in this fragment. The choir repeats and amplifies the lines of the solo voice. The whole fragment starts with a solo, goes on with male and female choirs dialoguing and ends with a *tutti* of everyone shouting the word finally found, "Punalua". It is an expression of a triumph that after singing and shouting of the vocals "u-a u-a" there's a word finally, probably a name, the random voices found a stable form finally which seems to be very significant. As a result, everybody seems to be happy with that because of the univocality of the whole choir. There is a very similar tautologism here that we have seen in the case of the Attila József poem. A cultic repetition of a sacred word. There was also a central word in the performance repeated from time to time. The community was born exactly at that moment, when everybody was shouting "the Masses, the Masses".

There is another meaningless vocal sequence in the poem, this is the 'ii – ya – aa – ya' sung by women. Later on it is repeated and transformed to "i – o – a – a" and evolves into the word "*izzólámpa*", that is "incadescent lamp". This word – in contrast to Punalua – has a clear meaning but it is still hard to understand what its role is here. One can probably argue that the glowing of the lamp symbolizes the spark of the revolution, but the meaning here is far more ambiguous and uncertain than it was in Attila József's poem. One cannot be sure how to take it. Is it a symbolic ritual of a community or is it a joke? When the audience suddenly understands that the meaningless vocal sequence has developed into a meaningful word, then again they still don't understand what to do with 'incandescent lamp".

In fact, the word "Punalua" is not meaningless either, although its usage in the choral poem is very surprising. Originally, "Punaluan family" was a term of a nineteenth century American cultural anthropol-

[16] *Punalua!* (Palasovszky, 1926, 6. My translation – D.Sz.)

ogist, Lewis H. Morgan (1877). The term describes a basic prehistoric form of human community that existed before family and monogamy. Morgan based his theory on the study of ancient precolonial Hawaiian family relations, that is where the name came from, and there is still a beach called Punalu'u in Hawaii. Morgan supposed that Punalua was a certain marriage-like arrangement between tribes. Daughters of one tribe became wives of the sons of another tribe. It was a kind of limited polygamy. The wives were sisters, the husbands were brethren to each other and they were parents of all of the children born inside the community, no matter who the mother and father were in the modern Western sense of the word. The concept of free love and the concept of group marriage had a certain popularity in the labor movement subculture. In fact, in most of the cases it wasn't an ongoing, real practice between girls and boys in the movement, it was rather a non-official way to imagine communism. At least two of the most famous authors of Marxism, Friedrich Engels (1884) and August Bebel (1879) wrote about the Punalua family and on the work of Lewis Morgan. Instead of the role it took in the turn of the century Marxist literature, we still do not know what is the exact role of the word "Punalua" in the work of Palasovszky. Is it an erotic vision of communism or is it propaganda for free love? Perhaps we can say that Palasovszky was dreaming about a bond between people that is stronger than the ties of present bourgeoise society. A utopic community tied both by love and by brotherhood and sisterhood. Or perhaps it is only a frivolous joke, nothing more.

Punalua of Palasovszky was a product of the same little artistic subcultural scene in Budapest at the end of the twenties, but does not share the semantic structure and political function of the other choral poems. Mostly because in this case one cannot know for sure the meaning of the central word: Punalua. The audience can see that there's a ritual going on during the virtual performance, and something very important is happening that unites the community. But it is really hard to join to a community in the name of something you absolutely don't understand. What one can do is merely join for the fun of it, in a mocking manner, such as in a carnival or in a festival.

Punalua and other works of Palasovszky had some impact in their times in Budapest society. As we noted earlier, they were in fashion but they also succeeded in making a scandal, and that is what a proper Avant-Garde performance should do. Because of their evident hints about sexuality, they were outrageous not only in the bourgeoise but also in the labor-class subculture. The speaking choir movement was probably the most powerful and effective leftist cultural movement in the interwar period in Hungary; but considering both the artistic and political subversivity of Palasovszky's pieces, most of the choral poems and choir performances of the time seem to be rather conservative and old fashioned.

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Table 1.

Attila József *Tömeg* (The Masses,1930) (József, 1983, 288), translated by Anton N. Nyerges (József, 1973, 108–9.)

