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Hungarian Studies Review

Vol. XV, No. 1 (Spring, 1988)

Special Issue:

THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY HUNGARIAN AVANT-GARDE

Edited by Oliver A. I. Botar (Jr.)

Hungarian Studies Review

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Hungarian Studies Review Vol. XV, No. 1 (Spring 1988)

CONTENTS

Hungarian Studies Review Vol. XV, No. 1 (Spring 1988)

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Hungarian-born SYLVIA BAKOS is a Ph.D. candidate in the History of Art at Rutgers University in New Jersey. She has just completed a dissertation concerning Hungarian avant-garde art and publications before 1920.

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French-born ALAIN J. FINDELI has trained as an engineer and architect, and now teaches at the École de Design Industriel at the Université de Montréal. He has recently completed a doctoral dissertation on the pedagogical methods of László Moholy-Nagy.

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Hungarian Studies Review Vol. XV, No. 1 (Spring 1988)

PREFACE

There is a veritable surge in North American interest in the twentieth century Hungarian avant-garde today. An exhibition of art mostly from the collection of New York dealer Paul Kövesdy was on display late in 1987 and early in 1988 in Connecticut and Vermont, and a catalogue containing several essays was published on the occasion. Stephen Mansbach is in the process of editing a major catalogue to go with a travelling exhibition of the Hungarian avant-garde he is putting together for the Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Articles by various authors, including Esther Levinger, who has contributed to this issue, have appeared in major American art journals during the past couple of years. I am in the process of organizing more sessions on the Hungarian avant-garde for the Hungarian Studies Conference to be held at the University of Toronto in May of 1989, and an exhibition of Hungarian art in Toronto collections produced between 1900 and 1949 is being prepared for the Hart House Gallery at the University of Toronto to coincide with that Conference. This is, then, a good time for such a special issue of the *Hungarian Studies Review* to appear.

The idea for this special issue of the *Hungarian Studies Review* first arose after a well-attended session on the topic at the Third Triennial Hungarian Studies Conference at the University of Toronto in May of 1986. The session was organized and chaired by myself, and included presentations by all the authors in this issue. To papers by them, I have added my own "Connections Between the Hungarian and American Avant-Gardes During the Early Twenties," originally published in Hungarian as "Kassák és az amerikai avantgárd" [Kassák and the American Avant-Garde] in the volume *Magam törvénye szerint. Tanulmányok és dokumentumok Kassák Lajosról* [According to my Own Laws. Studies and Documents on Lajos Kassák], (Ferenc Csaplár, ed. Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum and Múzsák Közművelődési Kiadó, 1987).

The documentary section more or less assembled itself. Hattula Moholy-Nagy, the daughter of the artist, sent two previously unpublished letters concerning her parents' naturalization as United States citizens, and kindly agreed to their publication. She and Alain

Findeli also recommended that I contact André Gabor of Chicago, who in turn put me on to Zita Schwarcz, an old friend of László Moholy-Nagy, who agreed to be interviewed about Moholy-Nagy and the Hungarian-American Democratic Council. She was also generous to send the information on Moholy-Nagy in the Hungarian-American Council on Democracy's newsletter. The Gropius and Bayer pieces came of their own accord, so to speak, as well. Dr. Thomas Vámos sent them, and we are very thankful to him for that, as we are for his having agreed to their publication.

The issue falls into two thematic sections, each having a certain coherence to it. The first section deals with the Hungarian avant-garde in Hungary or near it from about 1906 to 1929, with a focus on its central figure, Lajos Kassák. Sylvia Bakos' article serves as an excellent introduction to those unfamiliar with the Hungarian avant-garde tradition in art by dealing with its early years. Her concentration on the intellectual origins of its aesthetic theories serves as a background for those interested in reading Esther Levinger's analysis of Kassák's International Constructivist aesthetics. Levinger's article also gives the reader information on Kassák in his "heroic" days of Viennese emigration. My own article serves to underline the importance of international connections for the Hungarian avant-garde, and the fact that it deals with American connections, seems particularly appropriate in a North American publication such as this one. It also contains an American account of a "Constructivist" get-together at László Moholy-Nagy's Berlin apartment hitherto unnoticed in the Moholy literature. This brings us to the second section, which focuses on the theories and activities of Moholy-Nagy. Alain Findeli's article fills us in on Moholy's important pedagogical theories; while Diane Kirkpatrick's piece focuses on what Walter Gropius, in his appreciation of Moholy-Nagy appearing in the Documents section of this issue, named as his "great contribution to leadership in art": his ideas on space and time, and his "vision in motion." Interestingly enough, Herbert Bayer, in his appreciation of the artist, cites Moholy's "brilliant chapter on space" in his book *Vision in Motion* as "his great contribution." The documents assembled on Moholy-Nagy's involvement with the Hungarian-American Council for Democracy serve to point out what his family have always taken for granted, but what has not generally been acknowledged, namely Moholy-Nagy's concern for the future of his homeland, a concern which lived side by side with the appreciation of his adopted home, the United States.

In addition to thanking the authors for their contributions and patience, I would like to thank Hattula Moholy-Nagy, Zita Schwarcz, André Gabor and Thomas Vámos for their help in assembling the material for the documentary section of the issue. The assembly and editing of both the documentary material and the issue as a whole were carried out while I was the recipient of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship. The Council has also provided funds to help with the publication of this special issue of our journal. I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Council for its support.

Oliver Botar

Toronto, September 1988

Hungarian Studies Review Vol. XV, No. 1 (Spring 1988)

Nature and Intellect: the Ideas of the Emergent Hungarian Avant-Garde

Sylvia Bakos

> "What we want in painting is not science, not the play of emotions, but intelligence, the disciplined work of the human brain."
> (Károly Kernstok, "Kutató művészet" [Explorative art], *Nyugat*, 1910.)

The Hungarian artistic avant-garde developed during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Its cradle was the Transylvanian artists' colony at Nagybánya (today Baia Mare, Romania), founded in 1896. The basis of the Nagybánya aesthetic was the lyrical contemplation and portrayal of the region's haunting mountain scenery. The art of Nagybánya combined the descriptive exploration of indigenous nature central to Impressionism with a sensitive and intuitive transcription of mood found in Romantic landscape painting. This well-known and successful school prepared the way for the keen interest in—and eventually, acceptance of—French artistic innovations which developed in Hungary during the early 1900s.[1] Almost all major Hungarian artists of the early twentieth century, including Károly Kernstok, Béla Czóbel and Lajos Tihanyi, spent some time at Nagybánya. The school's emphatic faith in nature as the best source of artistic subject matter continued to influence Hungarian artists for generations. This outlook determined in some measure the general reliance on the forms of nature that continued to temper the movement toward abstraction in Hungarian art up to 1919.[2]

From the ranks of the Nagybánya school emerged a group of young artists who visited Paris in the mid-1900s, and responded to the recent Post-Impressionist and Fauvist developments there by painting in a new, more abstracted style marked by heavy contours and heightened colour. Good examples of these new stylistic qualities are to be found in the paintings of Béla Czóbel, Vilmos Perlrott-Csaba and Lajos Tihanyi of around 1905–1907. They ex-

hibited their—for the time and place—radically new work at Nagybánya during these years, and earned the slightly derisive name "Neos" from the older artists. These paintings of Czóbel, Perlrott-Csaba and Tihanyi—as well as those of Károly Kernstok, Róbert Berény and others—constituted a radical break with Hungarian academic traditions, and it could be said that it was this body of work which initiated the modern movement in Hungarian fine arts. The "Neos" and other like-minded artists combined their own spirit and vision with the most up-to-date developments in Western European art: Fauvism, Expressionism and Cubism. They travelled widely throughout Europe, and during the first decade of the twentieth century, some of them studied with Henri Matisse in Paris, and exhibited with him and his fellow Fauves. In addition to Matisse, they particularly admired the work of the older masters Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin.

The early years of the twentieth century were characterized by a general cultural and economic upsurge in Hungary, to a large extent the result of the social and industrial progress following the political compromise reached with Austria in 1867. The Compromise resolved the problem of Hungary's inferior position within the Austrian Habsburg dominions by giving her independence in internal affairs. The industrial revolution that followed the Compromise brought economic growth and increasing urbanization, resulting in the gradual replacement of the earlier semi-feudal economic system with an advanced capitalist one. Consequently, a modern urban bourgeoisie emerged, and by the turn of the century this new class constituted an important element in the country's system of artistic patronage. The leading arts at this time were literature and music, but their patrons—motivated by wide-ranging interests and a desire for unity in the arts—also gave their support to the fine arts.[3]

This new lively, largely urban culture included major innovations in several areas of the arts. In music, the composers Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály found a new source for modernism in the methodical study of authentic folk music. In the realm of theatre, the experimental Thália Company brought the latest in international developments to the Budapest stage. In literature, the visionary poetry of Endre Ady (1877–1919), charged with a poignant concern for the fate of the nation, led the way for all the arts. Literary periodicals open to new ideas included *Huszadik Század* [Twentieth Century], founded in 1900, and *Nyugat* [West], founded in 1908. In art, the new urbanity is evident in the emergence of groups of radical innovators and

extraordinary personalities. The first group formed in the spirit of modernism was established in 1909, under the leadership of Károly Kernstok (1873–1940). They called themselves "Keresők" [Seekers], though they later became known as "Nyolcak" [The Eight].[4] As a group they were active only until 1912, but their program and painting style provided a fruitful point of departure for the "Activists" who grouped around the poet-writer Lajos Kassák during the second half of the 1910s. In 1915, Kassák (1887–1967) founded the journal *A Tett* [The Deed], a forum for avant-garde literature and art. A year later, after *A Tett* was banned by the authorities for its pacifism, Kassák began publishing *Ma* [Today]. *Ma* developed into the best-known periodical of the Hungarian avant-garde, and appeared regularly until 1925. In addition to publishing them, Kassák also arranged for the exhibition of the work of Hungarian avant-garde artists in the galleries of the *Ma* group. The modernist artists and writers gathered around Kassák, his gallery, and *Ma* called themselves "Activist" because of their strong commitment to social change, and their support of radical action to engender such change.[5]

Extensive patronage, as well as the attention given by advanced journals to artistic events both at home and abroad, brought about a lively cultural climate. The opportunities to exhibit increased with the proliferation of galleries and museums. Besides the Műcsarnok [Exhibition Hall]—that bastion of tradition, conservatism and successful careers in the arts—the state also began sponsoring the Nemzeti Szalon [National Salon] in 1894. More open to innovation, this salon brought several large foreign exhibitions to Hungary. Foremost in importance among these were an extensive showing of French art in 1907 (with numerous works by Gauguin and Cézanne), and the travelling exhibition of the Futurists, Expressionists and Cubists in 1913. Private enterprises also promoted radical new work, and the avant-garde artists of the first decades of the twentieth century found opportunities to exhibit in the Ernst Museum, the gallery of the Könyves Kálmán Publishing Firm, and the Művészház [Artists' House].

Frequent opportunities for exhibition, critical attention, and an effervescent cultural life brought extensive public exposure to artists. Thus, artists working in new ways became part of the social milieu, and were freed from the isolation experienced by their predecessors.[6] Certain Budapest cafés became gathering places for the leading personalities of Hungarian intellectual life. The Japán café was the meeting place for modernist artists and critics, presided over by the two grand old men of Hungarian avant-garde art, the pioneering

modernist painter Pál Szinyei Merse and the innovative Art Nouveau architect Ödön Lechner. The poet Endre Ady—guiding genius of the Hungarian modern movement—favored the Három Holló [Three ravens], where he often met with his artist friends, including Károly Kernstok and the Hungarian Nabi painter and leading Post-Impressionist József Rippl-Rónai.[7]

Groups of young intellectuals, members of the urban bourgeoisie, gathered in friendly associations such as the "Galilei Circle" and the "Sunday Society." These units of intellectual communality included now-famous philosophers and art historians such as György Lukács, Lajos Fülep, Frederick Antal, Arnold Hauser and Charles de Tolnay, some of whom took an active interest in contemporary art. They, as well as literary publications such as *Huszadik Század*, *Szabadgondolat* [Free Thought] and *A Szellem* [The Spirit] which published their writings, contributed to the development of a radical aesthetics, whose starting point was a rejection of naturalism, Impressionism and aesthetic liberalism.[8] Such an anti-Impressionist stand had already been anticipated by the reaction against the Impressionist orientation of the Nagybánya school among the "Neos." The interest in Post-Impressionist and Fauvist art, evident in the paintings of Béla Czóbel, Vilmos Perlrott-Csaba and Lajos Tihanyi executed during the mid 1900s, also exercised a decisive influence on the formation of The Eight. Thus, innovative artistic developments in Hungary were reinforced and validated by similar concerns in the radical aesthetics of the time. Between 1905 and 1907 some of the artists who were later to form The Eight, including Czóbel, Kernstok, Róbert Berény and Ödön Márffy were in Paris, as was the aesthetician Lajos Fülep. This circumstance led to a lively exchange of ideas among them.[9]

Besides Kernstok, its leader, The Eight included former "Neos" Béla Czóbel (1883–1976) and Lajos Tihanyi (1883–1923), as well as the highly original Róbert Berény (1887–1953). These artists sought to unite subject matter rooted in nature with deliberate, rationally-structured composition into monumental images of a harmonious and orderly world. Theirs was an intellectual approach to the raw material of visible nature. This program was stated in the catalogue of their first exhibition at the Kónyves Kálmán Gallery in December, 1909:

We are believers in nature. We do not copy it in the manner of the schools, We draw from its depths with intelligence.

In January of 1910 Kernstok further elaborated the views about art he shared with The Eight. In a lecture before the Galilei Circle

entitled "Kutató művészet" [Explorative art], and published in *Nyugat*, Kernstok discussed the relationship between nature and art. He stated that art originated in nature, but its slavish copying was not the artist's goal, for he was not born with the photographic apparatus of a *camera obscura*:

> True, we humans possess something of equal importance, and this is our intelligence.
>
> This is the instrument we have with which to arm ourselves, this is that certain something one must take to nature when one wants to have nature's help in creating. What we want in painting is not science, not the play of emotions, but intelligence, by all means, the disciplined work of the human brain... I consider the current turbulence in the arts to be a gigantic cleansing process, a liberation, as from a fever, from all those superficialities that still play an important role in today's painting.[10]

Related ideas were expressed by the philosopher György Lukács (1885–1971) in his response to Kernstok's lecture and to the exhibition of The Eight at the Könyves Kálmán Gallery. Entitled "Az utak elváltak" [The ways have parted], Lukács's lecture was delivered to the same forum in January of 1910, and was later published in *Nyugat* as well. In The Eight's intellectual approach to nature, and in their search for essential form, Lukács emphasized the desire for order and solidity, and highlighted their opposition to Impressionism, which focused on capturing fleeting atmospheric aspects of nature, dematerializing its substance and solidity. Lukács commended Kernstok and The Eight for their constructive reaction against the ephemeral, momentary subjectivity of Impressionism:

> This art is the old art, the art of order and values, the art based on construction. Impressionism turned everything into a decorative surface... The new art is architectonic in the old, true sense. Its colours, words and lines are merely expressions of the essence, order and harmony of things, their emphasis and their equilibrium... This art of order must destroy all anarchy of sensation and mood. The very appearance and existence of this art is a declaration of war. It is a declaration of war on all Impressionism, all sensation and mood, all disorder and denial of values, every world view and art which writes "I" as its first and last word.[11]

The Eight's program to select and organize the elements of subject matter derived from nature with intelligence and reason into images of monumentality and harmony finds exemplary expression in Kernstok's *Horsemen at the Water's Edge* of 1910. (Illustration) This monumental painting was one of the showpieces of The Eight's exhibition at the National Salon of 1911. Kernstok explored the theme of nude horsemen in landscapes in or near water in several compositions during the teens and early twenties. In his review of this 1911 show of the Eight, the critic György Bölöni wrote the following appreciation of *Horsemen at the Water's Edge*:

> Kernstok threw off the habit of convention and strove for deeper understanding in his art. [In the contemporary French artists] he admired only their constructive abilities that enabled them to emphasize the essential elements during painting, as the movement of lines yielded a wondrously delicate and sensitive balance of masses. Thus, his pictures became hermetic constructions... Kernstok dissected man himself anatomically, and put him back together again. For years, he did nothing but these exercises in structure...
>
> Horsemen are setting out for the Danube, a group of nude men, an army of bodies in various stages of motion and momentum; thus, innumerable movements are born, and numerous bodies and body parts swing into balance, linked by a surprising, broad rhythm. Károly Kernstok demonstrates his intentions in palpable pictorial form, and ever since I saw this picture, my thought has remained: behold, this is the most serious Hungarian painting...[12]

In paintings such as *Horsemen at the Water's Edge*, as well as in his writings of ca. 1910–1911, Kernstok asserted the primary role of the human intellect in artistic creation. The aim of his art was not imitation, but creation through the study and organization of visual phenomena, the elimination of extraneous elements, and the distillation of essential form and sovereign, self-contained composition from nature's raw material.[13] In his essay "Explorative art," Kernstok also discussed his method of arriving at essential form:

> Let us try to look at those ways and means that help us reach nature's meaning.

> Let us cut ourselves off from all we know; let us put aside the isms...
>
> Let us go before nature and look at a head, for example. We see, among other things, that it is round, that it has eyes, ears, a nose, a mouth, a forehead, a chin, etc., and, along with the neck, it grows out of the body....
>
> I think we should look at that head,... and... consider its roundness, the cheekbones, the forehead, the chin to the extent that these may help us capture the essential idea. And, if the jaw helps me grasp the head mentally more than the nose, then I will emphasize the jaw at the expense of the nose, and vice versa... that is, [I will] always emphasize what I consider most important... In the expression of a body in motion, if the balance I want to convey requires a wider swing and consequent lengthening of the usual proportions of arms, legs or torso, or, if this balance can be obtained by placing stronger emphasis on one muscle or another... then I will use these means without hesitation, for the sake of the harmony of the whole.

The anti-Impressionist ethos of modernist Hungarian artists and aesthetes of the time was related to the general opposition among young intellectuals to positivism as well as to subjective philosophical and aesthetic concepts. In the meetings of the Sunday Society and later, in the short-lived but outstanding philosophical journal *A Szellem* (1911–1912), the philosophers György Lukács, Lajos Fülep and their friends turned to French and German metaphysical idealism.[14] In 1917, Fülep also founded the Free School of the Humanities, which saw the road to spiritual fulfillment in scientific work and cultural investigation.[15]

Lajos Fülep (1885–1970) concentrated on the analysis of the contemporary state of the arts, in search of an alternative to the prevalent subjectivist-Impressionist point of view, and to move toward what he called the new "nagy stilus" [grand style] and a new world view. In the work of Paul Cézanne, Fülep found the elements of a viable new art with the power to counteract Impressionism and engender a dramatically new and meaningful point of view. Like Lukács, Fülep recognized in the endeavours of the young Hungarian modernists a decisive break with both academicism and Impressionism.[16]

This anti-Impressionist attitude first manifested itself in Fülep's articles about Cézanne, written in 1906–07. These represent the clearest and most favourable critical evaluation of the French artist's work anywhere up to that time.[17] Fülep pursued the subject in several insightful essays between 1906 and 1916. Already in his first such article, a report on the 1906 Salon d'Automne in Paris, Fülep recognized Cézanne's art as a reaction against Impressionism and as an ethical, as well as an aesthetic ancestor of and exemplar for the younger generation. According to Fülep, the Impressionists divested art of substance and consequently, they reduced it to mere ephemeral, weightless effects and subjective impressions. Cézanne brought back to art that timeless strength and the harmony of matter and spirit that characterized all great art of the past.[18] Fülep praised Cézanne's constructive power and the elemental strength, simplicity and conciseness of his broadly applied colours. He noted how Cézanne expressed the timeless and essential spirit within the raw material of nature, raising art once more to a level where it was able to communicate basic human experience:

> Cézanne's still lives... are the single adequate expression in the fine arts of the religious experience of modern man, of his internal conflicts, his struggles, his thirst for perfection—of his isolation, his weakness, his self-torment. This life of the spirit is implicit in [Cézanne's] still lives and landscapes. Thus, in his paintings, matter comes to life... In the work of Cézanne, we recognize ourselves, the fate that is ours, the life we live.[19]

In short, Fülep saw in Cézanne's work the embodiment of a universal and complete world view that was based on balance and harmony.[20]

This desire for order and deliberate composition was further elaborated on by Fülep in his essay "Az emlékezés a művészi alkotásban" [The role of memory in artistic creation], published in 1911 in *A Szellem*. Here Fülep emphasized the importance of memory as an agent of the selection and organization of raw sensory phenomena. Fülep was opposed to the belief in the supremacy of intuition in creation, central to the aesthetics of both Benedetto Croce and the Nagybánya school.[21] Thus, Fülep attributed to art an intellectual faculty that strives for harmony. In his consideration of form, Fülep wrote that

> form is not a matter of appearance, but the essence of things, that which is deepest and most permanent in them: the interrelationship of their components and their unity, the constructive factor... Inasmuch as art expresses the inner, constructive component or interrelationship of things, individuals and events, that is, the idea within them, it can express the idea in all life.