Munkát! kenyeret! Munkát! kenyeret! Jön a tömeg, a tömeg! Mint a megriadt legyek röpülnek róla a kövek. Szálló szikla apró szikra, mint ki a szemét kinyitja, ha vasdorong ütötte meg. A tömeg járó erdő rengeteg, ha megáll, vér a gyökere. Termőföld talpa, tenyere. Százezer hegy a kenyere, itala nem férne ködnek s a ködök bár hegyet födnek, a tömegnek nincs kenyere. Kenyértésztaként dobódik, hánykolódik, dagasztódik a tömeg. Tömény őssejt, püffeteg tapogatóit kibontja, nyúlik, válik amőbaként, más dudorait bevonja. Világ, bekap a tömeg! Felleget fú orralika, odvas foga bérkaszárnyák görbe sora. Kapkod, nyúl, ahova ér, csűrért, gyárért, boglyáért, hétórai munkáért, a Göncölért, Fiastyúkért, bővízű, alföldi kútért - - Nyirkos, görbedő atyáim, édes, sovány leánykáim a tömeg. Körötte füstölgő csövek. Folyót piszkál a szalmaszál, - ni, kapja, viszi már az ár! és sodorja a padokat,	Work and bread! Work and bread! The masses! The masses! Stones swarming like startled flies. Rocks in the air, tiny sparks you see when struck by a beam. The masses walk like a wilderness. If it stops, they are rooted in blood, their soles and palms a fertile land, their loaves a hundred thousand hills, and their wine a mist covering the hillsides. But the masses have no real bread. Like swollen dough the masses heave, hard germ cells, inflates, grow feelers, develop, transform into amoebae, absorb other nodules. World, the masses will devour you! Their breath is a cloud, their teeth a staggered row of rotten tenements. They grab where they can factories, barns, wheat stacks, a seven hour workday, Dippers, Pleiades, and deep Alföld wells. Clammy old men and thin girls are the masses. They are girded by steaming pipes – a piece of straw poked in the river, the current snatches it,

a kiszniket, a kocsikat, a csákókat, a lovakat, a fölmutatott kardokat - -	sweeps away benches, chests, carts, shakos, horses, and upraised swords.
Óh! Minden más hiábavaló, az alku, az átok, a csönd, a szó! Ő az épület s az építő, lenn alapkő és fönn tető, a dolgozó, a tervező - -	All else useless – bargain, curse, silence, words. The masses: building and builder, foundation and roof, maker and planner.
Éljen a munkásság, parasztság, nem fogja polgári ravaszság, fölrugja milliónyi láb, - hú! tömegek, tovább! tovább!	Long live worker and peasant free of middle class cunning. Millions of legs kick up. Ho masses, onward, onward.

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Three Glorious Resumptions: Kassák's Road to Becoming a Master

ANDRÁS KAPPANYOS

Abstract: Although the Hungarian Avant-garde produced several outstanding and internationally renowned creative minds, its defining figure is undoubtedly Lajos Kassák, poet, novelist, editor, critic, curator, typographer, painter, but first and foremost tireless and incorruptible organizer. His unprecedented career is more than just an amusing story: it also exemplifies the changes of the times that made it possible for a very sharp and very stubborn young man to accomplish this journey from apprentice of a locksmith in a small rural town to respected member of the community of progressive European artists. The presentation examines the major stages of this journey in the socio-cultural context and in the intellectual-spiritual development of Kassák. It focuses on the turning points when his surprisingly independent thinking allowed such insights and decisions that heavily influenced the destiny of Central-European Avant-garde, and still affect our ideas on the ultimate aim of art.

As the organizer of this conference, I felt it was my duty to fill in the greatest gap these wonderful presentations have left open, and devote a full paper to Lajos Kassák, the undisputed leading figure of the Hungarian Avant-garde movement, also known as Activism. But it isn't just a lap of honor. Kassák's extraordinary career is a unique example of how the two core ideas of modernity, *mobility* and *autonomy*, define the life of an individual and a movement. Kassák became a modern artist of international prestige at about the age of 35 – that is a remarkable achievement, but far from being unique. What makes Kassák's career rather rare is that he turned a *modern* individual before becoming either an *artist* or, even later, *international*. The paper presents these three steps of his development in relation to his three formative journeys.

Kassák was the first-born son of a pharmacy assistant and an illiterate washerwoman in the rural town of Érsekújvár, Northern Hungary, today Nové Zamky, Slovakia. His father's ambition was to make his son a "gentleman": presumably an official or clerk at some governmental institution, but even priesthood was considered. Kassák's first act of rebellion took place at the age of 12, when the bright youngster refused to continue middle school: he deliberately failed in all subjects and took an apprentice's job at a locksmith's workshop. Clearly, at the time, it wasn't part of a conscious life plan: it was an act of instinctive, juvenile revolt. Nevertheless, it fits very consequently among his later decisions. On the surface, this might appear as a step down in the social hierarchy: to choose a proletarian way of life instead that of the lower middle class. But Kassák saw very clearly (even if not consciously) that the perspectives promoted by his father were distinctively pre-modern, belonged to the 19th century. At the time, he presumably perceived this only as a premonition of unbearable dullness. On the other hand, being a confident member of the proletariat could mean immediate contact with progress, at least in its technological sense. Being an ironworker might have seemed an open-ended story, and later it proved to be one.

The second phase of the first step of this self-modernization process came five years later, when Kassák, armed with his new vocational certificate, moved to Budapest. The capital was a modern metropolis (again, at

least in the technological sense), with the first subway on the continent, among other wonders. The millennial celebrations and exhibitions of 1896 inspired many young people of Kassák's generation in spite of their ideological and aesthetic conservatism. These events were devised to promote the thousand-year continuity of the Hungarian state as well as its economic strength – but it also promoted modernity, the realm of open-ended stories, and inspired actual mobility, as in the case of Kassák.

The cruel efficiency of modern life opened the young ironworker's eyes to social injustice that was much more visible in the urban environment. He soon became a socialist and a trade unionist and began to read passionately. This finalized his break with the world of his father, and started the second period of his development, during which he became an artist. First, he tried his hand at poetry. His first idols, predictably, were premodern poets, namely Sándor Petőfi, the much plagiarized romantic-patriotic hero poet of the 1848 revolution, and a contemporary, the rather mediocre socialist poet, Sándor Csizmadia. The choices of the young Kassák, as is typical of untrained readers, were thematically based. But his readings triggered new expectations in his mind, and he gradually realized that modern subjects would require modern forms. This instinctive search brought him to the point where, in 1909, at the age of 22, he started on his second journey: he went on a study tour to Paris to see the modern world and learn what is there to be learned. As he writes in his autobiography, "I started off the second time to fulfill my life."[1] The first time, he implies, was his moving to Budapest. That time, five years earlier, he made a typical journey of a young, dissatisfied craftsman; this time that of a young, restless artist. His most important role model was his older contemporary, Endre Ady, the leading figure of Hungarian literary modernism. But unlike Ady, Kassák's poverty wasn't an artistic pose; he was really penniless, and covered most of the distance by foot, relying on the compassion of people, sometimes on actual begging.

We cannot be sure how much he could actually learn about modernity, but he definitely learnt a lot about the richness of European culture: as he writes in his 1922 narrative poem, this journey irreversibly made him a poet.[2] Returning to Budapest he gradually established himself as an independent writer. He wrote short stories, novels and plays, he was accepted even by the leading moderate-modernist review, *Nyugat.* His prose works weren't distinctly avant-garde, as the first core groups of the European avant-garde were just forming this time. His writing was predominantly naturalistic, with a distinct expressionist tinge in his language. But he already followed the European developments very closely, like the first manifestations of Futurism and Expressionism.

As with so many avant-garde artists, it was the war that brought about his aesthetic radicalism – as the vehicle of a radical political reaction to the monstrosities of the war. The Hungarian population, even the working class, received the war rather enthusiastically: it was a general illusion that it will bring social justice and prosperity. Kassák and Ady were among the very few intellectuals who opposed the war almost from the beginning. In 1915 Kassák published his first poetry volume,[3] which was also his first avant-garde

[1] „Másodszor indultam útra, hogy életemet kiteljesítsem." KASSÁK Lajos, *Egy ember élete* [A Man's Life], 2 köt. (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1983), 1:299.