Kernstok's painting *Horsemen at the Water's Edge* embodies the artistic aspirations of the first two decades of the twentieth century not only formally, but also in a thematic sense. Paintings of horsemen in an outdoor setting, usually near water, belong to the larger thematic category variously called "the earthly paradise," the "Golden Age," or "Arcadia."[22] Such paintings present the viewer with an idyllic harmony of man and nature, a mythic land where human beings live in the ideal state of nudity, free of the physical and spiritual fetters of modern civilization.

Essentially a product of Romanticism, and employed both in literature and the fine arts, this theme evolved in painting during the second half of the nineteenth century. At first, it was linked with the formal world of Classicism and with the literary and mythological themes of past ages. Central to the motif of a Golden Age is the concept of the eternal relation of man to nature on the one hand, and a stylistic standard of Classicism and monumentality on the other. In European art the major exponents of the theme were Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, Hans von Marées, Paul Gauguin, Paul Cézanne, and the Nabis. Examples of "Golden Age" paintings include Marées' *The Orange Grove* (1872–73), Gauguin's *Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?* (1897), and Cézanne's *Bathers* (1898–1905). In works such as these, the artists were able to unite form and content, and distill the essential ideas of the theme: naturalness, harmony, order and monumentality.

> If we abstract the idea of the earthly paradise from its literary and mythological settings and seek the common factors in its different manifestations, we shall find the following characteristics: a life dominated by... warmth of sensual perception, timelessness, permanence, the natural state, fellowship without effort or conflict—in a word, equilibrium.[23]

This equilibrium found in portrayals of the "Golden Age" was based on an idealized view of nature and human existence, substituting monumental order, harmony and grandeur for the disorder, variability and triviality of real life.[24] In the 1910s, this quest for harmony and order characterized the art of Central and Eastern Europe, as evidenced by the preference for monumentally-sized paintings of "Golden Age" themes, in compositions of simplicity, order and grandeur reminiscent of the formal values of Classicism. The constructive, organizing impulse in the Hungarian Eight's concept of "explorative art" has been mentioned above. Parallels to this ideal can be found especially in Czech and Russian art of this period: "In pictorial harmony and classical compositional formulas [they] seem to discover the artistic equivalent of a new intellectual universality."[25]

Around 1910, most of the artists of The Eight painted monumental compositions exploring the relation of man and nature and employing qualities of order, harmony and reason. Among others, in this context we may cite Tihanyi's *Nudes* of 1908, Berény's *Idyll* and Bertalan Pór's *Sermon on the Mount* (both of 1911), as well as Kernstok's 1912 designs for the stained glass windows of the Schiffer Villa and his mural *Mythic Hunters* of 1913.[26] In these works, the artists sought to compositionally unify the human figures with their settings. They show signs of having been receptive to the constructive compositional methods of Cézanne, the linear rhythms of Art Nouveau, and the simple classicism and grandeur of Marées. Themes that deal with the "Golden Age" were also painted by other major figures of the Hungarian avant-garde during the first decades of the twentieth century, particularly János Kmetty, Béla Uitz, Béla Kádár, and Gyula Derkovits.[27]

The nude horsemen of Kernstok's *Horsemen at the Water's Edge* symbolize the quest for a harmonious, orderly world and the desire for the unity of man and nature inherent in all treatments of "Golden Age" themes. The subject of the horse and rider in an outdoor setting constitutes a subgenre of "Golden Age" painting in Central and Eastern European art during the first decades of this century. In Hungary, the horseman is a subject of intense interest in various fields of art. The world of ancient legends and folk art constitutes the roots of these motifs, which assume unique significance in the early twentieth century as symbols of timely content.[28]

As early as 1908, the artist János Tornyai painted, in his *Sad Fate of Hungary, an Autobiography*, an exhausted horse in a stormy landscape as a personal metaphor for himself and the fate of his

country.[29] Among the avant-garde artists, the emblematic pair of horse and rider appears not only in the work of Kernstok, but also in that of Pór, Berény, and Kádár. In sculpture, Fülöp Beck explored the subject in a work such as *Scythian Archer* of 1913.[30] The theme of the horseman is also present in poetry; for example Endre Ady wrote a poem entitled *Az eltévedt lovas* [The lost rider]. The haunting refrain that begins and ends the poem presents us with a mythic horseman who has lost his way in the cold and ghostly autumn—as a symbol of the poet's profound concern for the nation's course and his deep sense of foreboding:

> You can hear the heedless trot
> Of an ancient, lost rider,
> Chained spirits of past forests and old reeds
> Tremble in sudden terror.[31]

In Kernstok's and the other avant-garde artists' use of the horseman motif, the juxtaposition of the nude rider and water is noteworthy. The horse and the nudity of the rider are appropriate to the exploration of the relation of man and nature, the thematic world of "Golden Age" painting discussed above. Water is the ancient symbol of life's ultimate source and of the processes of rebirth, renewal and purification.[32] In Kernstok's images of horsemen, both horse and rider are powerfully built and charged with energy. Their athletic strength and robust sensuality contradict the pervasive narcotic sensibility and enervated eroticism that characterized the Art Nouveau style prevalent around the turn of the century.[33] Carrier of nature's primordial energy, the mighty horse that knows neither saddle nor bridle trots with its rider into the water, the ideal medium of rebirth and renewal. Thus, in the interpretation of the avant-garde artists, this particular "Golden Age" theme expresses not only the quest for order and harmony as static conditions, but also a dynamic process of purification and renewal.

In this sense, Kernstok's *Horsemen at the Water's Edge* may be seen as the direct embodiment in painting of his views about art as stated in "Explorative art": both his belief in the rational, constructive power of human intelligence to bring about order and harmony, and his interpretation of contemporary art as a "cleansing process," a purging of all unnecessary superficialities.

The Eight's interest in painting themes of the "Golden Age" constitutes the "Arcadian" branch of the Hungarian avant-garde, which was coupled with the interest in the machine, beginning in

1917–18. These two thematic concerns underlie Hungarian modernism in the twentieth century.[34]

The major contributions of The Eight to modern Hungarian art were their constructive approach to composition and their desire to distill order and harmony from the raw matter of nature through intelligent selection and composition. Their work brought Hungarian art into the front lines of modernism, and it gave impetus to the later development of constructive trends in that art, particularly in the work of Lajos Kassák, Sándor Bortnyik, and László Moholy-Nagy. The oeuvres of these avant-gardists illustrate the definition of the artist's position espoused by Kernstok in "Explorative art":

> The artist cannot be nature's mirror; however, to the extent that he is able to glean new values from nature, this very measure is the mirror of his intellect. And the social effect he brings about determines the intellectual standard of his time.

Notes

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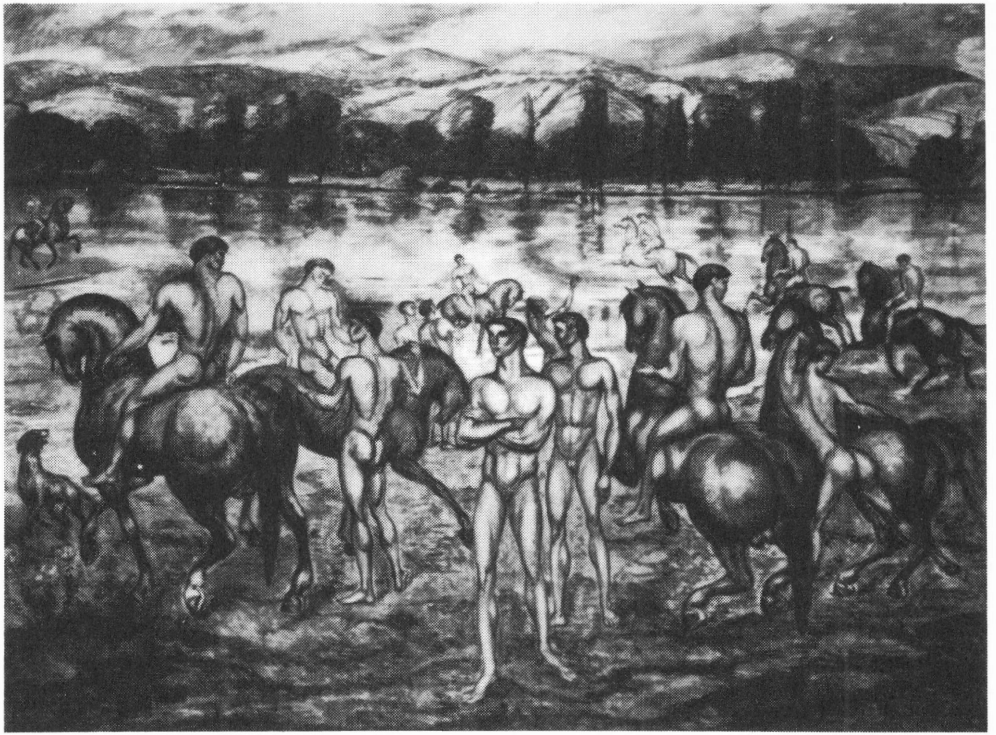
1. Lajos Kassák, *Képzőművészetünk Nagybányától napjainkig* [Our fine arts from Nagybánya to our day] (Budapest: Magyar Műkiadó, 1947), p. 8. See also Krisztina Passuth, *A Nyolcak festészete* [The painting of The Eight] (Budapest: Corvina, 1967), pp. 10–11.
2. The artists' colony of Nagybánya is discussed in this context in Júlia Szabó, *A magyar aktivizmus művészete 1915–1927* [The art of Hungarian activism 1915–1927] (Budapest: Corvina, 1981), pp.35-36.
3. Passuth, p. 16.
4. On The Eight, see Passuth.
5. They actually only began calling themselves "Activist" in 1919. On Activism, see Szabó.
6. On p. 17, Passuth refers to the situation of Pál Szinyei Merse as an example of isolation that no longer existed in the 1900s. A pioneer of Impressionism outside of France (he began such work in the late 1860s), Szinyei received no attention or support for his work in Munich—where he had studied—or at home in Budapest. When he exhibited his 1872 masterpiece *Picnic in May* in Hungary, no one defended him against attacks by the conservative critics, nor was there a communality of artists which would have mitigated his feelings of isolation. This lack of attention caused Szinyei to stop the painterly experiments that marked the style of *Picnic in May*.
7. Passuth, p. 17–22.

8. Ferenc Tőkei, "Fülep Lajos különös élete" [The strange life of Lajos Fülep], introduction to Lajos Fülep, *A művészet forradalmától a nagy forradalomig* [From the revolution in art to the great revolution], Árpád Timár, ed., 2 vols. (Budapest: Magvető, 1974), vol. 1, pp. 5–17. See also Éva Karádi and Erzsébet Vezér, *A Vasárnapi Kör* [The Sunday Circle] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1974). For a discussion in English of contemporary philosophical currents and their effects on Hungarian art, see Szabó, "Ideas and Programmes: the Philosophical Background of the Hungarian Avant-Garde," *The Hungarian Avant-Garde, The Eight and the Activists*, exhibition catalogue (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1980), pp. 9–19.
9. *The Hungarian Avant-Garde, The Eight and the Activists*, p. 38.
10. Reprinted in Géza Perneczky, *Kortársak szemével* [Through the eyes of contemporaries] (Budapest: Corvina, 1967), pp. 106–110.
11. Reprinted in English in *The Hungarian Avant-Garde, the Eight and the Activists*, pp. 106–108.
12. In *Aurora*, May, 1911, pp. 82–83.
13. About Kernstok's significance in this relation for the next generation of artists in Hungary, see Éva Körner, *Derkovits Gyula* (Budapest: Corvina, 1968), pp. 16–17.
14. Tőkei in Fülep, *A művészet forradalmától a nagy forradalomig*, 12–13.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. Charles de Tolnay, "Les écrits de Lajos Fülep sur Cézanne," *Acta Historiae Artium*, vol. 20, 1974, p. 105. All of Fülep's writings are reprinted in Fülep, *A művészet forradalmától a nagy forradalomig.*
18. Fülep, "Cézanne és Gauguin," *A Hét* [The week], May 12, 1907. Reprinted in Fülep, *A művészet forradalmától a nagy forradalomig*, pp. 448–454.
19. Fülep, "Mai vallásos művészet" [Today's religious art], *Élet* [Life], September-October, 1913. Reprinted in Fülep, *A művészet forradalmától a nagy forradalomig*, pp. 523–545.
20. Fülep wrote down these ideas in most complete form in his essay "Magyar festészet" [Hungarian painting], *Nyugat*, 1922. Reprinted in Fülep, *A művészet forradalmától a nagy forradalomig*, pp. 317–380.
21. Passuth, p. 20.
22. Werner Hofmann, "The Earthly Paradise," *Art in the Nineteenth Century*, transl. Brian Battershaw (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), pp. 363–402. "Earthly paradise" and "Golden Age" are Hofmann's terms. "Arcadia" is used by Éva Körner in "Az Arkádia festészet mint nemzetközi előzmény és kortárs" [Arcadia painting as an international antecedent and contemporary], *Derkovits Gyula*, pp. 48–53. For the idea of the connection between the horseman and the theme of "Arcadia"/"Golden Age," I am grateful to Dr. Éva Bajkay.
23. Hofmann, p. 382.
24. See Körner, p. 49.
25. Körner, p.50. In this context, Körner refers particularly to the Czech painter Bohumil Kubista's work around 1910, such as *Bathers* (Czech National Gallery, Prague), and to the Russian Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin's paintings around 1911, for example *Boys at Play* (Russian State Museum, Leningrad).
26. Tihanyi's *Nudes*, oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm, is privately owned. Berény's *Idyll (Composition)*, oil on canvas, 49 x 62 cm, and Pór's *Sermon on the Mount*, oil on canvas, 245 x 445 cm, are both in the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest. Some of Kernstok's watercolour designs for the stained glass windows of the Schiffer Villa in Budapest are on view at the Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs; they measure ca. 250 x 52 cm. Kernstok's *Mythic Hunters* mural is located in a

school gymnasium, at 21 Dugonics Street, Budapest. All are reproduced in Passuth, plates 55., 59., 63., 64., 97.

27. On these artists see (in English): Lajos Németh, *Modern Art in Hungary*, transl. Lili Halápy (Budapest: Corvina, 1969).
28. Géza Perneczky, "A Vörös Lovas és ami utána következik" [The Red Horseman and what follows it], *Tanulmányút a Pávakertbe* [Study trip to the Peacock Garden] (Budapest: Magvető, 1969), p. 195.
29. Oil on canvas, 111 x 150 cm, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest. Reproduced in Zsuzsa D. Fehér and Gábor Ö. Pogány, *Hungarian Painting of the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Corvina, 1971), pl. 13.
30. Bronze, 22 cm, Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest. Reproduced in *Magyar művészet 1890–1919* [Hungarian art 1890–1919], Lajos Németh and Nóra Aradi, eds., 2 vols. (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1981), vol. 2., pl. 893.
31. Vak ügetését hallani / Eltévedt, hajdani lovasnak, / Volt erdők és ó-nádasok / Láncolt lelkei riadoznak. This poem is part of a group of fifteen—also entitled "The Lost Rider"—written in the early and mid-1910s.
32. Perneczky, *Tanulmányút a Pávakertbe*, p. 195. See also D.V. Sarabianov, "Kupanie krasnogo konia" [The Bathing of the Red Horse], *Russkaia zhivopis' kontsa 1900-kh-nachala 1910-kh godov. Ocherki* [Russian Paintings from the end of the 1900s to the beginning of the 1910s. Impressions]. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971), pp. 46–47.
33. Tivadar Artner, *Ló és lovas a művészetben* [Horse and rider in art] (Budapest: Corvina, 1982), pl. 46.
34. I am grateful to Dr. László Beke for this observation.



Károly Kernstok, *Horsemen at the Water's Edge*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 215 X 294 cm. (Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest) (Photo, Hungarian National Gallery)

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Kassák's Reading of Art History

Esther Levinger

Today, when Modernist theory is being questioned,[1] it is most instructive to inquire into the attempts of the early twentieth century avant-garde to anchor art in its social and economic context. These attempts were varied, and the theory presented by Kassák differed from the equally Marxist theories of the Russian Constructivists. In fact, from the point of view of Kassák's ideas, the differences between Russian Constructivism and Russian Socialist Realism were minor.

Kassák believed that Constructivism[2] was historically inevitable, determined by the inner laws of artistic, economic and political development.[3] Accordingly, the very existence of Constructivism was sufficient proof of its necessity; its validity was axiomatic.[4] For Kassák the new art—down to its smallest detail—declared of itself that "...it could be born only now and only thus." It was on the basis of this determinist outlook that Kassák proceeded to deduce the evolution of art, and consequently, to prove the necessary alliance between Constructivism and Communism.

As noted by Júlia Szabó, it was in the wake of the publication of Wilhelm Ostwald's "Energetism"[5] that Kassák came to believe that art—much like light, heat, gravitation and electricity—was a form of energy which had existed from the beginning:[6]

> Art has no beginnings, and will never come to an end. Art has been a force since time immemorial, like ethics, like revolutions, like the whole world itself. Thus there is no new art and no old art.
>
> There is only art.[7]

He felt, moreover, that since art was a form of energy, it was invisible, dimensionless and timeless, and was only cast into perceivable and concrete forms by specific artists living in specific times. Since men differ within and between periods of history, and a work of art depends on the artist who creates it, it follows that every work

of art was the particular product of its time. Thus, Kassák felt, art changes eternally.[8]

For Kassák, changes in art, like social transformations and other events, were regulated by strict and fundamental laws—nothing was left to chance. A work of art was not an arbitrary or capricious game. On the contrary, it was the actualization of the spirit that guided the principles and praxis of social life, an intentional creation in accordance with the laws of irreversible modernity.[9] Hence Constructivism was determined by the art movements that preceded it. According to Kassák, "Constructivism developed through three phases: Futurism, Cubism, and Expressionism,"[10] and was "the result of the accumulated experience and philosophy of all previous art."[11] This evolutionist approach induced Kassák to analyse the different art movements, beginning with Impressionism, in order to demonstrate how Constructivism advanced beyond them on the road to the ultimate purification of the medium. The subjects Kassák treated were all central issues of avant-garde art: the rejection of mimetic representation and the abolition of perspectival space in favor of the flat surface. The result of this was an art built up of forms that were both abstract and geometric.

According to Kassák, the three avant-garde art movements prior to Constructivism remained at the stage of mimesis. Futurism, Cubism and Expressionism exhausted, respectively, the possibilities of the dynamic, physical and psychological representability of objects and of men.[12] Futurism, according to him, was the first artistic manifestation of the active psyche, and with its explorative power it tackled the problem of movement in art. But the Futurist artist, even in his best paintings, depicted only moving bodies and not movement itself, he felt.[13]

The Cubist painter, held Kassák, did not recognize the picture as a fully independent object with its own inner laws. Consequently, he maintained, Cubism was still representational art. It was

> [...] the illustration of a scientific will by using artistic means. Their pictures are not creations for their own sake, but transpositions into painting of a world apprehended through optical or psychological means... Their forms are tied to the corporeality of objects seen or known...[14]

Thus, felt Kassák, although Cubism gave form to the inner laws of the objects it depicted, it was nonetheless the representation of an

entity that existed outside the painter, and not the realization of pictorial forms emanating from him.[15]

After Futurism and Cubism, according to Kassák, came Expressionism.[16] For a time, he felt, Expressionism was considered to be "abstract;" it seemed as if its painting really was divorced from exterior (foreign) phenomena, and that like any other process of creation—it expressed only itself. Later, he writes, it became clear that Expressionism had ventured into other fields. Though it worked with greater subjectivity than Futurism and Cubism, it had—in essence—not progressed beyond mere representation. According to Kassák, even in the works of the most typical exponents of Expressionism (such as Kandinsky, Klee and Chagall), one would be unable to find a picture which signified nothing but itself. All these pictures wished to perpetuate some psychological event or other.[17] In the manifesto of *Képarchitektúra* (Pictorial Architecture), Kassák singled out Kandinsky who, in his opinion, went the farthest on the road to non-representation, noting that "his forms scarcely have any optical bases..."[18] Nevertheless, for Kassák, these were not the "absolute paintings" Kandinsky claimed them to be, because "a painting—as a planar creation—cannot bring to mind any foreign body... and must not narrate anything... but Kandinsky's pictures have a story to tell."[19] For Kassák, Kandinsky's paintings were depictions of sensations. He did not create something out of nothing, but only transferred "life already living somewhere into the realm of the picture frame."[20]

"After them, as if it were an inevitable sequel, creative art had to follow."[21] According to Kassák the creative work of art was the Constructivist picture, since it eliminated mimetic representation and rejected illusory space entirely. Unlike Cubism, which in spite of its recognition of the flat surface still painted "three dimensional figures onto the two-dimensional plane,"[22] Constructivism repudiated perspective completely.

> We know that if we are painting a picture we are not boring a tunnel or building a house. We are building a picture. *Képarchitektúra* is constructed not inwards from the plane but outwards from it. It takes the surface simply as a given foundation and does not open perspective inwards which is always illusory.[23]

For Kassák, the new work of art, non-representational and planar, had to be composed of flat abstract-geometric forms. The Cubists

were, according to him, the first to draw our attention to geometry as the essence of creation.