[2] „[M]ert akkor már költő voltam megoperálhatatlanul" ([B]ecause I was already a poet then, inoperably). KASSÁK Lajos, *Összes versei*, 2 köt. (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1981), 1:206. Another version: „Már költő voltam megválthatatlanul" (I was already a poet, irredeemably). KASSÁK, *Egy ember élete*, 1:425.

[3] KASSÁK Lajos, *Eposz Wagner maszkjában* (Budapest: Hunnia nyomda, 1915).

statement, and in November he started his first periodical, *A Tett* [The Deed], with a distinct antiwar focus. In the summer of 1916, with almost prophetic foresight, he published an international issue that included contributions from several warring nations, both allies and enemies. The strength of this gesture is shown in the reaction to it, as the review was banned by a decree of the Ministry of Interior. (In a posthumous volume, Kassák includes the text of this banning decree.[4]) Apparently, they understood this as Kassák meant it: a declaration that the bonds between progressive, creative people everywhere are stronger than fleeting political interests. What Kassák didn't know was that only a few months earlier, in neutral Zurich, Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara and others founded Dadaism, the first international movement of the century.

Kassák quickly started his new periodical, *MA*, and for the next decade this became the foremost institution of the Hungarian avant-garde, that developed into a review of international impact, and an important inspiration to the whole of Eastern and Central Europe. But before reaching this prominence, the undertaking had to face some difficult challenges. In 1917, under the spell of the events in Russia, four leading collaborators left the periodical because Kassák didn't agree to their demands for an openly Bolshevik revolutionary stance. Kassák was very much involved, and even published a special issue on Lenin, but he wanted to keep *MA* a *cultural* review. The youngest of the four deserters, József Révai (the others were Mátyás György, Aladár Komját and József Lengyel), became a member of another, much more sinister quartet three decades later: he became the omnipotent tyrant of Hungarian cultural politics of the Stalinist regime of the fifties (his peers were Mátyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő and Mihály Farkas). He caused a lot of damage in this position but he did try to save his former master from atrocities.

But to get back to our main story, the worldviews of the two of them had to collide once again much earlier. During the short lived 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, Révai became an editor of the party journal, and in this position he prepared a decree to make *MA* the official literary journal of the Republic. Kassák firmly declined this honor,[5] which testifies to his surprising insight, or even foresight. Though he agreed with the general direction of the revolution and even had an office in the Commissariat of Public Education (as a censor of posters), he wanted to preserve the autonomy of his periodical. This preserved autonomy was the token of the authenticity that kept *MA* alive for the coming six years of exile.

During the months of the Soviet Republic, in May and June of 1919, the issues of *MA* doubled in bulk and sported a heading printed in red, but the leaders of the revolution apparently didn't forget Kassák's refusal. Béla Kun attacked the periodical in one of his speeches to which Kassák responded with an open letter.[6] *MA* wasn't officially banned but the once abundant paper supplies were suddenly exhausted: the story of the review ended in Budapest, to resume, in a year's time, in Vienna.

The flight to Vienna, Kassák's third definitive journey, was involuntary, but it was probably an even bigger social-cultural leap than the previous two. In a relatively short time Kassák became an honored member of the international community of progressive artists. He corresponded with Schwitters, Arp, Tzara, van Doesburg, Hausmann, Archipenko, Puni, and many others: published their writings in translation and their visual works in reproduction, and advertised their

[4] KASSÁK Lajos, *Az izmusok története* (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1972), 197.

[5] KASSÁK, *Egy ember élete*, 2:519–520.

[6] KASSÁK Lajos, „Levél Kun Bélához a művészet ügyében" [Letter to Béla Kun in the name of art], *MA* 4, 7. sz. (1919): 146–148.

journals as they advertised his. Of course, there had been Hungarian artists in the past who achieved international prominence: Ferenc Liszt was a real world-celebrity in his time, as well as Mihály Munkácsy, to a somewhat lesser extent. But being admitted in the not-so-secret international society of artists and thinkers was something different: the closest analogy is probably the great Hungarian humanist poet of the 15th century, Janus Pannonius, who corresponded somewhat similarly with his peers above the heads of their earth-bound, medieval contemporaries.

However, for Kassák, this implied elitism was foreign, as he felt a strong vocation for the elevation of the masses. He wanted to achieve a broad impact, even internationally, and realized that his main medium, language, was a hindrance. From 1920 on, he began to experiment in visual arts: first with typography, and visual poetry, then collages and linocuts, and shortly with oil paintings. He made *MA* one of the most spectacular magazines of its time, so that it would be attractive even for those readers who didn't read Hungarian. "I think ours is one of the most attractive periodicals in Europe", he wrote in a letter in 1921.[7] Each issue became a strong visual statement, and the number of writings on visual arts, architecture, theatre and film increased significantly – not at the expense of literature, but that of politics. This shift of emphasis led to a new, bitter split in the editorial board: in 1922 both deputy editors Sándor Barta and Béla Uitz left Kassák, in spite of the fact that both of them were his brothers-in-law (husbands of his two younger sisters). This crisis brought about Kassák's most important poetical work, the long narrative poem, *The Horse Dies the Birds Fly Off*, as well as one of his most important essays, *Answer to Many Inquiries and Standpoint*.[8]

In this critical situation, we can once again ascertain his acumen. The famous, enigmatic closing line of the poem, "and the nickel samovar flies away above our head" ("s fejünk fölött elrepül a nikkel szamovár"),[9] spectacularly coincides with a sentence of the essay: "As we see, the possibility of a world-revolution, prepared by the war, has swept over us unfulfilled, due to the moral constrains and immature demands of the proletariat, and we fell back again in a preparatory phase."[10] Kassák clearly realized that the imminence of a world-revolution is an illusion; a responsible activist artist should find new ways to fulfill his mission. Contrary to his collaborators, among them his brothers-in-law, Kassák realized that the program of directly revolutionizing people would imply the subordination of art to politics, the abandoning of the autonomy of art. I could find no evidence that he would have explicitly followed this line of thought, that degrading art to a device of political persuasion degrades its recipients as well, damaging their autonomy. Nevertheless, he acted as someone who fully realized this.

Kassák had to face the dilemma of many progressive, committed artists of the century, and he found his own way out of it. From the early, predominantly Expressionist concepts he led the movement to its mature, predominantly Constructivist era, through a short and stormy Dadaist period. He realized that art shouldn't be used as a device that is supposed to directly change people's convictions. Art either shouldn't be used as a device at all, or it should be used for changing people's environments: the spaces they live and work in, the views they see, the objects they interact with. These elements of human environment should be purely functional and

[7] ILLÉS Ilona, szerk., A Tett, Ma, 2×2 *repertórium* (Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 1975), 17.

[8] KASSÁK Lajos, „Válasz sokfelé és álláspont", *Ma* 8, 8. sz. (1922): 50–54.

[9] KASSÁK, *Összes versei*, 1:215.

[10] KASSÁK, „Válasz sokfelé…", 52.

beautiful in their functionality. Kassák, through his own personal reasoning, arrived at the conclusion of Bauhaus – and admittedly, this insight wasn't independent from his closest collaborator at the time, László Moholy-Nagy, who was soon to become a professor of Bauhaus in Weimar. One of the fruits of this cooperation is *Buch neuer Künstler.*[11]

Kassák became an international modern artist on his own, and he performed three social-cultural leaps which typically only occur once in a generation, at most. At the age of 37 he began to write his autobiography which spans eight volumes but only reaches the age of 33. Were there more possible steps?

In 1926 Kassák returned to Budapest and in several gestures offered a new synthesis to the Hungarian public—a synthesis that involved the innovations of the avant-garde attuned to Hungarian cultural traditions. This offer consisted of his portfolio-like volume, *Tisztaság könyve* [Book of Purity],[12] and his new periodical, *Dokumentum* (1926–27). The Hungarian public – which had no experience with the avant-garde – ultimately refused this offer. But Kassák's personal intuition, that understanding through art is more universal than understanding through politics, provided substance for the second forty years of his life, and liberated several generations of artists.

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[11] MOHOLY-NAGY László und KASSÁK Lajos, Hg., *Buch neuer Künstler* (Wien: Ma, 1922); see also facsimile edition: (Zürich: Lars Müller, 1996).

[12] KASSÁK Lajos, *Tisztaság könyve* (Wien: Horizont–Fisher Verlag), 1926; see also facsimile edition: (Budapest: Helikon Kiadó, 1987).

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