> They were psychologists and surgeons... they peeled off the object's epiderm... and demonstrated the essence that lives according to its own laws: universally true mathematics, rationality, and objective reassurance. And they showed the basic form of art—the geometric form—as creation.[24]

Moreover, according to Kassák, the Cubists proved that behind the exterior appearance of every work of art there was a pattern that held within it all possible variations. This was geometric form, the "universally true mathematics."[25] Kassák felt, however, that they did not draw the necessary conclusion from their discoveries:

> Through the geometrical articulation of form they paint a human being, an animal, a violin, etc... Their scientific theories borne of planar recognition have not been successfully transferred into compositional form...[26]

Evolutionist theories of art generally hold an idea of eternal destruction and rebirth according to which each new art movement at once negates the one preceding it and announces the one to follow. In his introduction to the *Book of New Artists*, Kassák cites the first destructive force to appear on the artistic scene as Futurism. Correspondingly, he saw Expressionism as a direct reaction to Futurism, similarly followed by Cubism and Dada, and finally Constructivism, the possibility for construction. Futurism was curtly dismissed by Kassák. It was

> energy without direction, purpose without force. The trumpet blast of Futurism, with its watchword of liberty and heroism, rode straight into the biggest and most voracious cannibal, the World War.

Furthermore, according to Kassák, Futurism differed from Impressionism only in its virulent gestures. Expressionism was a "puddle of sentimentality." It had succeeded too quickly, and without the slightest struggle it soon fitted into "the golden frames of exhibitions and into the china, lace and gobelins of bourgeois interiors." Cubism wasted its efforts on analysis and lost its force in compositions inherited from the past. It stopped at the stage of

confirmation, and by the time it could have revealed new laws, it had faded into dullness and immobility. He felt that Cubism did not clear the way through the debris of the past; it spent its energy on its preservation.

Then came Dada—the "tragic scream" of social existence according to Kassák—and the sudden collapse of the whole system imbued the bankruptcy of Cubism with meaning. Kassák saw Dada as coming to replace Cubism, to sweep clean the road for future construction. He saw Dada's fanatical will to destroy as its positive aspect. He felt that the Dada artists were the true revolutionaries since they did not fight in order to live in a better world, but rather because they could not bear to live in the world as it was. It was the combination of destructive Dadaism and the World War, according to Kassák, that made new creation possible:

> The world cleansed itself in the bath of blood, and chaos swallowed up the immobility. The disarray that the blind feel around themselves is already the formative stage of the order that will be born.

For Kassák, the era of construction had arrived, and he saw the first significant and decisive change in this direction as the development of Suprematism. Suprematism, in his view, was a revolutionary act which discarded all exterior aesthetics and civilization; it went back to the essentials, to basic geometric forms, and to the basic colours, black and white.[27]

This reading of art history as a series of advances towards the ultimate purification of art resulted in the recognition of the plane and of abstract-geometric forms as necessary and sufficient features of a work of art. But, unlike later Modernism, Kassák's theory of evolution and reduction presupposed the fundamental Marxist assumption that the value of art derives from social, economic and technological conditions which result in certain aspirations. The issue which interested Kassák in this respect was how planarity and geometry related to society.

Planarity for Kassák was not a value in itself. It was a definition of the work of art as an autonomous object.[28] When the artist repudiated mimetic representation and illusory perspective, the work of art became an object comparable on the one hand to any object of nature, and on the other to the products of technology. Geometry was likewise related to the idea of art as an object. According to Kassák, the world was a conglomerate of elements whose foundation

and mode of cohesive construction was geometry. Since every object was a microcosm, the components of each were identical to those of the world as a whole.[29] Hence, the basic forms of the art object had to be identical with those of the world, that is, they had to be geometric.

Kassák, therefore, conceived of the artist as a creator of objects. The new constructive picture was a product of creation, just as natural objects such as trees, mountains and oceans were. It did not narrate anything, and "its creations, as concrete realities, as experiences and memories, could be the subject of representation by others."[30] In Kassák's thought the gift of the ability to create was not limited to the artist, but was, rather, an essential capacity of all people. As such, in spite of art's historicity, it possessed an absolute value in and of itself. He asserted that man was a creator by nature, and that his life would have no meaning if he did not add something to the world that had not existed until then.

> After the enormous stone blocks of the pyramids, Greek model carving, Gothic towers aspiring to heaven... man stands again in front of his creator, with his soul and his sinews, and his undefeatable will to create.[31]

In Kassák's aesthetics, it is this idea of art as creation necessarily related to planarity and geometry that forms the link with the new technological and communist society.

Creation is also a quality of technology; the engineer and the technician create wholly new objects. There is no doubt that Kassák, like other theorists of the avant-garde, admired the beauty of the machine.[32] Above all, however, he viewed the machine as proof of man's creativity, and as a source of inspiration for creating the art object. For this reason he published pictures of machines, appliances, silos and skyscrapers alongside reproductions of works of art. For Kassák "Art, science and technology meet at one point;"[33] the meeting point is creation, when "technology as invention shows the way".[34]

The link between "creation" and Communism is equally crucial. According to Kassák the aim of Communism is to liberate the worker from the yoke of Capitalism, and to restore to him the will to create.[35] The new creations of technology and art have convinced man that he can indeed possess his creative powers and exploit them. Furthermore, the possibilities offered by technology—transportation,

electricity, and radio, for instance—demonstrate man's ability to construct a new world order.[36]

In this context geometry has wider implications. As the embodiment of order and logic, it symbolizes the formal quality not only of art and technology, but also of social systems. According to Kassák, the constructive artist and the technician-constructor both create new objects based on the human need for order, which therefore radiate the coming order of the world.[37] The strict methods of the inventor, the engineer and the artist carry within them the promise of a future constructive society; their work announces what is to come.[38]

The trinity of Communism, Constructivism and Technology, originated from Kassák's Marxist philosophy. All three are inevitable and determined by historical materialism according to Kassák, though he sees technology as the pivotal point around which the other two evolved.

Kassák, following Marx, explains that the bankruptcy of Capitalism was not the result of the backwardness of the bourgeois political system, but rather the ultimate result of the development of technology in accordance with its inner laws. The Capitalist mode of production had to collapse because technology—although it was first developed by private enterprise—would abolish the enslavement of the individual, restore a collective mode of production and thus bring about the final victory of the proletariat. The Communist mode of production, by fully exploiting the machine, would liberate man and thus give birth to the collective society.[39] It was the notion of collectivity that underlay and formed Kassák's concept of Constructivism.

For Kassák the term "construction" applied to all these spheres of life: politics, technology, and art. The will to construct was collective, and it was this will that united all members of society and assured the advent of Communism.[40] Hence it is not surprising that Kassák equated Communism with Christianity and *ipso facto*, Constructivism with "Gothic" art.[41] This four-term equation determined the basic link between Communism and Constructivism. For Kassák, true art—namely art which was the synthesis of life at a given period of time—was possible only in a society with a unified world concept.[42] This was the case in the Christian era, and it would also be the case in the future Communist society. For Kassák, the proof was historical.

Accordingly—holds Kassák—ever since the disintegration of the Christian social order and its "Gothic" art, man has sought absolute

form and the "repose in the One".[43] In the long period of disintegration since the decline of the "Gothic," he felt, art mirrored the chaotic state of the world, and became the expression of individual longings. With Impressionism's zigzag lines and loud colour combinations, the individual life of disjoint surfaces came to the fore for the first time, he held. The artist, like all humanity, was separated from the productive "unity of heaven and earth." Hence, he concluded, art no longer represented the human spirit aspiring to order, but depicted rather particular corners of the disintegrated world around the artist.[44]

In this respect, according to Kassák, Expressionism did not differ from Impressionism. He saw Expressionism as evidence of the religious longing of man to withdraw into himself since he was incapable of confronting the horrors of appearances.[45] Expressionism was the art of somnambulists, he felt, whose ultimate aim was to represent the individual's state of mind, or rather his mood.[46] Therefore, Expressionism was divorced from the aspirations of the collectivity and lacked the support of the community.

Communism, like Christianity, offered a new collective world concept:

> There is no doubt: Like the collective belief of the first Christians,... we have once again come close to achieving a constructive *Weltanschauung*. But this world view is not one of Christian religiosity, but rather of Communism, in whose essence totality is akin to the One, but, as opposed to the hierarchical structure of Christianity, the One is also akin to totality.[47]

Thus, held Kassák, Constructivism was not a new artistic "ism" in the long succession of "isms" around the turn of the century.[48] Constructive art was "the synthesis of a new order."[49] Hence the Constructivist artist—together with the Communist politician and the technician-constructor—represented for Kassák the potential of society.[50] The artist worked with the inventor and the engineer,[51] and it was in this sense as well that Constructivism was "collective."[52]

Kassák saw the link between Constructivism and Communism as being historical. Constructivism began in liberated, revolutionary Russia, that is, in a country where the wish to construct a new world was the strongest and where it had a chance to be realized.[53] Both Constructivism and Communism were preceded by revolutions: Contructivism by Dada, and Communism by the Revolution of the

Proletariat. Thus, according to Kassák, highly developed technology in itself was not enough to engender the advent of either Communism or Constructivism. Both required, in addition, the conscious will of the people and of the artist. It is for this reason, felt Kassák, that "in America there are no Constructivist artists".[54]

The idea that Communism necessitates a particular form of art was not peculiar to Kassák. It was shared, most notably, by the Russian Constructivists and the Russian Socialist Realists. There is, however, a crucial difference between Kassák's viewpoint and those of these movements, one that involves the idea of the autonomy of art. The autonomy of art was central to two, interrelated concepts in Kassák's aesthetics: his concept of creation, and his concept of collectivity. In both cases he was at variance both with Russian Constructivism and Socialist Realism.

Unlike the Russian Constructivists, Kassák refused to denounce art as a superfluous activity. He was opposed to the ideas of the death of art and the concomitant absorbtion of art into industry.[55] For Kassák, the artist, like the technician, was to be an integrated member of the Communist state, and thus works of art were not to be considered to be secondary to products of technology—they were creations of equal importance. Art, like economics, was to be an active agent in the development of society, and like technology it was indispensable to society's construction. Since the world is constantly changing, the task of construction is never-ending. In other words, art is eternal.

The ideas of creation and collectivity were equally opposed to Socialist Realism. As we have seen, Kassák felt that art developed according to its own inner laws, and its production was an act of "creation" like any other God- or man-created object. He held that because art involved creation it was an end in itself. Hence the idea of art being in the service of politics, political parties or the Revolution was for Kassák a contradiction in terms. Moreover, political parties and even the proletariat were only elements of society, he felt, and the exploitation of art for the promotion of their particular interests was in flagrant contradiction to "art as synthesis." The role of art was to present the masses with a unified image of the world rather than to educate them, or in Kassák's words: "The artistic creation, like any other synthetic creation is, in its essence, demonstrative and not pedagogic."[56]

In the final analysis, although Kassák held that art was historically determined and that Constructivism was the historically inevitable

art of Communist society, art as creation, i.e. an independent and autotelic activity, was for him of absolute and eternal value.

Notes

1. The question of the validity of Modernist theory and criticism is the subject of numerous recent studies. For example, on the relations between American abstract-expressionist art, and social, political and economic factors, see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art, Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983).
2. I use the term "Constructivism" to refer to what has become known as "International Constructivism," that is the loose groupings of central European artists during the 1920s espousing a connection between politics, technology and art—as well as a geometrical-abstract aesthetic. This usage is not meant to refer to Constructivism proper, the Russian artists of the early 1920s grouped around Rodchenko at the Moscow VKhUTEMAS (Higher Artistic and Technical Workshops). On Constructivism proper, see Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983). Note that Kassák, like most of his contemporaries, did not distinguish between Constructivism's Russian and "International" variants.
3. Lajos Kassák, "Jegyzetek az új művészethez" [Notes on the New Art], *Bécsi Magyar Újság*, 6 August 1922. In *Éljünk a mi időnkben, irások a képzőművészetről*, Zsuzsa Ferenc, ed. (Budapest: Magvető, 1978), p. 70.
4. According to Kassák, to question the validity of Constructivism made as little sense as to ask "why day was not night." Lajos Kassák and László Moholy-Nagy, *Új művészek könyve* [Book of New Artists] (Vienna: Verlag Julius Fischer, 1922) Facsimile, (Budapest: Corvina and Magyar Helikon, 1977), n.p.
5. Júlia Szabó, "Ideas and Programmes: The Philosophical Background of the Hungarian Avant-garde," *The Hungarian Avant-Garde, The Eight and the Activists* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1980), p. 13
6. Lajos Kassák "Az új művészetről" (On the New Art), *Diogenes*, no. 1 (1923). In: *Éljünk a mi időnkben, irások a képzőművészetről*, p. 79.
7. Lajos Kassák, "Képarchitektúra," *MA* /VII/4, March 1922, p. 52. Translated by George Cushing, in *The Hungarian Avant-Garde, The Eight and the Activists*. Translation revised by Oliver Botar, *The Structurist*, 25–26 (November 1986), pp. 96–98. All translations of the manifesto are taken from Oliver Botar's revised version.
8. Kassák, "Az új művészetről," p. 79.
9. Kassák, "Jegyzetek as új művészethez," p. 69.
10. Lajos Kassák, "Ábrázoló és teremtő festészet" [Representational and Creative Painting], *Bécsi Magyar Újság* (August 1922). In: *Éljünk a mi időnkben, irások a képzőművészetről*, p. 76. Kassák's analysis did not follow the chronological order of the art movement, but varied in each of his articles according to the particular subject, or specific problem he wished to treat. Thus, on one occasion the order was: Cubism, Expressionism, Merz ("Képarchitektúra"), on another: Futurism, Expressionism, Dada (Új művészek könyve) and on yet another: Futurism, Cubism, Expressionism ("Ábrázoló és teremtő festészet").
11. Kassák, "Az új művészetről," p. 82–83.
12. Kassák, "Ábrázoló és teremtő festészet," p. 77.

13. *Ibid.*
14. Kassák, "Képarchitektúra," pp. 96–97.
15. Kassák, "Ábrázoló és teremtő festészet," p. 77.
16. "After Futurism that heralded motion, and Cubism that searched for stability, came the 'je m'en foutiste' art: Expressionism, which was entirely closed in on itself, and divorced from earthly realities." "Ábrázoló és teremtő festészet," p. 77.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
18. Kassák,"Képarchitektúra," p. 97.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. Kassák, "Ábrázoló és teremtő festészet," p. 78.
22. Kassák, "Képarchitektúra," p. 97.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
24. Kassák, "Jegyzetek az új művészethez," p. 71.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
26. Kassák, "Képarchitektúra," p. 97.
27. Lajos Kassák, "A berlini orosz kiállításhoz" [On the Russian Exhibition in Berlin], *MA* vol. 8, no. 2–3 (December 1922), n.p. "Suprematism" was an artistic direction founded by the Russian artist Kasimir Malevich just before the First World War, which called for "non-objectivity" in art, that is for an art which was geometrical and abstract.
28. On the socio-cultural significance of the flat surface in modern art see: T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life, Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), p. 13.
29. Kassák, "Jegyzetek az új művészethez," p. 71.
30. Kassák, "Ábrázoló és teremtő festészet," p. 76.
31. Kassák and Moholy-Nagy, *Új művészek könyve*, n.p.
32. Kassák wrote of the "wondrous creations of technology," and used exalted language when writing about them: "Today we see for the first time man's invincible force in New York's skyscrapers, the viaducts that run over mountains, the locomotives that cross the prairies, the bridges across waters, the x-ray and all that signifies man's victory over God's creation. *Új művészek könyve*, n.p.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Kassák, *Álláspont, tények és új lehetőségek* [Point of View, Facts, and New Possibilities] (Vienna: MA edition, 1924), p. 40.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 40–41.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
41. Kassák did not distinguish in this context between the various phases of Medieval art, but referred to them all with the general term "Gothic".
42. This idea is expressed in different writings: "Képarchitektúra," *Álláspont, tények és új lehetőségek*, p. 70.
43. Kassák and Moholy-Nagy, *Új művészek könyve*, n.p.
44. Kassák, "Az új művészetről," p. 82.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Kassák and Moholy-Nagy, *Új művészek könyve*, n.p.
47. Kassák, "Képarchitektúra," p. 96.

48. Kassák, "Rechenschaft," *MA* vol. 8, no. 5–6 (March 1923), n.p. and *Álláspont, tények és új lehetőségek*, p. 37.
49. Kassák, "Képarchitektúra," p. 98.
50. Kassák, *Álláspont, tények és új lehetőségek*, p. 38.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 44
52. *Ibid.*, p. 38
53. Kassák, "Az új művészetről," p. 83 and *Álláspont, tények és új lehetőségek*, p. 44–45.
54. *Ibid.*
55. On the Marxist/Saint-Simonist nature of the productivist idea in Russian Constructivism see Margaret A. Rose, *Marx's Lost Aesthetics, Karl Marx and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge University Press, 1984) chs. 6–7, p. 99-136. On Kassák's anti-productivist views see my article "Lajos Kassák, *MA* and the New Artist 1916–1925," *The Structurist*, 25–26 (November 1986), pp. 78–84.
56. Kassák, *Álláspont, tények és új lehetőségek*, p. 46.

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Connections Between the Hungarian and American Avant-Gardes during the Early 1920s

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An interesting, but virtually unknown chapter in the history of linkages in the international avant-garde is the contact between Hungarian emigrés and three American "little magazines" of the early 20s with editorial offices in Europe. These journals, *Broom*, *The Little Review* and *Secession* were, owing to their locations and interests, particularly open to publishing the work of continental avant-gardists, the Hungarians included. As will become apparent, this interest was reciprocal, and the result was a small but significant set of links and interactions.

Lajos Kassák, the central figure of the early 20th century Hungarian literary and artistic avant-garde, was—like many Europeans—fascinated with the "New World," with the America of wide open spaces, political liberty, and technological progress. His interest in things American seems to have first manifested itself in his admiration for the poetry and ideas of Walt Whitman (1819–1892). In his first journal, *A Tett* [The Deed], as well as in the early *Ma* [Today], Kassák published Whitman's poems on several occasions, in translations by Andor Halasi, György Szabadkai and Iván Hevesi.[1] It is significant that both the translator and the publisher of the first Hungarian edition of Whitman's *Song of Myself*, were Kassák's close associates.[2] Kassák and his circle admired Walt Whitman at least as much as that other pioneer of free verse, the Belgian poet Emil Verhaeren, and the influence of these two on the poetry of the Hungarians was considerable. As we shall see, the American Gorham Munson, a member of the post-World War One generation of avant-garde writers, would challenge the Hungarians' traditional pattern of fascination for things American.

The art and literature of the 20th century American avant-garde began—like the Hungarian—around 1910. Alfred Stieglitz's journal *Camera Work* (1903-1917) and his gallery "291" (1905-1917) played

important roles in the dissemination of information about the burgeoning European modern art scene.[3] Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), one of the pioneers of Modernist American literature, was a generous patron, and she strove to acquaint American visitors to her Paris apartment with the latest developments in French art.[4] Just as in Budapest, 1913 was the year in which the wider New York public first gained access to the new European art through major exhibitions. In Budapest it was Herwarth Walden's travelling show of Futurist and Expressionist art, and the great "International Post-Impressionist" exhibition which gained both adherents for and enemies of the new art, while in New York it was the by now famous "Armory Show" which did so. Avant-garde American writers acquired a published forum in 1914—only a year before *A Tett*, its Hungarian equivalent—when Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review* first appeared in Chicago.[5] Anderson, just as Kassák, made great personal sacrifices to make the appearance of her journal possible. At one point she lived in a tent on the shores of Lake Michigan so she could divert money from her housekeeping expenses to the journal. *The Little Review* exercised a great influence on the younger generation of American writers around 1919–1920, and Anderson's example was crucial to the birth of both *Broom* and *Secession*.

It was to provide a forum for this new wave of writers that Gorham B. Munson (1896–1969) established *Secession* in 1922. Munson belonged to the generation of American writers which Gertrude Stein (and Ernest Hemingway after her) described as "lost," and whose members moved to Europe after the Great War—mainly from New York's "bohemian" centre of Greenwich Village—to escape their homeland's provincialism. We read the following in the memoirs of Malcolm Cowley (1898–1988), one of these "refugees":

> Everywhere, in every department of cultural life, Europe offered the models to imitate—in painting, composing, philosophy, folk music, folk drinking, the drama, sex, politics, national consciousness—indeed, some doubted that this country was even a nation; it had no traditions except the fatal tradition of the pioneer.[6]

In establishing the reasons for this flight to Europe, one should not forget to take into account the fact that the American dollar was worth a lot on the Continent at the time, and so writers who would have been poor by standards at home, were able to live in relative luxury there. Cowley writes of this phenomenon:

> Nobody was honest in those days.... Those who had gold, or currency redeemable in gold, hastened toward the cheapest markets. There sprang into being a new race of tourists, the *Valutaschweine*, the parasites of the exchange, who wandered from France to Romania, from Italy to Poland, in quest of the vilest prices... a few dollars in our pockets, the equivalent of how many thousand crowns or pengos(*sic*), we went drifting onward with the army of exploitation:
>
> Following the dollar, ah following the dollar, I learned three fashions of eating with the knife and ordered beer in four languages from a Hungarian waiter while following the dollar eastward along the 48th degree of north latitude—where it buys most, there is the Fatherland...[7]

Most of these Americans lived in Paris during the years of their "exile," but others spent periods of varying length in London, Rome, Vienna and Berlin. In Paris, as was the case with artists of other nationalities, the Americans spent much of their time at the "Dome" and the "Rotonde." These cafés were where the many dramas, melodramas and comedies—later described by so many authors from so many points of view—were played out.[8]

Munson went to Paris in 1921, and he soon met the Dadaists—the Romanian Tristan Tzara among them—through his friend, the Philadelphian painter and photographer Man Ray. Shortly afterwards, his compatriot Matthew Josephson (1899-1978) arrived, and looked Munson up on the recommendation of a common friend, the poet Hart Crane. Munson then introduced Josephson to Tzara, among others. Josephson became very interested in Dada, and he and Man Ray became Paris Dada's most intense American participants.[9] It was more or less on Josephson's suggestion that Munson decided to found a journal. They soon realized that printing costs were lower in Central Europe, so Munson decided to go to Vienna to begin the enterprise. Before going there, he went to Rome to visit Harold Loeb (1891-1974), who had just established *Broom* with intentions and economic reasons similar to his own.[10] Munson remembers his arrival in the Austrian capital thus:

> I walked for hours along the muddy pavements of war desolated Vienna, framing my policy. I was resolved that the magazine should strike a definite editorial note and that

> there should be no hasty improvisations of policy from issue to issue. I was very serious.[11]

During one of his walks through the city he discovered the building of the Viennese Secession (Joseph Maria Olbrich, 1898). This is when his idea arose to lend the new journal this name, in order to emphasize the younger generation's withdrawal from the literary world of their elders.[12]

Three issues of *Secession* appeared in Vienna; in April, July, and August of 1922. The printing of the first issue—which appeared, according to Josephson in a press run of 300, and according to Munson in 500 copies—cost a grand total of twenty dollars![13] We do not know exactly how Munson came into contact with Kassák, because neither he nor the Hungarian write of this in their memoirs. It is possible that Munson got Kassák's address in Rome from László Medgyes, an artist and writer associated with Kassák at least since 1919,[14] and in Loeb's Roman circle in 1922.[15] In any case, it is likely that Munson and Kassák met at some point, for a pattern of interaction is evident from the publications of the time. One of the central documents of this interaction is Kassák's design for the cover of the second issue of *Secession*. (illustration 1) About this Munson writes the following on the inside cover:

> The cover design is by Ludwig Kassák, a Hungarian communist and refugee in Vienna. He is the editor of *MA*, a publication in correspondence with those of the advance guard in France, Russia, Germany and America.

While we have no direct evidence for it, there is substantial indirect evidence for a polemic between Munson and Kassák during the early summer of 1922, shortly before Munson left Vienna. The fascination Kassák and other members of the European avant-garde felt for America's technological advances, was expressed in their use—often out of context—of photographic images of American icons such as skyscrapers and grain silos in their publications. This tendency need not be discussed here in detail. Suffice it to mention the 1 May 1922 "Jubilee Double-Issue" of *Ma*, and the anthology edited by Kassák and László Moholy-Nagy, *Új művészek könyve* [Book of New Artists]—probably assembled by late May of 1922.[16] It is noteworthy in these and other of Kassák's publications, that among reproductions of all that was the latest in the European and Russian avant-gardes, there are no examples of North American art.

The American content of these publications is confined to the art of one photographer living in Paris (Man Ray). All other examples are of the writings of Americans living in Europe (Munson, Cowley) or of their immediate associates and friends at home (Williams and Kreymbourg). The bulk of the North American content consists of photographs of the aforementioned "icons."

The 1 May 1922 issue of *Ma* opens with an aerial view of the New York Public Library surrounded by scyscrapers. Ernő Kállai's article "Technika és konstruktiv művészet" [Technology and Constructive Art] is illustrated with photographs of the "largest airplane hangar" (under construction) and of a long, unidentified bridge. In the *Book of New Artists* these images are supplemented by two enormous grain silos (probably at the Lakehead in Canada), and the courtyard of an unidentified skyscraper. The message of these juxtapositions is clear: the intentions of the artists of the European avant-garde are similar to those of the great engineers of North America, that is the construction of a new world. While the left-wing Kassák was critical of America's political system, he could not help but admire its technological achievements, and held them up as models for the artists of Europe to follow.

It seems to have been to this message that Munson was replying when he published his article "The Future and America" in the next, July 1922 issue of *Ma*, in a translation by Kassák associate Endre Gáspár. In it, Munson attempts to dispell some of the myths that his European avant-gardist colleagues had about America, a land few of them had ever seen. He points out the irony of the fascination Europeans had for a land and culture which their American colleagues (Munson included), could hardly wait to get away from:

> The Atlantic Ocean divides two species of intelligence from each other, both of which display their impotence by expecting something from the other. An American visiting Europe notes with great surprise that Frenchmen, Italians, Hungarians, etc. attach great hopes to his culture, a hope whose foundation is the myth of American energy, strength and daring.

Munson's references to "Hungarians," and to Whitman, as well as to the fact that Whitman's puritan Idealism no longer represented America's reality, could well be indications of discussions with a Kassák, who, as we have seen, was a great admirer of the 19th century American poet. Munson exposes the reality of crass commercialism,

as opposed to Whitman's pantheistic and cooperative individualism, that underlies the often exciting visual impact of great bridges, silos and skyscrapers. In the article, Munson also introduces a few members of the youngest generation of American writers, and recommends Waldo Frank's *Our America* as an accurate account of his homeland.

The fact that, in his review of Claire Goll's anthology of "new" American poetry, Endre Gáspár calls Goll to task for not including the works of this youngest generation (and of those publishing in *Seccession* in particular) is an indication of the effect Munson had on the Hungarians.[17] The review also functions as a critique of Munson's article, however, for Gáspár points out that this newer literature has lost some of what he considers to be a "specifically" American character: "There is something, however, in the [older] poets of this anthology" writes Gáspár "which informs us of much, indeed everything: that perhaps also typically American momentum and dynamism, which has remained a living, driving force of our contemporary artistic efforts." In becoming less provincial, in other words, Gáspár notes a loss of "American" energy in the work of Munson and his associates. It seems to have been an impossible task for Munson to dispell his Hungarian colleague's Romantic image of his homeland.

Munson continued to have a high opinion of new European art in general, and of Central European culture in particular, after his return to the United States. Indeed, in writing of the rival journal *Dial*, Munson recommended Kassák's *Ma* instead, in his own "letter to the editor" of *Secession*, published in the fifth issue:

> To *Secession*
>
> Every man, it is prophesied, must eventually become his own brewer. Certainly, every man must already import his own art from Central Europe. The *Dial*, as official importer, lands too many dead fish... Portrait of Richard Strauss by Max Liebermann (geboren 1847, now President of the Berlin Academy of Arts), Richard Specht on Schnitzler, Stefan Zweig on Dickens... we produce this sort of stuff in vast quantities on this side, too. I recommend as a counter-irritant the Hungarian activist review, MA, edited by Ludwig Kassák. MA excells in experimental typographical composition, reproduces the latest works of Moholy-Nagy, Raoul Haussmann, Jacques Lipshitz, Picabia, Van Doesburg, Mondrian, Gleizes, Léger, Tatlin, Viking Eggeling,

> Man Ray, the Russian constructivists, and photographs of beautiful bridges, machines and New York, and publishes translations from the *avant-garde* writers in Germany, France, Russia and America, the last being represented so far by Malcolm Cowley, Gorham B. Munson, and William Carlos Williams.
> G. B. M.[18]

No other European journal was thus recommended as a model on the pages of *Secession*, and this is important because anglophone writers and artists of the avant-garde read it; despite its small circulation, it had quite an effect on literary life of the time.[19]

Since Malcolm Cowley's and William Carlos Williams' poems appeared in the December 1922 issue of *Ma* (well after Munson's return home during the summer of 1922),[20] and since Munson's praise of *Ma* appeared in July of 1923, we can be certain that Kassák continued to send Munson the new issues of *Ma* until mid 1923. Furthermore, the fact that we know Kassák continued to receive *Secession* until its demise early in 1924, further suggests that he sent *Ma* in return at least until that time. Still, it is not likely that many besides Munson and his immediate associates ever saw copies of *Ma* in New York.

Gáspár returned the praise lavished by Munson on the Hungarians in the paragraph on American magazines in his article "Külföldi folyóiratokról" [On Foreign Journals].[21] In the article Gáspár writes of *Broom*, *The Little Review* and *Secession*, but reserves his greatest praise for the last:

> The demise of this journal is the most regrettable event of the international literary scene in the last few weeks, because *Secession* brought a whole army of people to the fore from the literary wilds of America—people with their own voices, some of truly international significance—and this at a time when England's literature still sleeps the sleep of the *fin-de-siecle*. The last, winter 1924 issue of *Secession* is still so impressive and upward looking, that its continuation would have offered limitless possibilities.

In addition to high praise for Munson's polemical writings in the last issue, Gáspár writes very positively of Kenneth Burke's short stories, and of Waldo Frank's books—the latter recommended by Munson in his article "The Future and America."

Besides this article, two of Munson's poems (in László Medgyes' translation) appeared in *Ma*; "Pregnant Society" and "The Urinal Angel," the two bearing the surtitle "Two Dramas for Popular Theatre."[22] Munson writes the following about their genesis:

> [at Tristan Tzara's request] in the hotel the next day I dashed off three dada 'poems,' making use of multiplication tables and the mention of forbidden things, and being properly idiotic. They were at once accepted by Tzara and dispatched thither and yon over Europe for translation; the only translation I saw was in *Ma*, the Hungarian activist review. Of course I attached no importance to this little stunt, but dadaism as a movement continued to interest and puzzle me.[23]

It may well be that the two witty pieces only survived in *Ma*. It is doubtful that Kassák would have received the originals from Tzara. It is more likely that Kassák asked Munson himself for the poems (perhaps in exchange for his own *Secession* cover design), and then sent them to Medgyes for translation.

Besides Munson's works, two other examples of avant-garde American literature appeared in the Viennese *Ma*, both in the 25 December 1922 issue, Cowley's "Valuta," and William Carlos Williams' beautiful "To a Solitary Disciple." Kassák probably acquired these manuscripts through Medgyes, since "Valuta" first appeared in the November 1922, Roman issue of *Broom*. An attempt to include material by Ezra Pound in the *Book of New Artists* did not meet with success.[24]

Cowley visited Vienna in August of 1922, bringing with him from Paris material for the third issue of *Secession*. He does not, however, remember meeting any Hungarians. In a letter to the author he writes:

> You are barking up the wrong tree when you ask me for information about the colony of Hungarian exiles... When I made a trip to Vienna... I didn't look up any Hungarians. The different nationalities lived in separate compartments, even when they were all left wing artists.[25]

As mentioned, *Broom* was established with intentions similar to those Munson had for *Secession*; it was to provide a forum for those writers who could not get published elsewhere. The idea for *Broom*

first arose in New York, where Harold Loeb as well as his associate and co-editor Alfred Kreymbourg decided to found a literary journal which would be printed in Italy, since production costs were much lower there. Though *Broom* had a wider audience than did *Secession*, it was still primarily the work of the young, avant-garde American writers that appeared in it. *Broom*'s financial base, furthermore, was more secure than *Secession*'s. Loeb's first wife was a Guggenheim, and his own family were the owners of a major New York firm. Thus *Broom* was printed on paper of fine quality, was finely-bound, and contained many illustrations—some of them in colour. In Rome, Loeb and his associates (not including Kreymbourg, who decided to remain in New York), stayed in a villa rented from the Italian royal family.[26] Munson and Loeb both write of the pleasant social life of the Italian capital. As mentioned, the Hungarian avant-gardist László Medgyes was in close contact with Loeb's group; he designed *Broom*'s June 1922 cover, and several of his late Cubist woodcuts appeared on the pages of the journal.

It seems, however, that this lifestyle proved to be too expensive—even in Rome—and so, with Medgyes' help the Loeb crowd moved on to Berlin.[27] Medgyes is listed as the journal's "artistic assistant editor" in the Berlin issues, and it is no doubt his good (mainly Hungarian) connections with the Berlin avant-garde of the day that brought the journal some of the interesting European material it published. Meanwhile Kreymbourg resigned as co-editor, citing the preponderance of European material in what was supposed to have been a journal of new American letters as his reason. After this, Loeb travelled to Tyrol and asked Matthew Josephson to take over as assistant editor. Josephson was still working on *Secession* at the time, but as his relations with Munson were deteriorating, he accepted the offer and returned with Loeb to Berlin.

Kassák's poem "19," first published in the 1 July 1922 issue of *Ma*, appeared in *Broom*'s first Berlin number. While the translator's name is not indicated, we know him to have been Endre Gáspár, since this and two other translations of Kassák's poetry by Gáspár later appeared in the poet's *Tisztaság könyve* [Book of Purity].[28]

Loeb moved to Berlin in November of 1922, but we do not know whether he met Kassák, who was in Berlin from the 14th to the 25th of the same month, or whether Loeb attended Kassák and his associates' performance at Herwarth Walden's Galerie Der Sturm on the 25th.[29] We do know, however, that Loeb met Moholy-Nagy while in Berlin,[30] and we can be sure that Moholy-Nagy was in contact with Kassák on his visit. In his account of *Broom*'s Berlin

period, furthermore, Josephson writes of the many "red" Hungarian emigrés who met in a certain corner of the Romanisches Café. This suggests that perhaps Loeb had at least some passing contact with them. Josephson provides us with a detailed account of his own meeting with László Moholy-Nagy, a rare glimpse of a social event involving the Berlin "Constructivists:"

> One evening in the winter of 1923, Lissitzky accompanied us to a lively gathering of the Constructivists of Berlin in the barnlike studio of his friend Moholy-Nagy... Though Moholy lived in dire poverty at the time and boasted no furniture in his big studio, he was a most gallant host. The place was decorated with abstract paintings of his own as well as with machine-sculptures by the Russians Lissitzky, Gabo, and Vladimir Tatlin... Moholy had us all sit down on packing boxes, making merry the whole evening over some weak table wine.[31]

Josephson and Loeb maintained their contacts with Moholy-Nagy. In the March issue of *Broom*—shortly after Moholy's appointment to the Bauhaus—four of Moholy's new photograms appeared, though they did not use any of his cover designs. (illustration 2) This contact was, in all likelihood, Moholy's first with members of the American avant-garde, an ambient of which he would one day himself become a part.[32]

Kassák included an advertisement for *Broom* once on the back cover of *Ma* (15 October 1922), where such ads for foreign journals were usually published. Six other connections with *Broom* and its staff are discernible in Kassák's publications. On the pages of *Ma* we find Medgyes' translations of Beaudouin's poetry (March 1922), his articles "Teória és Praxis" [Theory and Practice] (October 1922) and "Geld und Andere Mysterien" (15 March 1923),[33] Cowley's and Williams' poems (December 1922), and a short discussion of *Broom* in Endre Gáspár's article "On Foreign Journals" discussed above. In the *Book of New Artists* we find the score of Alfred Kreymbourg and Julian Freedman's song "Our Window."

Despite the fact that it is short, Gáspár's mention of *Broom* is important because it is the only evidence we have of what Kassák and his associates thought of the journal. As already mentioned, the good (and in all likelihood, personal) connections with *Secession* and its editor predisposed Kassák and Gáspár to prefer it to the other American "little magazines." However, as should be apparent,

Kassák maintained a lively working relationship with *Broom*'s László Medgyes throughout 1922 and 1923. Gáspár's opinion of *Broom* was a good one; he describes it as "a slightly eclectic, but forthright and impressively-produced [product] of the progressive Americans..." and mourns (in the spring of 1924) its loss. After four Berlin issues, Loeb was out of money, and he passed *Broom* into Josephson's care. Josephson then returned to the United States, "taking" *Broom* with him, and the January 1924 issue was the last.[34]

Hungarian avant-garde connections with *The Little Review* and its editor were the least intensive of the three "little magazines" examined. There probably would have been even fewer connections, had Margaret Anderson not relocated to Paris in 1921. While her primary reason for going to Europe was—as in the case of the others—the dollar's strength, she also wanted to avoid American postal censorship, with which she had had some trouble while serially publishing James Joyce's *Ulysses*.[35] it was undoubtably also to her advantage to have many of the best European writers and artists near at hand, and her journal did become much more international in scope than before. In fact, the Parisian *'Little Review* developed into an important international forum of the arts and letters, certainly the best in the English language.

Five publications by Hungarians appeared on the pages of Anderson's journal. In the second issue of volume 11 (1925), we find a brief account of the Dutch-Hungarian Vilmos Huszár's "Mechanical Dance Figure" and two of László Péri's designs for cement reliefs. In the first issue of volume 12 (1926), Anderson published a self-portrait by the former Activist painter Lajos Tihanyi, and in the journal's last issue of 1929, we find Moholy-Nagy's response to Anderson's questionnaire directed to major contemporary cultural figures. Though we know that Anderson and Kassák sent each other copies of their journals, there is no surviving correspondence between the two, and it is not likely that they ever met each other. Still, four copies of *The Little Review* survived among Kassák's papers,[36] and it is noteworthy that a costume design by Fernand Léger for a Blaise Cendrars play which Anderson reproduced on the cover of *The Little Review*'s spring 1923 issue, also appeared in the 15 September 1923 "Special Music and Theatre Issue" of *Ma*. While nothing by Kassák, or about *Ma* ever appeared in *The Little Review*, Endre Gáspár did write about the American journal in his 1924 piece "On Foreign Journals" discussed above. From this it becomes apparent that the Viennese Hungarians first heard of the

nascent Surrealist movement from an article by René Crevel published in *The Little Review.*

Notes

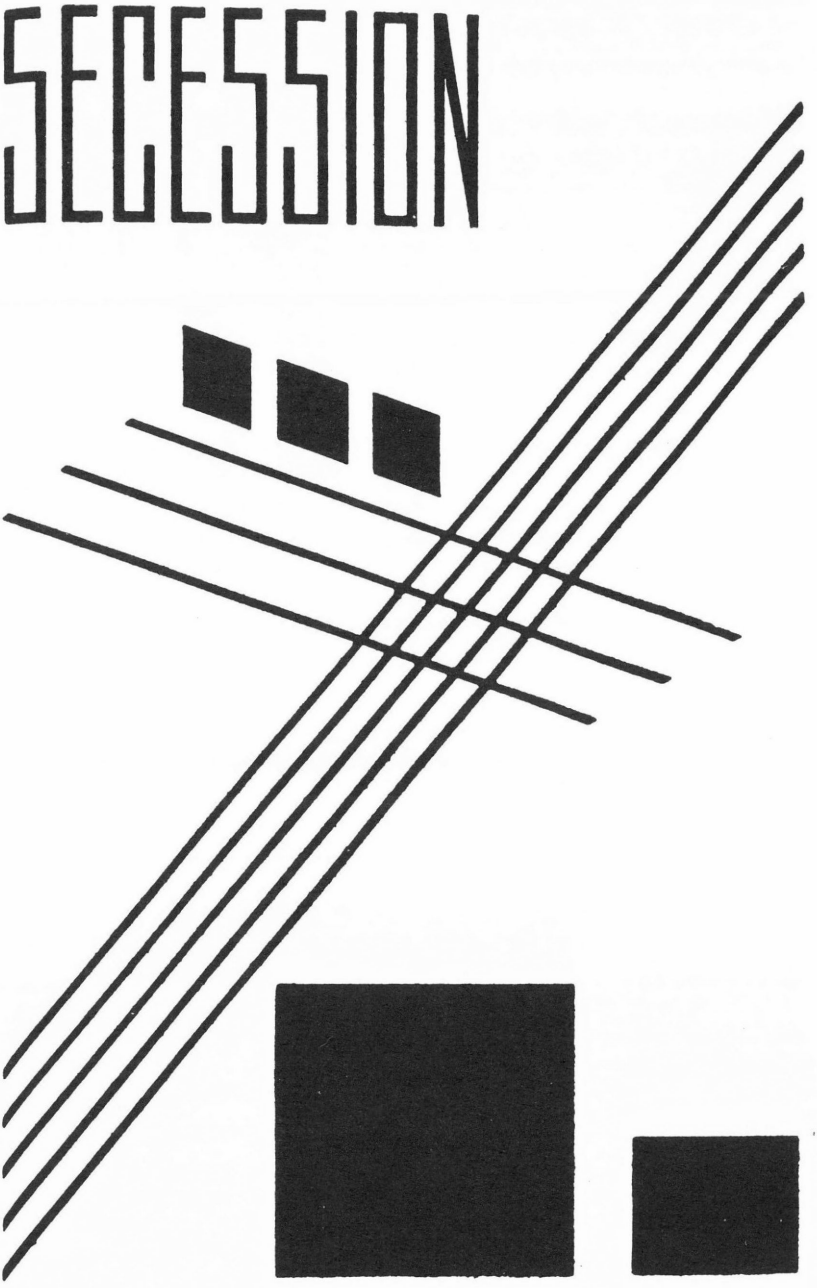
I wish to express my thanks to Dr. Ferenc Csaplár, director of the Kassák Museum in Budapest, and to Cameron Holliger of the Metropolitan Toronto Library for their help in assembling the material for this article, originally published in Hungarian as "Kassák és az amerikai avantgárd" [Kassák and the American Avant-Garde] in the volume *Magam törvénye szerint. Tanulmányok és dokumentumok Kassák Lajosról* [According to my Own Laws. Studies and Documents on Lajos Kassák] (Ferenc Csaplár, ed., Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum and Múzsák Közművelődési Kiadó, 1987). Dr. Csaplár has kindly agreed to the publication of this revised version of the article. Its translation from the Hungarian original, as well as its reworking, were done with the financial help of a Doctoral Fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which I wish to thank for its support. For help with the Hungarian of the original text, I wish to thank Anna Cseke-Gál.

1. In *A Tett*: Vol. 1, no. 4, p. 62 (20 December 1915); vol. 2, no. 10, p. 163 (20 March 1920). In *Ma*: Vol. 3, no. 6, pp. 74–75 (1 June 1918); vol. 3, no. 11, p. 134 (20 November 1918).
2. The poems appeared in a translation by Endre Gáspár at the Bán Verlag in Vienna, 1922.
3. William Innes Homer. *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977); Frederick J. Hoffman, Charles Allen and Carolyn F. Ulrich. *The Little Magazine. A History and Bibliography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1946), p. 7.
4. Janet Hobhouse. *Everybody Who Was Anybody. A Biography of Gertrude Stein* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975). As an interesting footnote, we might mention that the Stein family lived in Vienna between 1875 and 1878, where the children's nanny was Hungarian (p. 2). Clearly the principal language of the German-Jewish family was German, though it seems that the adult Stein's strongly Francophile orientation precluded the possibility of her developing an abiding interest in German or Austrian culture. It also seems that the Hungarian nanny of her early childhood did not leave a deep imprint on her.
5. Hoffman *et al.*, *The Little Magazine*, pp. 52–66; Kenneth A. Lohf and Eugene P. Sheehy, eds., *An Index to the Little Review. 1914–1929* (New York: New York Public Library, 1961).
6. Malcolm Cowley. *Exile's Return* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1934), p. 105. "Folk-Drinking" is a reference to the fact that the American prohibition on the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages at the time was yet a further inducement for the young writers to go to the Continent. Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Little Magazine*, p. 76.
7. Malcolm Cowley. *Exile's Return*, p. 92. The quotation is from Cowley's poem "Valuta." It appeared in *Ma* in Endre Gáspár's translation. Vol. 7, no. 2–3 (25 December 1922).
8. Some of the most important of these memoirs: Matthew Josephson. *Life Among the Surrealists* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1962); Harold Loeb. *The Way it Was* (New York: Criterion Books, 1959); Gorham Munson, "The Fledgeling Years. 1916–1927," *Sewanee Review* (January-March 1932), pp. 24–54 (The material

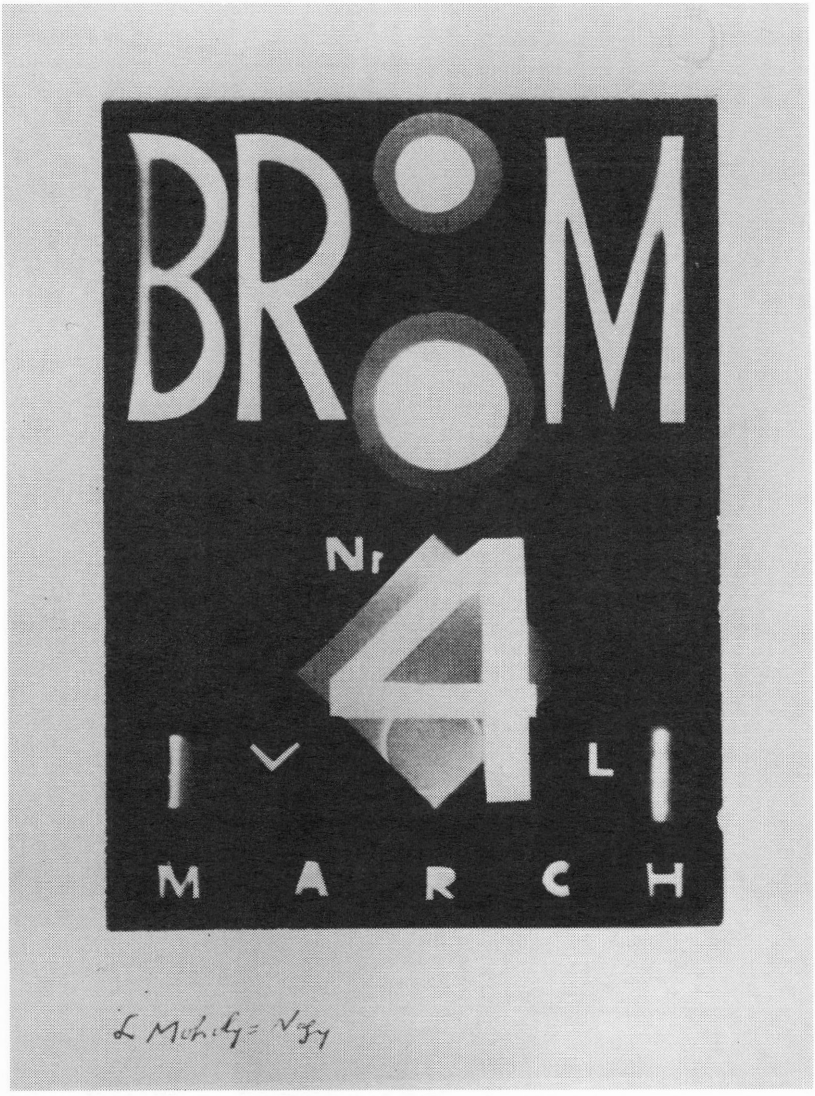
contained in this article was later republished in Munson. *The Awakening Twenties.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1985. All references here are to the 1932 article); Robert McAlmon. *Being Geniuses Together* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938) (Reprinted in a joint edition with Kay Boyle's memoirs, San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984); Malcolm Cowley. *Exile's Return.*

9. On Man Ray, Kassák published a short account of his "rayogram" technique of photogram production in the "Hirek" [News] section of the 1 July 1924 issue of *Ma.* He also published a photograph and the multi-media work "The Impossibility" (1920) by Man Ray in his anthology *Új művészek könyve* [Book of New Artists] (Vienna, 1922), unpag. "The Impossibility" also appeared in the 1 May 1922 issue of Ma (p. 20). The photograph is probably one of a series taken of the cardboard lampshade in the shape of a spiral Man Ray made for Katherine Dreier in 1919. Compare, for example, "Lampshade" 1919, reproduced on p. 11 of Roland Penrose. *Man Ray* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975). See: Robert L. Herbert, et al. *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest* (New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1984). On "The Impossibility" see William S. Rubin, *Dada and Surrealism* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969), pp. 475.
10. Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Little Magazine*, pp. 94–95. See also Munson's and Josephson's memoirs on this.
11. Munson, "The Fledgeling Years," p. 31.
12. Josephson found the choice of a name to be unfortunate. *Life Among the Surrealists*, p. 159. The "Secession" was an artists' organization which established itself in opposition to the prevailing Academic style in the arts.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 231; Munson, "The Fledgeling Years," pp. 31, 36.
14. The seventh exhibition held at the Budapest Ma Gallery, was one of Medgyes' work. *Ma* vol. 4, no. 3 (20 March 1919).
15. According to Loeb, Medgyes was at the time madly in love with his own lover's older sister. In any case, it is certain that Medgyes was in contact with Kassák early in 1922, because several of his translations of the writings of Nicolaus Beaudouin appeared in the 15 March, 1922 issue of *Ma.* Loeb. *The Way it Was.* p. 199.
16. Kassák dates his introductory essay 31 May 1922. The anthology was published in Hungarian and German versions in Vienna early in September, 1922. It is also worth mentioning that decades later, in his memoirs, Kassák remembers the publication of an English edition of the anthology, but no such English edition has as yet turned up. Kassák. *Csavargók, alkotók: Válogatott irodalmi tanulmányok* [Hoboes and creators. Selected literary essays]. Zsuzsa Ferenc, ed. (Budapest, 1975), p. 66.
17. *Ma* vol. 9, no. 2 (15 November 1923). Claire Goll's anthology, entitled *Die neue Welt*, was published by Fischer Verlag in Berlin.
18. *Secession* no. 5 (July 1923), p. 26.
19. Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Little Magazine*, p. 97. A single copy of *Secession* no. 2 (with Kassák's cover design), survives among Kassák's papers (Kassák Múzeum, Inv. No. 1832).
20. Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Little Magazine*, p. 98.
21. *Ma*, vol. 9, no. 6–7 (1 July 1924), unpag.
22. *Ma*, vol. 7, no. 5–6 (1 May 1922), p. 16.
23. Munson, "The Fledgeling Years," pp. 28–29. I was unable to locate an edition of Munson's poetry or early essays, indeed any of the English originals of the material published in *Ma.*

24. Ferenc Csaplár, "A Karavántól az Új művészek könyvéig" [From 'Caravan' to the 'Book of New Artists'], *Magyar Könyvszemle*, vol. 98, no. 4 (1982), p. 381.
25. Malcolm Cowley to Oliver Botar, 11 December 1985. He writes evocatively of Vienna, however, in *Exile's Return* (p. 93) Also: Donald G. Parker, "Malcolm Cowley," in Karen Lane Rood, ed. *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Writers in Paris 1920–1930* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1980), p. 74.
26. Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Little Magazine*, pp. 102–04.
27. Loeb, *The Way it Was*, p. 128. According to Loeb it was Medgyes who discovered that the Berlin presses were cheaper and better than those of Rome.
28. Budapest, 1926, pp. 86–89. It is not known whether the other two translated poems, "47" and "54" appeared in an anglophone publication.
29. The dates of Kassák's visit are courtesy of Dr. Ferenc Csaplár.
30. Lissitzky remembers such a meeting in "1922–23." El Lissitzky, letter to Sophie Küppers, 15 September 1925, as reprinted in Krisztina Passuth. *Moholy-Nagy* (Budapest: Corvina, 1982), p. 362.
31. Josephson, *Life Among the Surrealists*, p. 211.
32. There were at least two photogram-designs for the cover of the March, 1923 (no. 4) issue. Reproduced in: Passuth. *Moholy-Nagy*, no. 161, p. 231; and Eleanor M. Hight. *Moholy-Nagy: Photography and Film in Weimar Germany* (Wellesly, Ma.: Wellesly College Museum, 1985), no. 25, p. 64.
33. This article, in both its theme and style, is closely connected to Harold Loeb's article "The Mysticism of Money" which he wrote during the summer of 1922 (Josephson, *Life Among the Surrealists*, pp. 188–89), and which first appeared in the September 1922 issue of *Broom*. All this, as well as the links between the two authors indicate that they were engaged in a lively—and as yet unreconstructed—discourse on money and the future of Western art and culture in 1922–23. It is noteworthy that one of Medgyes' late Cubist paintings is reproduced in *The Book of New Artists*.
34. Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Little Magazine*, p. 105.
35. On *The Little Review* my two major sources were Hoffman, *et al.*, *The Little Magazine* (pp. 52–66), and Lohf and Sheehy, eds. *An Index to the Little Review*.
36. Vol. 9, no. 3 (spring 1923); vol. 9 no. 4 (fall-winter 1923–24); vol, 11, no. 1 (spring 1925); vol. 12, no. 1 (spring-summer 1926). Kassák Múzeum, Inv. no. 1840.



1. Lajos Kassák's cover design for *Secession*, no. 2 (July 1922).



2. László Moholy-Nagy's unused cover design for *Broom*, no. 4 (March 1923). After: Passuth. *Moholy-Nagy*, no. 161. Photogram, c. 1922–23. No other information is provided.

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De la photographie à la peinture: la leçon de László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946)

Alain Findeli

> "Quand j'étais jeune peintre, j'ai souvent eu l'impression, en assemblant mes collages et en peignant mes tableaux "abstraits," que je jetais à la mer un message enfermé dans une bouteille. Il faudra peut-être des décennies pour que quelqu'un le trouve et le lise."[1]

La découverte de la photographie ou: *The New Vision*

On sait que Moholy-Nagy a commencé sa carrière de peintre alors qu'il était encore en Hongrie; c'est pendant la première guerre mondiale que naît cette vocation et qu'il décide d'abandonner la carrière de droit à laquelle il se destinaient. Pourtant ce n'est qu'après son arrivée à Berlin en 1920 que, grâce à Lucia Schultz qu'il devait épouser bientôt, il découvrit la photographie alors en pleine expansion grâce en partie au développement rapide du photojournalisme. Le titre de cet article semble donc paradoxal à première vue car c'est bien après avoir fait de la peinture pendant quelques années que Moholy-Nagy entreprit ses premiers travaux photographiques, et qu'en réalisant ses premiers photogrammes, il allait devenir l'un des pionniers en la matière; en fait, son cheminement artistique n'est pas aussi lineaire et chronologique que l'on pourrait le croire.

Il semble en effet que le travail accompli avec l'appareil photographique, puis avec la caméra, lui fît découvrir un monde entièrement nouveau et que cette révélation ait agi sur lui comme un déclic: son travail de peintre en fut totalement bouleversé et la réflexion qui en découla lui fit suivre une marche imprévisible. A la seule vue de ses premières oeuvres, deux types de préoccupations l'absorberont: d'abord la question des rapports de l'art avec la technique, ensuite le mystère de la lumière.

Pour Moholy-Nagy, l'outil employé, qu'il soit manuel ou mécanique, n'a pas d'importance pourvu qu'il soit maîtrisé et qu'il permette d'approfondir le champ d'intervention de l'artiste qui l'utilise; vivant au XX^{e} siècle, il est normal de retrouver dans les techniques artistiques l'influence de la civilisation de la machine et, plutôt que de la refuser et de se réfugier dans le classicisme et la tradition, il est préférable de se lancer à la conquête de nouveaux média, afin d'obtenir des effets novateurs pour bouleverser la vision qu'on se fait traditionnellement de l'environnement: la caméra, le pistolet à peinture, le phonographe, les mécanismes et automatismes, les installations industrielles même, tout est prétexte à de nouvelles expérimentations artistiques.

La photographie lui fait également découvrir la lumière et ses possibilités; il recherche des effets de transparence, de projection et cherche a comprendre les manifestations de la lumière et de la couleur pure sous toutes leurs formes. Ces recherches l'amèneront à mettre au point une véritable méthode expérimentale propre à la découverte de nouvelles lois visuelles. Leurs conséquences sont, selon lui, considérables pour les arts, mais plus généralement pour la conscience sociale; elles sont exposées dans les deux livres majeurs qu'il nous a laissés: *The New Vision et Vision in motion*,[2] qui constituent une véritable esthétique de l'art avant-gardiste.

Lorsqu'il est appelé en 1923 par Walter Gropius à enseigner au Bauhaus à Weimar, il construit un enseignement entièrement inspiré de sa propre expérience et fondé précisément sur cette méthode d'expérimentation; il aimait comparer son atelier à un laboratoire où étaient mis en chantier les modes de vie futurs.

Plus tard, à Chicago, en 1937, il sera invité à fonder un institut inspiré des principes qui rendirent célèbre le Bauhaus, obligé par les évènements à fermer ses portes en 1933. Sous le nom de *New Bauhaus*, puis de *School of Design*, enfin de *Institute of Design* après avoir obtenu le rang universitaire en 1944, cette école inaugurera aux Etats-Unis le premier programme pédagogique réellement moderne, voue à la formation de designers industriels. Moholy-Nagy consacra tous ses efforts à la direction et au développement de l'école, malgré les nombreuses difficultés financières et l'imcompréhension, sinon l'hostilité, qu'elle suscitait. Présumant de ses forces, il mourut en 1946 quelques années avant que l'Institute of Design soit invité à constituer un département du prestigieux Illinois Institute of Technology.

La méthode ou: *Vision in Motion*

Pour Moholy-Nagy, l'activité artistique, tout comme celle de l'ingénieur, doit s'attacher à résoudre un problème. L'un des premiers auxquels il fut confronté est celui de la ligne: impressionné par les dessins de Rembrandt et de Van Gogh, il découvre qu'un élément simple, abstrait, la ligne, a des possibilités expressives très puissantes, selon la manière dont elle est utilisée; ainsi la ligne peut représenter des objets mais surtout elle rend visible la complexité intellectuelle et émotive de l'artiste, en constituant ce qu'il appelle "un diagramme de forces intérieures." Il découvre ensuite, peu à peu, en approfondissant d'autres problèmes, les éléments de base de tout langage visuel: le point, la couleur, les formes simples, ainsi que la signification réelle de la composition, équilibre parfait de ces éléments en relations mutuelles. Le sujet du tableau n'a donc plus aucune importance, pas plus que son titre; seule importe la manipulation des éléments et la solution, provisoire, qui en résulte. Du problème de la ligne, il passe ensuite à celui de la couleur qu'il aborde par la peinture, puis par le collage, et à celui, plus immatériel encore et plus "abstrait," de la transparence. C'est dans la photographie, et plus particulièrement dans les photogrammes, qu'il s'attaque à ce problème et à la recherche de l'équilibre délicat et subtil des contrastes, rattachant le tout à celui plus fondamental, originel, de la lumière; il envisage ainsi la possibilité de "compositions de lumière" où la lumière, nouvel élément plastique, serait contrôlée tout comme la couleur en peinture et le son en musique."[3] Le photogramme, véritable signature de la lumière sur l'émulsion photographique, permet de mettre en évidence l'opposition des contrastes, la variété infinie des intensités de gris comprises entre le noir et le blanc, l'interpénétration des masses lumineuses, et de construire un espace tridimensionnel à l'aide de ces seuls éléments. La technique de projection utilisée pour ces recherches lui inspire d'autres expériences qu'il reprendra plus tard dans sa peinture, après une interruption de plusieurs années à la suite de sa démission du Bauhaus en 1928. C'est en Angleterre, en 1935, qu'il fabrique sur de nouveaux principes, son premier "modulateur spatial"; ce dispositif est constitué d'une plaque de plastique transparente (rhodoi"d ou plexiglas) sur laquelle est peint un motif abstrait qui se projette sur un support en contre-plaqué blanc ou gris pâle; c'est une transcription, par des moyens techniques entièrement différents, des résultats optiques obtenus lors des manipulations photographiques. La lumière est utilisée comme un matériau qui, par projection et

effets visuels particuliers, permet de produire une illusion de profondeur, d'espace, de mouvement même. (Fig. 1). Dans toutes ces oeuvres il est frappant de retrouver des archétypes (*Urformen*), tels que les éléments simples qui apparurent dans ses premiers dessins et photographies (Fig. 2); la ligne, le rectangle, le cercle, la portion de cercle, le point. Mais, encore une fois, le motif ici ne signifie rien et ne représente rien de particulier. Ce qui importe, c'est cette méthode qui consiste à circonscrire un élément à la lumière d'un problème particulier; en le déformant, en le répétant, en modifiant sa texture, sa brillance, sa tonalité, son épaisseur, sa position par rapport à d'autres éléments, une image nouvelle de la réalité se crée, perçue ainsi sous divers éclairages par une "vision en mouvement," un peu à la manière des peintres cubistes qui présentaient simultanément plusieurs faces d'un même objet dans le même tableau.

Lorsqu'on contemple une oeuvre de Moholy-Nagy, on se trouve donc en présence d'une étape d'un processus vers la résolution d'un problème plus global de lumière, ou de mouvement, ou d'équilibre; c'est aussi une solution particulière momentanée qui nous fait réfléchir, comme il l'a fait lui-meme à un moment particulier de sa vie. L'objectif d'une telle démarche artistique est de modifier la conscience du spectateur engagé ainsi sur la voie d'une recherche qui devra s'élargir à tout son environnement physique, puis humain: "L'art peut mener à la solution de problèmes sociobiologiques avec autant d'efficacité que les révolutionnaires engagent à l'action politique."[4]

La leçon ou: *Von Material zu Architektur*

Cette méthode d'investigation artistique est à la base de la pédagogie de Moholy-Nagy pour qui le processus d'expression et de découverte est plus important que le produit final: "Ce n'est pas le produit, mais l'individu qui constitue le but à atteindre."[5] C'est une méthode *intégratrice*, non-directive, centrée sur le talent et les capacités propres de l'étudiant. Le professeur n'est là que pour guider, apporter une appréciation, encourager, jamais pour imposer sa méthode, encore moins sa solution. Il faut faire appel à tout le potentiel de l'individu, en prenant soin d'équilibrer les facultés intellectuelles, émotionnelles et sensorielles; tout objet sera considéré d'un triple point de vue artistique, technique et scientifique.

Ainsi, par exemple, un simple carré de plastique transparent peut être utilisé pour étudier les propriétés techniques du matériau lorsqu'on le travaille avec des outils manuels et mécaniques: il peut

être percé. scié, gratté, plié, poli, collé, soudé, etc. (Fig. 3). On exploite ensuite ces qualités pour le transformer, intuitivement d'abord (sculpture) (Fig. 4), intentionnellement ensuite en vue de lui donner une forme et une fonction particulière (design): poignée de tiroir, bijou, support. (Figs. 5 & 6). La pièce ainsi obtenue, ou la sculpture, servira à l'étude visuelle par le dessin, l'étude de texture, la projection de lumière, la photographie, le film, les plans d'exécution. On pourra également rechercher les divers modes d'assemblage avec d'autres matériaux, ainsi que la possibilité de fabrication industrielle. Aucune contrainte particulière n'est imposée avant que l'étudiant ait envisagé toutes les possibilités techniques et artistiques, et par voie de conséquence, ses propres capacités créatives mobilisées par ces exercices. Il doit parvenir, avec cette méthode, à dégager les éléments fondamentaux d'une totalité complexe pour les analyser un par un, et s'en servir plus tard pour construire. La rapidité de l'intuition et la vision synthétique mises en oeuvre lors de la phase d'expérimentation laissent alors la place à la systématisation de l'analyse pour aboutir, en intégrant les deux, à la maturité du design. C'est dans ce type de progression que l'étudiant affine ses outils conceptuels et développera une méthode originale, afin d'appréhender les exigences les plus complexes des projets qui lui seront soumis.

Conclusion

Le physicien Werner Heisenberg, commentant le bouleversement scientifique du début du XX^{e} siècle, constate que "la connaissance des atomes et de leur mouvement *en soi*, c'est-à- dire indépendamment de notre observation expérimentale, ne constitue plus le but de la recherche"; il en conclut que "le sujet de la recherche n'est plus la nature en soi, mais la nature livrée à l'interrogation humaine."[6] Singulièrement, et sensiblement à la même époque, Moholy-Nagy fait la réflexion suivante, lorsqu'il découvre la propriété expressive de la ligne: "J'essayais d'analyser des corps, des visages, des paysages avec mes *lignes*, mais les résultats m'échappaient des mains, allaient au-delà de l'intention analytique. Les dessins (...) représentaient moins des objets que mon excitation à leur propos."[7] Cette analogie frappante indique bien le caractère révolutionnaire de la méthode artistique de Moholy-Nagy et de la pédagogie qui en découle, qui s'opposent radicalement à la tradition académique basée sur l'imitation et la soumission au modèle du maître d'atelier. Ce qui prime, au-delà du résultat final. C'est le cheminement de

l'artiste et la modification de conscience résultant du dialogue avec son sujet de recherche; le but n'est plus d'atteindre une norme fixée par une école ou par la mode, mais d'inventer constamment de nouveaux dialogues possibles en utilisant au maximum les possibilités techniques des outils qui sont à sa disposition. Un problème doit être attaqué par toutes ses facettes et non plus par une méthode unidirectionnelle qui lui enlève toute sa richesse et stérilise la créativité de l'artiste et de l'étudiant. Une telle méthode anticipe sur les modèles que proposeront plus tard les théoriciens des sciences physiques et surtout des sciences humaines, irréductibles aux paradigmes rationalistes du XIX[e] siècle. Ces méthodes, dites holistiques ou *systémiques*, prennent soin d'inclure dans leurs investigations l'expérimentateur lui- même, et concentrent leur regard sur les interactions entre les divers intervenants, davantage que sur les objets eux-mêmes; toute connaissance devient ainsi nécessairement contextuelle.[8]

Une conséquence importante de cette attitude nouvelle, dont Moholy-Nagy avait très tôt pris conscience, est que l'art, tout comme la science, doit dorénavant répondre de son utilité auprès de la société, en remplissant une fonction pédagogique et idéologique; l'artiste nouveau doit guider le public et lui proposer des expériences, des problèmes qui, par l'éveil et l'élargissement de la conscience qu'ils provoquent, le mèneront vers davantage de liberté: "une approche prétendument *apolitique* de l'art est une illusion, une hypocrisie."[9]

Références

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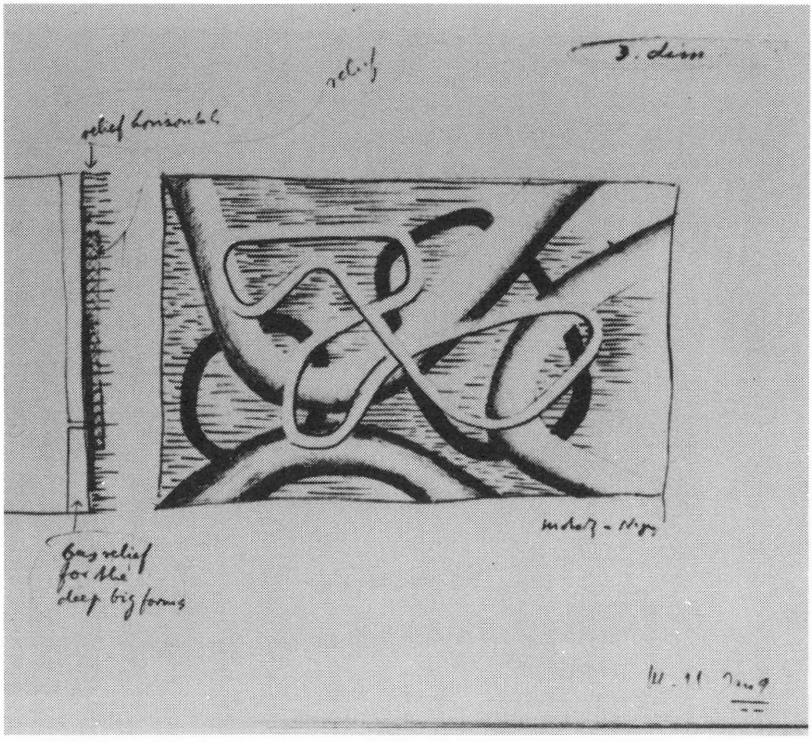
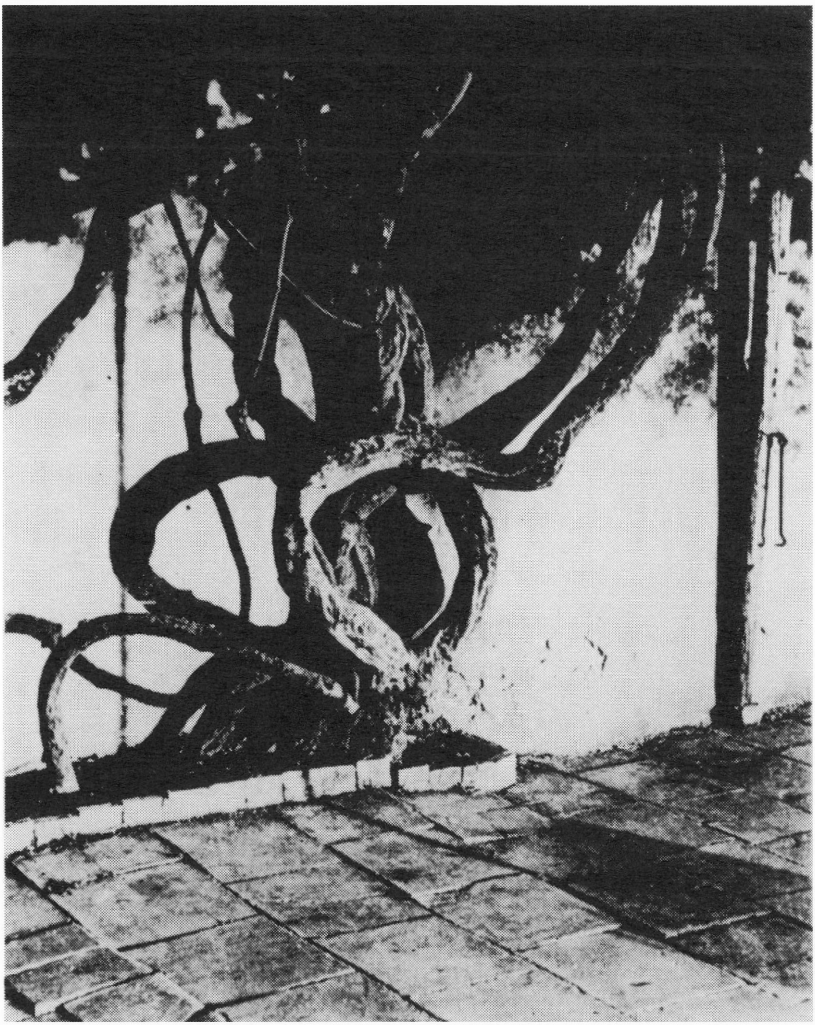
2. Moholy-Nagy, L., *The New Vision* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1938), et *Vision in Motion* (Chicago: Paul Theobald, 1947).
3. Moholy-Nagy, L., "Light: a Medium of Plastic Expression," *Broom*, 4, 1923; p. 283.
4. "Abstract of an Artist," p. 76.
5. Moholy-Nagy, L., *Von Material zu Architektur*, facsimilé de l'édition de 1929 (Mayence et Berlin: F. Kupferberg, 1968); p. 14.
6. Heisenberg, W., "Les sciences de la nature en tant que parties des actions réciproques entre l'homme et la nature," in *La nature dans la physique contemporaine* (Paris: Gallimard, coll. Idées, 1962); p. 29.
7. "Abstract of an Artist," p. 68.
8. Voir par exemple Feyerabend, P., *Contre la méthode* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), et Lévy, R., "Vers un cadre d'enseignement du design," Conseil national de l'esthétique industrielle, Ottawa, 1975.
9. "Abstract of an Artist," p. 76.

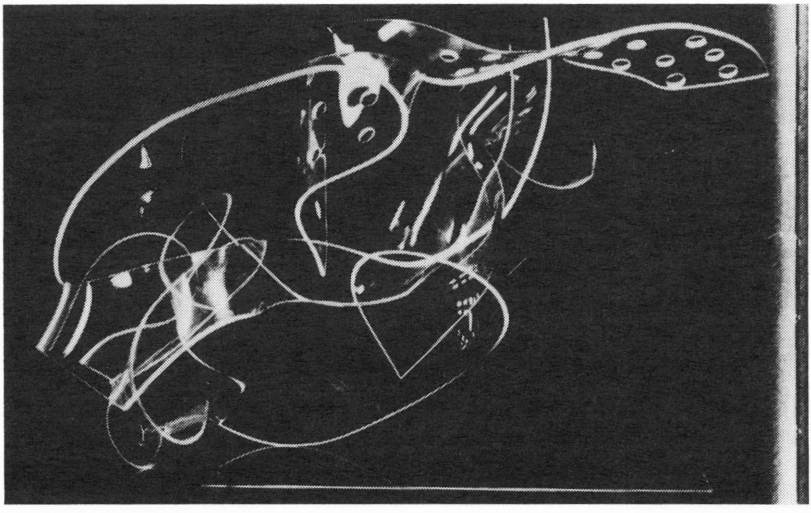


1. László Moholy-Nagy. Croquis pour modulateur spatial. (Vues de profil et de face.) Papier, crayon, 1937. 21 X 27 cm. (Collection Bauhaus Archiv, Berlin) Après: Krisztina Passuth. *Moholy-Nagy*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1985, p. 209.

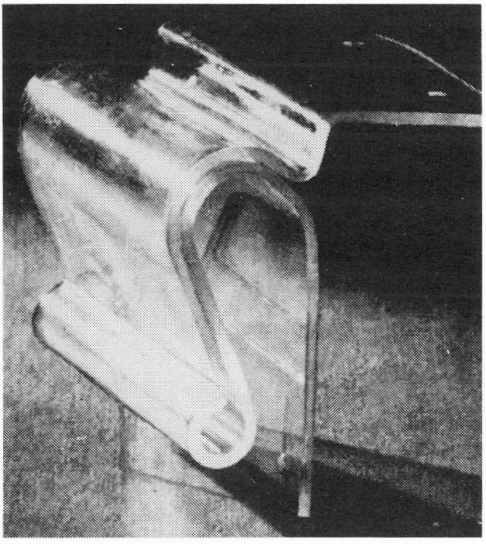


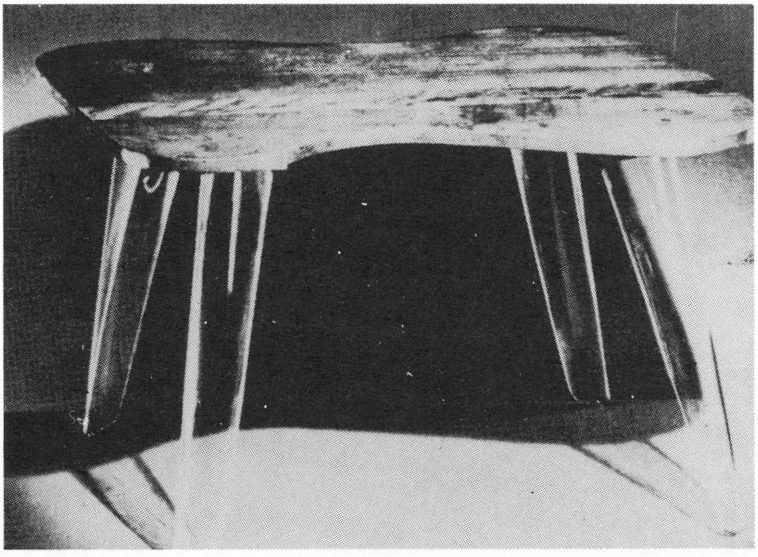
2. László Moholy-Nagy. "Wistaria." Photographie, 1924 (?). 21 X 27.2 cm. (Collection Hattula Moholy-Nagy) Après: Andreas Haus. *Moholy-Nagy. Photographs and Photograms.* New York: Pantheon, 1980: p. 82.

3. Un étudiant de l'Institute of Design travaillant sur une plaque d'acrylique (plexiglas). Photographie. Après: László Moholy-Nagy. *Vision in Motion*. Chicago: Paul Theobald and Co., 1961, p. 93.



4. Utilisation scupturale du travail sur acrylique. Sculpture de László Moholy-Nagy, 1945. 49 X 37.5 X 40 cm. (Collection Hattula Moholy-Nagy) Après: Krisztina Passuth. *Moholy-Nagy*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1985, p. 220.





5. et 6. Deux applications pratiques du travail sur acrylique: poignées de tiroir (Robert Gatechair, 1942), pieds de table (Kenneth Evertsen, 1941) réalisés a l'Institute of Design. Après: László Moholy-Nagy. *Vision in Motion*. Chicago: Paul Theobald and Co., 1961, pp. 93, 59.

Hungarian Studies Review Vol. XV, No. 1 (Spring 1988)

Time and Space in the Work of László Moholy-Nagy

Dianne Kirkpatrick

László Moholy-Nagy took the role of the artist seriously, believing that "art is the most complex, vitalizing, and civilizing of human actions," and that the artist in each era "disentangles the most essential strands of existence from the... chaotic complexities of actuality, and weaves them into an emotional fabric of compelling validity, characteristic of himself as well as of his epoch."[1] Throughout his career, Moholy thought deeply about what kind of art would be best and most appropriate for the world in which he lived. His ideas infused his work in all media. His art can be understood more completely when it is seen within the context of the concepts the artist consciously sought to express.

Underlying the creation of all Moholy's mature works were his ideas about the time-space nature of our world. He believed we are

> heading toward a kinetic, time-spatial existence; toward an awareness of the forces plus their relationships which define all life and of which we had no previous knowledge and for which we have as yet no exact terminology... Space-time stands for many things: relativity of motion and its measurement, integration, simultaneous grasp of the inside and outside, revelation of the structure instead of the facade. It also stands for a new vision concerning materials, energies, tensions, and their social implications.[2]

Because Moholy held that the "space-time experience is... a biological function of every person," essential as one of "the laws of life which guarantee an organic development,"[3] he felt it to be imperative that each of us develop a new way of seeing if we were to exist fully in this new era. Moholy wrote at length about this quality as "vision in motion... simultaneous grasp... creative performance—seeing, feeling and thinking in relationship and not as a series of isolated phenomena.[4]

For Moholy, it was the artist who would create the visual works that could train people to experience the world in this new way. He exhorted his students in Europe and America to join him in research to produce the forms of art that would best embody this "vision in motion," believing that such works should use new technology and materials, because these were especially suited to translating the modern time-space experience into art.[5] Compositionally, the new art would draw on the ways our time-space perceptions have been expanded as our eyes, ears, sense of balance and equilibrium have been increasingly exposed to experiences in speeding cars, trains, and planes, and through x-ray cameras, telescopes, microscopes and the like. Eventually, the artist's research would develop "a genuine space system, a dictionary for space relationships, as we have today our colour system or as we have our sound system for musical composition."[6] It was to the development of this visual space system that Moholy devoted his life and his art.

Moholy studied the history of the artistic representation of space and time in art to better understand the ways in which its image in our age differed from that of earlier times. From early in his career, Moholy felt that the complexities of our own age could best be expressed in a non-objective (i.e. non-mimetic) art employing a visual system of spatial organization developed by artists as they did research into "the specific psycho-physical role of each colour value," the effects of various types of lighting, and the expressive potential of new materials and compositional devices.[7]

Moholy felt that space-time art was to be based on research into human perception. He wrote of the importance of an understanding of how we grasp "the dimensions: one, two, three, and more" of space-time. He particularly stressed the need for an understanding of how we perceive *space*—through the sounds that reach our ears, the cues that stir our kinaesthetic body senses, and the sights that meet our eyes. The kinaesthetic experiences he noted as coming to us through "motion, balance, and horizontal, vertical, diagonal, jumps, [...] circles, curves, windings (spiral stairways)," and the visual information through "wide perspectives, surfaces meeting and cutting one another, corners, moving objects with intervals between them... [and] layering [that binds] different space and time levels together."[8]

His second wife Sibyl reports that when Moholy described his aesthetic ideas aloud he often used a gesture in which "he crossed his spread fingers in the form of a grill... the most characteristic expression of his drive toward integration."[9] The interwoven layered

strips that this image conveyed emerged early in Moholy's art: "I find that during the last twenty-five years, since I began my abstract paintings, I did not paint any shape which was not the interpretation of the... strip, used in my first collages."[10] (illustration 1)

Chief among the devices Moholy used to represent the simultaneity of modern space-time was transparency, which implies the layered inside-outside space of x-rays and glass architecture, and also suggests light passing through surfaces. For Moholy, light and shadow were essential components in the artistic expression of time-space. Light had a special significance for the artist from early in his life when he wrote: "Light, ordering Light... Light, total Light, creates the total man... Space, time, material—are they one with Light?"[11] He believed that light was a natural medium for modern art: "Ever since the invention of photography, painting has advanced by logical stages of development 'from pigment to light.' We have now reached the stage when it shoud be possible to discard brush and pigment and to 'paint' by means of light itself."[12]

But mastering the medium of light meant mastering the medium of darkness too, because Moholy saw that "All human life has its shadow. Without it, it stops being human."[13] In his abstract work, Moholy's techniques for modulating light included painting on reflective metal and on layers of transparent plastic, bending plastic sheets into three-dimensional forms, and designing sculptural pieces especially to exploit the kinetic possibilities of shifting light and shadow. Moholy saw this new art as indicative of "a trend away from... [the mere] pigmentation of surfaces toward a kinetic 'light painting.' The problem" writes Moholy, "is only how to control [the effects of] these coloured 'light paintings' with the same precision as the painter of yesterday controlled the effects of his pigments."[14]

Moholy called his works in this mode "light modulators." He created light modulator paintings, relief paintings, sculptures, and stage sets to exploit the ways in which the changes wrought by shifting light and shadow could express "vision in motion." And he persistently stalked structures and objects which modulated light with both still and movie cameras, expressing his appreciation of the human face as "the best-known of all light modulators."[15]

For Moholy, photography ("writing with light") was particularly suited to expressing space-time "vision in motion." Black-and-white camera photography could capture the real interdependence of light and shadow, and the transparent layering found by shooting pictures through glass surfaces or capturing reflections could be augmented by superimposing two or more images. Photographs of all sorts could

teach much about the nature of "light texture" as well as revealing new spatial relationships if taken from a bird's eye, worm's eye, or other unusual angle of vision.[16] True photographic space-time relationships must echo actual human perception. Not only is our world unevenly lit, but things appear to us with differing sharpness:

> How rarely does one actually see in sharp focus! There is an interplay of advancing and receding forms in every movement. One of them is always 'out of focus.' And from the corners of our eyes we are conscious of shadowy objects and anticipated faces. The invariably sharp focus of the commercial camera... creates a shadowless world... Vision becomes two-dimensional. [17]

Such flattening was antithetical to developing "vision in motion." In his photographic and cinematographic work, Moholy strove to embrace the rich panoply of optical texture that is a part of everyday experience.

Perhaps the purest use of light, shadow, and focus to express the space-time of "vision in motion" was in his photograms.[18] In these images he carefully manipulated lights shining through, and shadows cast from various objects onto the photo-sensitive paper. The results were two-dimensional images that create the illusion of three-dimensional space through the employment of compositional devices found in his other abstract works such as layering, transparency, spatial cues, and chiaroscuro.[19] He felt the photogram to be "a diagrammatic record of the motion of light translated into black and white and grey values [that] can lead to a grasp of the new types of spatial relationships and spatial rendering." The "hidden world" revealed by the photogram's reversals of light and dark inspired Moholy to experiment with negative prints of his conventional photographs and portions of his films.[20]

In his photography, his sculpture, and his theatre set design, Moholy often used mirroring, varying degrees of focus, and strong chiaroscuro effects to reveal new patterns of time-space relationship. His camera found subjects that incorporated these features. His photograms were created to include them. The character of the metals and plastics he chose for his "light modulator" sculptures and paintings emphasized these qualities. His sets for operatic productions like *Tales of Hoffmann* (Berlin, 1929) and *Madame Butterfly* (Berlin, 1930) were constructed so that changes in light significantly transformed the appearance of the stage:

[For *Tales of Hoffmann*] Moholy created imaginary spaces through mere scaffolding which could be set into flowing motion. Light and color effects corresponded to musical-dramatic sequences... [For *Madame Butterfly*, a] rotating scaffolding created constantly new space-effects through light and color projections on the stage horizon.[21]

Later in his life, it was Moholy's careful control of light and shadow patterning that made legible the complex effects of simultaneity in the images he produced in all media.

Moholy incorporated the effects of motion and time in space in all his works, most often translating "vision in motion" into non-kinetic pieces. He used *actual* motion in some three-dimensional pieces and in his films. The most complex of Moholy's motion sculptures was the *Lichtrequisit einer elektrischen Bühne*. (*Light Display Machine*—also known in English as the *Light-Space-Modulator* or the *Light Prop*). (illustration 2) Moholy worked on the design for this device from 1922 until 1930. He intended it to operate within an ambience of shifting coloured light beams which would create an ever-changing display of light and shadow: "The moving sculpture had 140 light bulbs connected wth a drum contact. This was arranged so that within a two-minute turning period, various colored and colorless spotlights were switched on, creating a light display on the inside walls of a cube."[22] At the time Moholy began work on the machine, he was teaching at the Bauhaus, and there he was but one of several people experimenting independently with a moving light apparatus. But his *Light Display Machine* differed from the works of his Bauhaus colleagues. Their inventions were designed to project shifting shapes of coloured light onto a screen, while Moholy's was conceived so as to fill a volume of space with the moving physical shapes of the sculpture, in addition to the light beams and shadows projected through its forms.

Moholy never managed to achieve his ambitions to create kinetic pieces with:

hand-controlled or automatic systems of powerful light generators enabling the artist to flood the air—vast halls, or reflectors,... fog, gaseous materials or clouds, with brilliant visions of multicolored light... [or] a monumental fresco of light, consisting of flat and curving walls covered with artificial substances, such as galalith, trolit, chromium, nickel—a structure to be transformed into a resplendent symphony of light by the simple manipulation of a series of switches, while the controlled movements of the various reflecting surfaces would express the basic rhythm of the piece.[23]

But a "performance" of his *Light Display Machine* must have given a taste of what that vision might have been like had it been fulfilled.

The relationships between all of the things Moholy found important to space-time "vision in motion" could be explored with particular freedom using a motion picture camera. For him motion pictures would always "more than anything else, fulfill the requirements of space-time accentuated visual art."[24] He attempted to explore these possibilities in a series of experimental films. When Moholy and Sibyl were working on one of his films in 1930, he told her: "I'm not thinking in chronological terms. At least not in the accepted sense. The rhythm of this film has to come from the light—it has to have a light-chronology."[25]

In all his films this "light chronology" was developed through patterns of light and dark—in the live-action films this was supplemented by all of his other space-time devices. In addition he created a different sort of simultaneous vision by linking objects from disparate environments through their visual juxtaposition.

Before he made his first film, Moholy was already working out the ways all of this would operate cinematically. The graphically-designed "typophoto" pages of his first film script, *A Nagyváros dinamikája* (Dynamics of the Metropolis, published in the 15 September 1924 issue of *Ma*), incorporate shifts in scale and visual texture, and an a-linear flow of "subject" accomplished through jump-cuts and idea-paired juxtapositons, as well as through patterns of motion within the frames of each page. Each of these qualities found their place in Moholy's realized films. An unrealized dream was to have a special theatre with simultaneous multiple projections of varied images.

Restricted finances and logistics limited his personal cinema work to eight short films. The first five were personal projects, carried out essentially on his own. *Berliner Stilleben* (Berlin Still Life, 1926) and *Marseille vieux port* (Marseilles Old Port, 1929) were experimental time-space city portraits. *Lichtspiel Schwarz-weiss-grau* (Lightplay Black-White-Gray, 1930) was a visual experiment in chiaroscuro time-space relationships; a ballet of light created using the *Light Display Machine*, and shot so as to intensify the mirroring, juxtaposition, and spatial layering effects of the device. (He also extended the ideas of the *Light Display Machine* in special light-space effects he designed for Alexander Korda and H. G. Wells' 1936 production *The Shape of Things to Come*—but only a few of them found their way into the finished film). *Tönendes ABC* (Sound ABC, 1932), was Moholy's lone attempt to pursue some of his ideas about an

appropriate acoustical language for cinema. This film has been lost, but Sibyl Moholy-Nagy described it as having had patterns scratched directly onto the sound track, which were also filmed and projected as the visual imagery—a tantalizing forerunner of similar effects employed in the films of the Canadian animator Norman McLaren. *Zigeuner* (Gypsies, 1932) depicted life in a community existing apart from, yet within the bourgeois world of Weimar Berlin.

This group of five films constituted Moholy's research into how his space-time ideas could be translated into the medium of the motion picture. When Sibyl asked him why he did these films outside the commercial film production arena he replied: "Who will work on problems of focus and motion, cutting, simultaneity and all that, if it is not ourselves?"[26]

Viewing Moholy's Marseilles, Berlin, and Gypsy films is a curious experience. Missing is the unity of subject-matter our movie-going has led us to expect in documentary films. In its place is a rapid cascade of glimpses into details of life in the particular environments depicted. Footage from separate scenes is intercut in segments so short that two or more subjects merge in our mind—an effective alternate cinematic technique for simultaneity. A viewer carries away from a showing of one of these films a lingering sense of place and culture tied to strongly remembered sights, people and actions. The effect resembles the way one remembers a place from a tourist visit, when new sights become memorable in the way they are filtered through our individual physical, mental, and emotional states. At its best, Moholy's cinematic style speaks through the physical world to the psychological time-space of the viewer.

The abrupt multiple cuts help to build the "light chronology" of each film. *Marseille vieux port*, for example, begins in the open and bright spaces of the more affluent parts of town. We move from a view seen through a second-floor window—the artist's hotel, perhaps—to the pavement, where the camera reveals patterns of motion in the streets and cafés, the town square, in shop window reflections, and as seen through the windows of a bus and several cars. Gradually we "find" the waters of the port and the *transponder* "bridge" which carried people from the new part of town to the older. Then, magically, we become enmeshed in the moving patterns of the high tower-ferry *transponder* as it moves across, over moored small craft and sparkling water to the more ancient, poorer section of town. There the "shadow" part of life dominates, alleviated only by occasional flashes of light. Finally we are back on the quay after a rainstorm, and then we move away from the city on a boat, where

waves and ships move past the city pier. In the final scene of the film, there is a blend of light and shadow as gulls wheel over darkened water. (illustration 3)

Moholy took his still camera as well as his cinema camera to Marseilles. Some of his most oft-published photographs are of compositions also found in the movie. Several of these images—like the shot near the film's beginning taken through the second-story window—reappear on the pages of a book of contact prints which Moholy probably assembled in 1937, on the eve of his departure for the United States. Sixty-nine pages from this contact book (which initially had at least 160 pages) survive in the collection of the artist's daughter Hattula Moholy-Nagy. Moholy may have compiled the contact book partly to provide a compact catalogue of his photographic work to show people in America, but the pages are no more like the usual photographer's reference contact book than Moholy's city films are like the usual documentary.

It seems that the artist assembled all the images he wanted to take with him, and that then he could not resist making an a-logical space-time composition on the blank pages. Moholy's camera used cut film and produced loose contact prints, which he could freely arrange in any order. And the orderings he chose were varied. As contact book page 102 shows, he did not feel compelled to stick to shots of one subject, or one time, on one page. (illustration 4) Here the Marseilles window and a rooftop "easel" that turns up later in the Marseilles film, join photographs taken on Moholy's Scandinavian trip of 1930. On this page, as elsewhere, we see that he preferred a vertical format for his photographs, though he did take horizontal pictures occasionally. These he upended on the pages of the contact book, so that the pictures and residual surface of the page as a whole combine to form a kind of window grid through which we see spatial patterns of light and dark. It is the production of this chiaroscuro pattern that seems to have been Moholy's impellent motive for the placement of the images on each page. This suggests that he saw each page as a compositional exercise in its own right. A recurrent pattern employed in these compositional exercises is analogous to one which Moholy repeatedly uses in the Marseilles film: Dark, upright forms flank a lighter strip in the centre, in which a darker band zig-zags through the space from the top of the page (or screen) to its bottom.

In the contact book, as in his photography, drawing, painting, collages, prints, cinema, set design, commercial art and industrial design, Moholy pursued the expression of twentieth century space-

time with "vision in motion." As Sibyl Moholy-Nagy wrote: for László Moholy-Nagy, "seeing was a philosophy of life."[27]

Notes

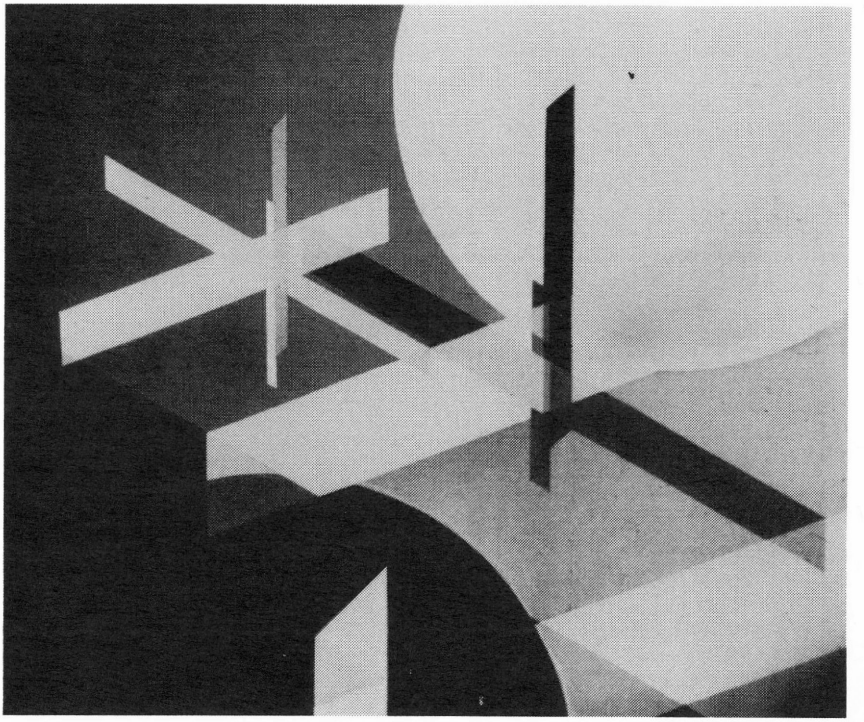
All the photos were supplied through the courtesy of Hattula Moholy-Nagy.

1. László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Chicago: Paul Theobald and Company, 1969), pp. 11 and 28.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 9 and 34.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.
5. See especially: Moholy-Nagy, "Directness of the Mind: Detours of Technology," *Bauhaus* I (1926), reprinted in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *Moholy-Nagy* (NY: Praeger Publishers, 1970), pp. 187-188; and *Vision in Motion*, passim.
6. Moholy-Nagy, "The New Bauhaus and Space Relationships," *American Architect and Architecture*, vol. 151 (December, 1937), reprinted in Kostelanetz, p. 104.
7. Moholy-Nagy, "Subject Without Art," *The Studio*, vol. 12, no. 239 (4 November 1936), reprinted in Kostelanetz, p. 43.
8. Moholy-Nagy, "Space-Time and the Photographer," *American Annual of Photography* (1942), reprinted in Kostelanetz, p. 59; Moholy-Nagy, "The New Bauhaus and Space Relationships," Kostelanetz, p. 107; and "Space-Time and The Photographer," Kostelanetz, p. 62.
9. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy, Experiment in Totality* (Cambridge, Ma., The MIT Press, 1969), p. 60.
10. László Moholy-Nagy, "Abstract of an Artist," written in 1944, published in *The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist* (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1947), p. 86.
11. Moholy-Nagy, untitled poem written early in 1917, printed in Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy*, p. 11.
12. László Moholy-Nagy, "Letter to Fra. Kalivoda," written in 1934, originally published in *Telehor* (Brno, 1936), reprinted in Kostelanetz, p. 37.
13. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy*, p. 83.
14. László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, p. 252.
15. Moholy-Nagy, "Make a Light Modulator," *Minicam*, vol. 3, no. 7 (March 1940), reprinted in Kostelanetz, p. 99.
16. Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, pp. 173, 178, and 252.
17. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy*, p. 83.
18. Photograms are photographic images made without the use of a camera. The works are produced by exposing light-sensitive paper directly to light sources, usually in the darkroom.
19. László Moholy-Nagy, "Space-Time and The Photographer," Kostelanetz, p. 61.
20. Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, pp. 188 and 197.
21. Hans Curjel, "Excerpt from Moholy-Nagy and the Theater," *Du*, 24 (November 1964), translated from the German by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy and reprinted in Kostelanetz, p. 94.
22. László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, p. 238, caption for figure 235.
23. Moholy-Nagy, "Letter to Fra. Kalivoda," Kostelanetz, p. 37.
24. Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion*, p. 271.
25. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy*, p. 69.

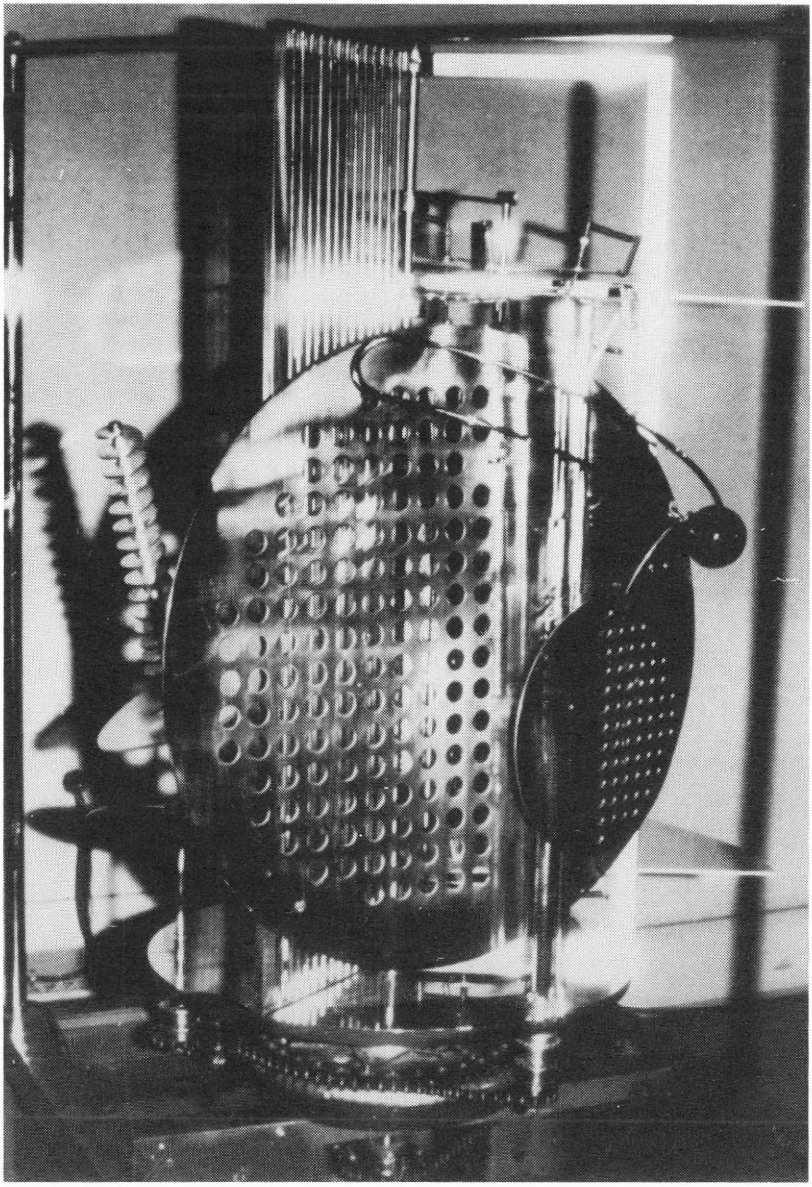
26. *Ibid.*, p. 79. For a variety of reasons Moholy's later films were less experimental. His sixth film, misleadingly titled *Architektenkongress Athen* (Architects' Congress, Athens) is a personally-produced record of the memorable 1933 CIAM (Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne) conference, held aboard a ship sailing round-trip from Marseilles to Athens, after the prospective Greek hosts (under pressure from Nazi Germany) cancelled plans to hold the assembly in the "cradle of democracy." The time-space possibilities of a meeting aboard ship may have prevented the kind of free-wheeling investigation of psychological and physical space that Moholy undertook in his urban films, for the conference film is more even in tone and in rhythm, and less varied in composition and montage than the earlier works.

Moholy's two final films were made to commission in England. *Life of a Lobster* (1935) explores the life of lobster fishers and their prey, while *The New Architecture at the London Zoo* (1936) is a visual tour through the new, prize-winning structures in that establishment. Passages in each film show Moholy's time-space cinema language at its most powerful. The overall structure of each British film is less inventive than his early independent cinema work, however. This was perhaps the result of tastes and concepts dictated by those who were paying the production bills.

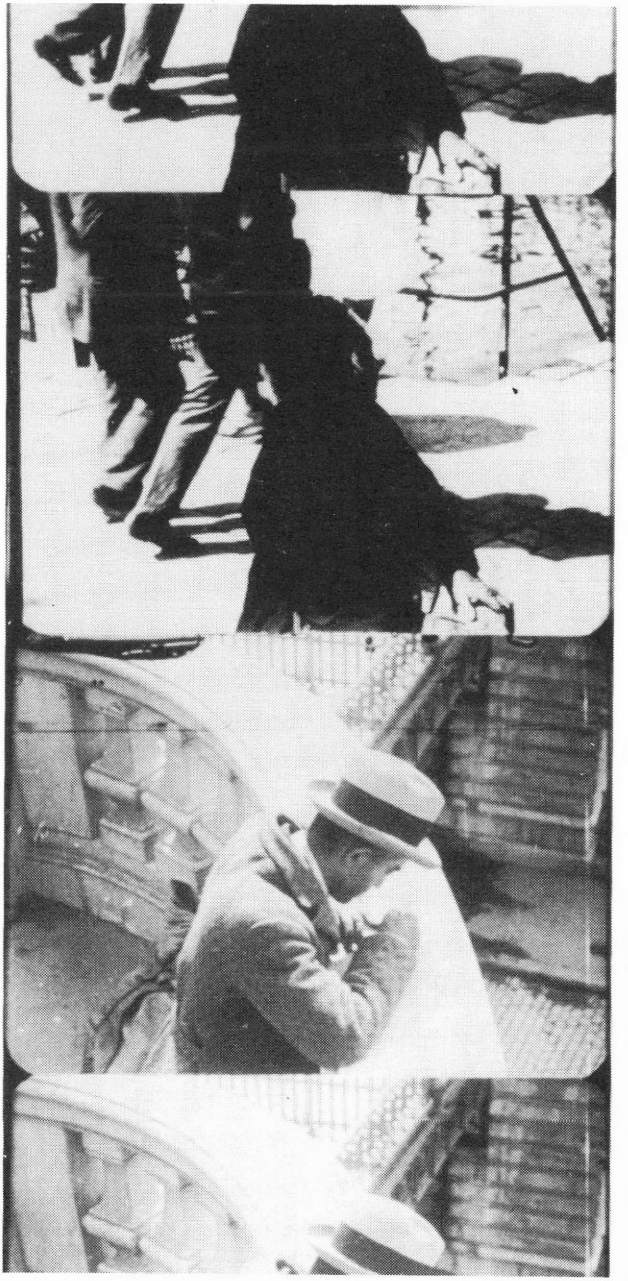
27. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy*, p. 62.



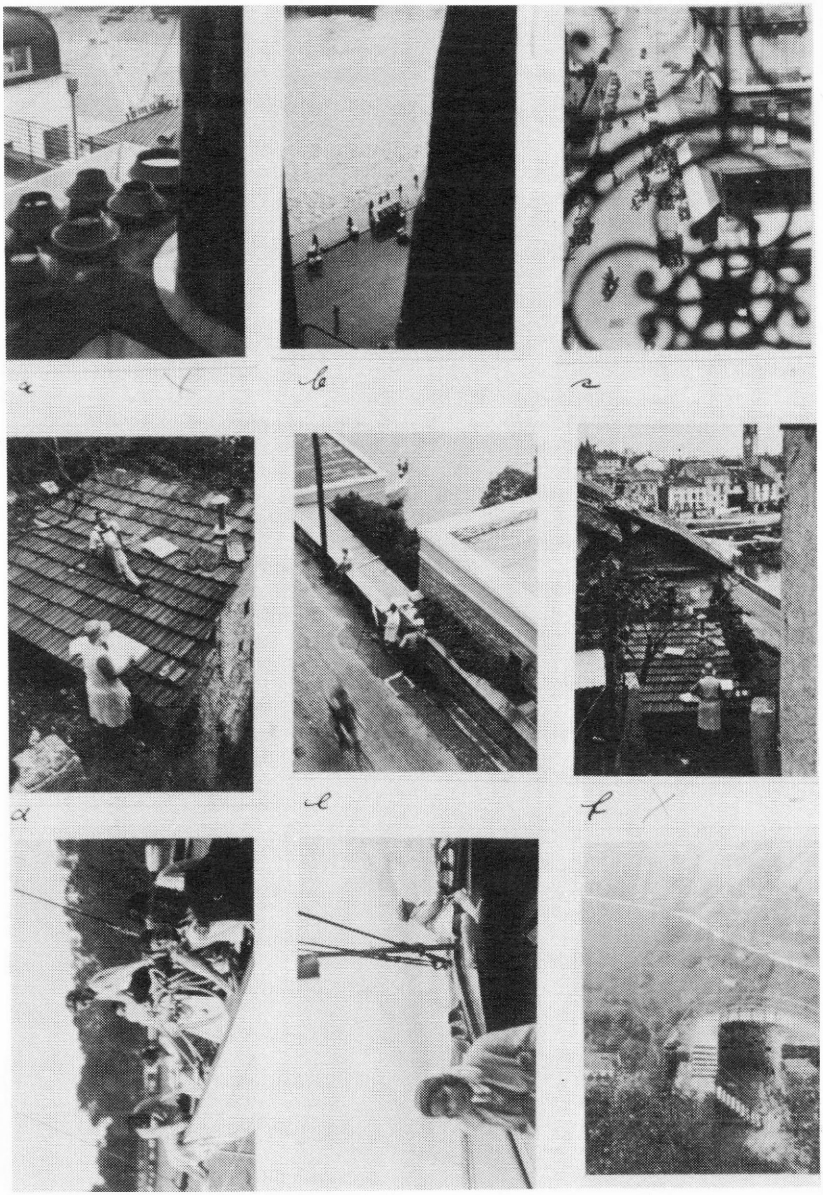
1. *Z VIII*, 1924, oil on canvas, 114 X 132 cm. (Nationalgalerie Staatliche Museen, West Berlin).



2. *Lichtrequisit einer elektrischen Bühne* (Light Display Machine), 1922-1930, wood, glass, metals, 151 X 70 X 70 cm. (Busch-Reisinger Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge Ma.)



3. Four frames at edit point from the film *Marseille vieux port*, 1929.



4. Page numbered 102 from contact book, c. 1937, sheet of mounted contact photographs (Collection Hattula Moholy-Nagy).

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DOCUMENTS ON LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY

Introduced, edited, and translated (where necessary) by Oliver Botar Jr.

1. Moholy-Nagy and the Hungarian-American Council for Democracy: Documents

a. Introduction

It is not a very well-known fact that during the war, László Moholy-Nagy expressed his continued interest in his homeland (as well as in his youthful political affiliations) by taking on the presidency of the Chicago Chapter of the Hungarian-American Council for Democracy,[1] a Leftist organization with allegedly Communist connections. We present here an interview with Zita Schwarcz, a former member of that Council; an exchange of correspondence between Moholy-Nagy and William Benton, Assistant Secretary of State of the United States in 1946; and a translation of the Council's remembrance of Moholy-Nagy in its newsletter.

In 1946, when trying to facilitate the process of his and his wife's naturalization as U.S. citizens, Moholy-Nagy downplayed his role in the Council, as well as the (Leftist) political affiliations of his youth. His daughter, Hattula Moholy-Nagy, remembers that shortly after her father sent Benton this letter, both he and his wife received their naturalization papers. She also remembers her father's energetic (and exhausting) efforts to support the Council and its candidate for a post-war Hungarian leader, Count Michael Károlyi. While Zita Schwarcz remembers these efforts as being largely an expression of Moholy-Nagy's loyalty to Károlyi, his daughter remembers them as an expression of her father's interest in the future of his homeland.[2] In her biography of Moholy-Nagy, Sibyl Moholy-Nagy remembers these activities thus:

> [...] During the war years there were long meetings with the local Office of Civilian Defense, hearings on draft defer-

ments, and weekly sessions with the American Federation of Democratic Hungarians (*sic*).

> This group was a curious assembly of doctors, lawyers, shopkeepers, artisans, and workmen, who had no more in common than their Hungarian nationality and their devotion to Moholy. Driven by the same nostalgic loyalty which had seemed so ridiculous to him in his friend Eisenstein ten years earlier, Moholy tried to 'form a permanent organization to work for the defeat of Hitler and the liberation of Hungarians from despotic rule, and to assist in the undercover democratic movement in Hungary.' It was the ultimate aim of this group to establish Count Michael Karolyi (*sic*), Hungarian land reformer and exile, as Prime Minister of a democratic Hungarian government. Moholy spoke before steel-mill workers in Gary and coal miners in Pennsylvania; he sat through endless amateur shows which are the peculiar obsession of all foreign language groups; he went to Washington to enlist support of Eleanor Roosevelt for the cause; and he spent hours on the telephone, trying to pacify the fiercely individualistic tempers of his followers.[3]

It is thus not surprising to find that after the war, Moholy-Nagy was also active as president of the Amerikai Magyar Roosevelt Bizottság (American-Hungarian Roosevelt Committee), an organization seeking to promote the re-election of F. D. Roosevelt as American President amoung Hungarian-Americans.[4]

A particularly intriguing bit of information in the memorial piece published in the newsletter of the Hungarian-American Council for Democracy is the "Moholy Nagy László Segélyalap" [László Moholy-Nagy Aid Fund] apparently administered by the Academy of Applied Arts in Budapest after Moholy-Nagy's death in November of 1946. It is likely that this Fund was Moholy-Nagy's own idea, as expressed in his will. While it is also likely that the Fund was liquidated along with all other foundations in Hungary after the Stalinists came to power in 1948, it would be a timely task to find out what happened to it, now that Foundations are once again legal in Hungary.

It is hoped that these documents will shed light on a little-known aspect of Moholy-Nagy's biography, and on what we know about his commitment to the future of his homeland.

Notes

1. The Hungarian-American Council for Democracy was founded in 1943, with Count Michael Károlyi as its honourary president, and actor Bela Lugosi as its acting president. Sándor Szilási, "Az amerikai magyarság a II. világháborúban" [American-Hungarians in the Second World War]. *Új Látóhatár* 1979, no. 2–3 as quoted in Miklós Szántó. *Magyarok Amerikában* [Hungarians in America] (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984), pp. 87–88.
2. Verbal communication with Hattula Moholy-Nagy, 1988. This interest in his homeland—indeed longing for contact with Hungarians—was also expressed in his friendship with his Hungarian-American carpenter, Kalman Toman (*sic*), as reported by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy. *Experiment in Totality*, Second Edition (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1969) pp. 237, 239.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
4. "Kiáltvány Chicago és környéke Magyarságához!" (*sic*) [Manifesto to the Hungarians of Chicago and District] (Undated flyer [1946?]). Courtesy of Zita Schwarcz.

* * * *

b. Excerpts from an interview conducted with Zita Schwarcz on László Moholy-Nagy (Hamilton, Ontario, 22 May 1988; by Oliver Botar Jr.)

Biographical Note: Zita Schwarcz was born Zita Strauss in Budapest, married a man from Chicago, and came with him to that city in 1932. Around 1944–46 she worked for the Hungarian-American Democratic Council as "Chairman of Entertainment." Her husband died in 1967, and she moved to Hamilton, Ontario in 1986.

Botar: When and how did you meet Moholy-Nagy?

Schwarcz: Moholy-Nagy I met right after the war. At that time, Hungarian Liberals, or so-called Liberals, decided to form an organization that would enhance the possibility of having a democratic Hungary, since all of them left Hungary because of Fascism... They decided to form the Hungarian-American Democratic Council. They asked Moholy to head this organization since he was the biggest name that they could find. Since Moholy was interested in Count Károlyi—who lived in London—and with whom he was in correspondence, he accepted. Also, Moholy was a humanitarian; I would say today he was an ethical Humanist... He really believed that there could be a democratic Hungary, and there will be real elections, and that there would be a kind of government where he could go back, and be an accepted person... I think he did it for Károlyi's sake. I know that he read us the letters he got from Károlyi

at every meeting; he was in constant touch with him... Since he was at that time at his Institute of Design... we held our meetings in his Institute...

Q: Do you remember exactly when this was?

Schwarcz: This must have been at the end of 1944 or the beginning of 1945... George Striker was really the godfather of the Hungarian-American Democratic Council. He and his wife Barbara were very active and worked very hard to establish it. Unbeknownst to me, [Striker] had intended to go back to Hungary eventually, and he wanted to show the Hungarian government what he did for Hungary... Moholy was very active in [the Hungarian-American Democratic Council]. There were about four or five others on the committee who were very active... I remember Dr. Tibor Rónyi, Dr. John Perl, George Striker, Béla Ruik (a Communist), Tomolicka, André Gábor (a Liberal), and myself... While Moholy did not actually draft the letters, it was he who signed them, and he came to all the meetings in the Institute—at least he was there every time that I was... I remember, however, that on one occasion I had organized a banquet, and Moholy was supposed to have been the speaker. Oszkár Jászi... and Rusztem Vámbéry were also there.[1] Anyway, Moholy could not make it, and I was absolutely hysterical because I was the entertainment chairman. So Moholy sent George Kepes,[2] who did not speak, but he had a beautiful voice so he read poetry. Anyway Oszkár Jászi and Vámbéry spoke. But then slowly [the HADC] got out of his hands, after about a year or a year-and-a-half, and he began to realize that he is not going to succeed in getting Károlyi back to Hungary to head the Hungarian government. Also, despite the fact that I did not have any conversations with him about this, I do assume now based on my present knowledge of the history of the Council—that he came to realize that it had been backed by the Communists, and I do not think he liked that, and he did resign. In fact he had a man working for him who was a Communist by the name of Tomolicka... who had been on the Council... and who [eventually] went back to Hungary. He worked for Moholy in the Institute, he was a carpenter, in fact a very good carpenter... He made the first inner spring out of wood [after Moholy's or another member of the School's design]...[3] Anyway, we [i.e. the Council] had a farewell dinner for Moholy, and very shortly afterwards I heard that he was sick. That was already when he was in the new school on Dearborn Street.

1. Oszkár Jászi was a sociologist particularly concerned with the minorities of historical Hungary. He, as well as the lawyer Rusztem Vámbéry, took part in Károlyi's short-lived Hungarian government of 1918–19.
2. György (George) Kepes (Selyp, Hungary 1906), painter, photographer, designer, teacher, editor. Belonged to Lajos Kassák's Budapest "Munka Circle" in the late 20s. After 1929, he worked with Moholy-Nagy in Berlin. Eventually, Moholy-Nagy invited him to teach at his Chicago Institute of Design. He later became professor of Visual Design at M.I.T., founded the Center for Advanced Visual Studies there, and edited the influential "Vision + Value Series" of books.
3. It is almost certain that this Tomolicka is identical with the carpenter "Kalman Toman" mentioned by Sibyl Moholy-Nagy in her biography. (See note 2. in Introduction "a." above)

* * * *

c. Correspondence Between László Moholy-Nagy and William Benton

(László Moholy-Nagy to William Benton)

February 14, 1946

Mr. William Benton
Assistant Secretary of State
State Department
Washington D.C.

Dear Mr. Benton:

I remember with great pleasure the luncheon I had with you and Mr. Fisher at my arrrival in this country in 1937, and our subsequent meetings during your work at the University of Chicago. At that time you made me feel that my ideas on art and education which I had come to teach in this country were well received by you; and I therefore hope you will understand why I turn to you in the following matter.

Though I am now almost nine years in this country my own and my wife's application (*sic*) for citizenship are being handled to say the least with a baffling slowness. The immigration authorities here in Chicago have stated repeatedly that the "FBI (*sic*) investigation has not yet been completed, and that we can not be granted citizenship before this has been done. Why I should be investigated by the FBI I do not know. Trying to find possible reasons I have come to the conclusion that my connection with the Democratic American-Hungarian Council (*sic*) might be under scrutiny. If this is the case it can be easily explained.

As an artist I never had any political affiliations. But when I was asked as a non-political educator to help unite the Hungarians in America for the Allied cause and the necessary war efforts, I felt it to be my duty to accept in spite of my many other obligations and the heavy work entailed. As soon as the war ended I terminated my connections with the Democratic American-Hungarian Council.

Whatever the causes for the delay may be, I feel rather humiliated by the handling of my case, and by the strange attitude of the Immigration authorities who have never felt it necessary to inform me about their objections. My life and work here and abroad have been always open to public opinion through my own publications, write-ups, exhibitions, and my activities as president of the Institute of Design in Chicago. When I was asked to come to this country I had to decide to come for good, and I did my best to contribute all my abilities to its civilization. This makes the treatment meted out to me by the Immigration authorities so particularly strange.

I am enclosing some of the very recent publications dealing with my work. You might also have seen the article on me in the current issue of TIME magazine (art section). A large volume "Vision in Motion", largely concerned with the educational aspects of modern art, is now in print.

I would be most grateful if you as the guardian of cultural affairs in the State Department could lend me a helping hand.

With kind regards,
Yours very sincerely

L. Moholy-Nagy

PS:
The filing numbers of our applications for citizenship are:
730p-271929 Moholy-Nagy
730p-278661 Dorothy Pauline Sibyl Moholy-Nagy

mn/sp
encl.

* * * *

(William Benton to László Moholy-Nagy)

Assistant Secretary of State
Washington

April 20, 1946.

Dear Mr. Moholy-Nagy:

If I've been of small help - I'm most happy.

Very sincerely yours,

William Benton

Mr. L. Moholy-Nagy,
2622 Lakeview Avenue
Chicago, Illinois.

(The letters are published through the courtesy of Hattula Moholy-Nagy)

* * * *

d. Excerpt from the Newsletter of 25 November 1946 of The Chicago Chapter, Hungarian-American Council for Democracy [In Hungarian]

To our Members and Friends:

A great loss has been suffered by the Chicago Hungarian family, news of it has probably already reached all of you. It is with a heavy heart that we inform you that memorial services for our beloved former president *László Moholy-Nagy* will be held on

Wednesday 27 November 1946, at *2:30 P.M.* At the Institute of Design, founded by him (632 North Dearborn Street)

While we ask all of you to attend the memorial service, we also wish to inform you that the interment will be a private, family affair. Those who wish to make donations (in lieu of flowers) to charities dear to our beloved deceased's heart, should send their contributions to *the aid of orphans in Hungary*, or to the "László Moholy-Nagy Aid Fund" at the *Academy of Applied Arts* in Budapest.

The Chicago Chapter of the Hungarian-American Democratic Council

György Striker, secretary

* * * *

Text of our press release sent to the Hungarian-language press:

> It is with heavy hearts that we remember in these few lines, our founding member and first president, László Moholy-Nagy, who was finally pulled from our ranks by a lengthy, incurable illness on Sunday, 24 November 1946.
>
> It was the Hungarian conscience of László Moholy-Nagy, our beloved president, that thrust him in 1943 into the public arena, so that he could take into his care the good name and honour of his people, during times when guilty hands had led them on a nearly fatal path.
>
> As one of the founders of the Hungarian-American Democratic Council, and as its local president, he forged together, with untiring energy, the leading figures of Chicago's progressive Hungarian community, and rallied them to the support of the ideal of a labouring, new free people's democratic Hungary, as well as to the support of our great president F. D. Roosevelt. We have his constructive will—suffused with his artistic temperament—to thank for the success of our efforts.
>
> His memory will keep alive in us László Moholy-Nagy's tireless efforts to build a new and better world.
>
> THE CHICAGO CHAPTER OF THE HUNGARIAN-AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC COUNCIL

* * * *

Sympathy telegram sent to László Moholy-Nagy's widow: [in English]

> HE WAS OUR GUIDE AT THE OUTSET, OUR SHEPHARD (*sic*) AS WE CARRIED ON THE INTEGRITY AND WISDOM OF HIS LEADERSHIP, HIS BOUNDLESS DEVOTION TO TRUTH AND BEAUTY HAVE SET EVERLASTING NORMS FOR OUR ACTIVITIES. HE LIVES ON AMONG US AS HE DOES IN HIS ART AND HIS FAMILY.
>
> CHICAGO CHAPTER, HUNG. AMER. COUNCIL FOR DEMOCRACY

(Material provided courtesy of Zita Schwarcz)

2. Two Appreciations of László Moholy-Nagy

Herbert Bayer and Walter Gropius wrote these appreciations of László Moholy-Nagy in 1965, at the request of Kálmán J. Vámos, who was preparing an article on Moholy-Nagy for the Hungarian art journal *Művészet*.[1] While Dr. Vámos had also asked the artist's widow, Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, and the Hungarian-American architect and fellow Bauhaus alumnus, Marcel Breuer, for such appreciations, it was these two which proved to be the most interesting, and they appear here for the first time. The editors would like to express their thanks to Dr. Vámos for his offer of their publication.[2]

These statements are lent particular importance due to the facts that it was Walter Gropius—that towering figure of 20th century Modernist architecture—that hired Moholy-Nagy to the staff of the Bauhaus in 1923, and that it was Bayer and Moholy-Nagy who were the most influential figures in the development of the "Bauhaus" style of Modernist typography and book design.

1. The article appeared in 1967, in an abridged version. "Emlékezés Moholy-Nagy Lászlóra (1895–1946)" vol. 8, no. 6, pp. 14–15. Letters from Kálmán J. Vámos to the editors of *Hungarian Studies Review* (14 April 1988) and Oliver Botar (3 May 1988).
2. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy had published her definitive statement on her late husband in her biography of him: *Moholy-Nagy, Experiment in Totality* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harper and Brothers, 1950). It should be noted here that some of the ideas contained in the Gropius text were expressed in his other statements on Moholy: his opening speech for Moholy's exhibition at the London Gallery (London, 31 December 1936), his eulogy at Moholy's funeral (Chicago, 27 Novemer 1946), and his introduction to Sibyl Moholy-Nagy's biography. (The first two texts are reprinted (in a Hungarian translation by Júlia Gál) in Ferenc Bodri, "Walter Gropius Moholy-Nagy Lászlóról (Dokumentumok)" [Walter Gropius on László Moholy-Nagy (Docoments)]. *Magyar Epitőművészet* (1973), pp. 60–61.

* * * *

ON LASZLO MOHOLY-NAGY

I first met Moholy-Nagy in his studio in Berlin. He was then 27 years old. His vitality and his artistic work in action made a deep impression on me almost instantaneously. I offered him right away a Chair in the Bauhaus. What the Bauhaus has achieved cannot be thought of without bringing back into one's mind the fiery spirit of Moholy, the Great Stimulator.

His greatest effort as an artist was devoted to the conquest of a new conception of space, and he commanded his genius to venture

into all realms of science and art to unriddle the phenomena of space. In painting, sculpture and architecture, in theatre and industrial design, in photography and film, in advertising and typography, he constantly strove to interpret space in its relationship to time, that is, motion in space. This I consider to be his great contribution to leadership in art. His whole work was a mighty battle to prepare the way for a new vision in that he attempted to extend the boundaries of painting and to increase the intensity of light in the picture by the use of new technical means. In his own words, a creation in space meant to him "an interweaving of parts of space which are anchored in invisible but clearly traceable relations and in the fluctuating play of forces".

Moholy was far ahead of his time, a basic innovator in contemporary art. The importance of his tremendous contributions in art will guarantee his place in history.

WALTER GROPIUS

Cambridge, Massachusetts
August 17, 1965

* * * *

herbert bayer
p. o. box b
aspen colorado 81611
tel. area code 303
925-3696

Moholy-Nagy was already an established painter when he came to the Bauhaus. As a "constructivist" he brought an individual and new orientation to the Bauhaus.

Seen today from a distant perspective, he became one of the most forceful agents toward the formulation of ideas, in the exploration of new areas, toward the moulding of the Bauhaus as a school, and particularly in the dissemination of the Bauhaus philosophy and of new concepts of art in general (to mention only his editorship of the Bauhaus books).

It was Moholy who opened the eyes of a generation to the new aspects and possibilities of photography and film. He inspired many with his interests and his concern with typographic communication was equally influential.

As an educator, he made a fundamental imprint on design schooling in the United States. One of his great contributions, as a

thinker and writer ahead of the times, is the brilliant chapter on space in his book "Vision in Motion".

The lack of direction in art today obscures temporarily the recognition of his contribution to art in a new context. The arts of the world have suffered a great loss in his untimely death, but future history will reestablish him as one of the moving forces in the concept of a new vision in this century.

Herbert Bayer
October 6, 1965