

Dadaist Text / Constructivist Image: Kassák's *Képarchitektúra*

Marian Mazzone

Many people, even if they are not art historians, are familiar with the notion that Modern art found its most quintessential form in pure geometric abstraction. Consider, for example, the work of Kazimir Malevich or Piet Mondrian. Some viewers may experience a state of perplexity or even unease when confronted with this mute geometry, sensing in these works a stripping of narrative from the picture's form and content, and an unwillingness to say anything or be anything other than pure opticality. A hostility toward language in favour of the visual has been frequently ascribed to the Modern in art history,¹ and in fact it has been used by many as a quality to distinguish the Modern from the supposedly much more heterogeneous, and genre-bending practices that characterize Postmodernism. I will not argue the whole history of Modernism here, nor resolve the Modernism vs. Postmodernism debate in this essay. However, I will suggest that Modernism's supposed emphasis on opticality is not as pure as one might think. In fact, from its genesis, there is much language embedded in the theoretical and experimental practices that produce abstract work and bring such "purity" about.² As W. J. T. Mitchell points out, there are moments when the apparent opposition within Modernism between the verbal and the visual seems to break down, and/or the verbal and visual interpenetrate in practice. What I will ultimately posit is that what is now always seen as "purity" may instead be at times mute geometry, work that has failed in its goal of communication, lost its voice, so to speak. Although some Modern artists did seek an absolute or essential style of geometric abstraction they intended as silent and not beholden to language, one that would speak to all equally and universally in terms of its pure intelligibility,³ the success of these attempts is open to debate. There are also artists who developed geometric abstraction for different reasons, with different intentions. What is important, and at

times forgotten, is that the abstract work of art in the first half of the twentieth century always had an intention, or something rather specific to “say”.

In this essay I am going to analyse the International Constructivist⁴ work produced by the important Hungarian avant-garde figure, Lajos Kassák, most especially his theory of *Képarchitektúra* [Picture-architecture], in order to argue that Kassák arrived at such a mute geometry while engaged in Dada-inspired experimentation with language. I choose Kassák as my example not because he is a singular case, but because I find his work revealing of the connections between experimental language and geometric form, implementing both as a way to construct meaning. Kassák most compellingly pursues this connection via his poetry and his Constructivist art works he named *Képarchitektúras*. Kassák's interest in Dada is first tied to Dada poetic texts and experiments in the visual formation of texts through typography. He simultaneously experiments with shaping form and meaning via typography, *and* with creating visual art in the geometric style now called International Constructivism. He used the avant-garde genre of the manifesto to evoke in textual form what the goals and intentions of his visual works were to be. Therefore, we will also consider the *Képarchitektúra* manifesto as a text that Kassák used not merely as a supplement, but rather as an important partner to his visual works. The combination or simultaneous appearance of Dadaism and Constructivism is typical during this time in a number of Central and East-Central European journals such as *Merz*, *G*, *Mecano*, *Veshch*, and *Zenit*. Also notable are the important collaborations between artists such as Kurt Schwitters and Theo Van Doesburg, Schwitters and El Lissitzky, or Hans Richter and Malevich.⁵ Thus, Kassák's simultaneous engagement with Dadaist and Constructivist methods was not unique, but noteworthy in the practice of a single artist. I map out Kassák's engagement with Dada and Constructivism through a close analysis of the texts published and the art reproduced on the pages of his journal *Ma* [Today].⁶

Ma was produced in two stages, from 1916 to 1919 in Budapest, and after Kassák's emigration, from 1920 to 1925 in Vienna. The group of Hungarians working in the *Ma* circle led by Kassák had a vision of avant-garde art that was forged during the massive social and political changes occurring in Central and Eastern Europe during the war. Art was created with the goal of improving the nation, and the first opportunity to integrate fully art into political life came during Hungary's 1919 Republic of Councils, led by Béla Kun. When that political experiment failed, *Ma*

was relocated to Vienna, and became a platform from which to participate in the ideological debates of international avant-garde art. This journal brought the Hungarians the highest international involvement and visibility of any of the Central and Eastern European avant-garde movements, because it interacted with the plethora of avant-garde journals being produced in Europe during the first decades of the 20th century.⁷

A wide variety of very recent and cutting-edge international Dada material was published in *Ma* by Kassák during the Vienna years. A letter from Kassák written during his first summer in Viennese exile thanks the Hannover critic Christoph Spengemann for the material sent concerning Schwitters, including examples of Schwitters' work that Kassák would publish in *Ma* in the January issue of 1921.⁸ Another early letter of the Vienna period is from Kassák to the Dada group of Zurich, dated December 1920, seeking to establish a reciprocal relationship for exchanging material.⁹ Kassák was not attempting to link up with simply one source, or one geographic manifestation of Dada. Instead he tried to establish contact with Dada practitioners both in Hannover and Zurich. By contacting Zurich, Kassák was attempting to reach Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, Hugo Ball and Hans Arp, who had instigated Dada at the Cabaret Voltaire. Kassák succeeded in establishing a correspondence with Tzara, and tried to solicit from Tzara information, reproductions and other works by artists such as Hans Arp, Francis Picabia, Man Ray and, of course, Tzara himself.

For example, Arp's poetry appeared in *Ma* several times in 1921 and Kassák published a special Arp issue in March of 1922, containing a number of reproductions of Arp's prints and wood sculptures.¹⁰ Francis Picabia's appearances in *Ma* consisted of a reproduction of his work *Canibalisme* in the Jubilee issue of 1 May 1922, and a Dada poem in the "French Anthology" published in the 10th anniversary issue of January, 1925.¹¹ Because such material never appeared in publication, we can surmise that some of Kassák's requests of Tzara were not fulfilled, such as those for reproductions of Man Ray's work, more Picabia material, and information on young American and English artists.¹² A few of Tzara's own writings were published in Kassák's journal, however. The first to appear (in translation), in November of 1921, was "Monsieur Antipyrine's Manifesto," a selection from *La Première Aventure Céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine* of 1916. Later, some shorter poems by Tzara were published as well.¹³ Tzara did not publish anything by Kassák in his Dada journal,

however, not even his poetry, despite the Hungarian's requests that he do so.

Kassák was also able to establish connections via *Ma* with the Berlin Dadaists such as Richard Huelsenbeck, Raoul Hausmann and George Grosz. In *Ma* Kassák published Grosz's Dadaist collages *Portrait Des Dichters Wieland Herzfelde*, *Deutschland*, *Ein Wintermärchen*, and two of Grosz's socially critical drawings. The published Hausmann material is more varied, because it includes his theoretical essays "Pré-sentismus" and "Optofonetika" produced when his engagement with Berlin Dada was largely a thing of the past. The essay "Dadaizmus" [Dadaism], Huelsenbeck's introduction to his *Dada Almanach* of 1920, was published in the March 1922 issue of *Ma*.¹⁴ This same issue had a rather pronounced Dada tone, as it also featured Arp's work. Yet it also contained Kassák's Constructivist manifesto "*Képarchitektúra*" [Picture-Architecture], a text that will be discussed in depth later in this essay.¹⁵ Juxtapositions such as this highlight the simultaneity of the engagement with Dada and International Constructivism by Kassák in *Ma*. This mix will appear regularly in *Ma* for several years, and parallels his attempt to balance and integrate Dada and Constructivism in his own artistic production, both in visual art and poetry. Although it has been argued that Kassák largely rejects Dadaism as he develops his Constructivist art,¹⁶ I am less inclined to see the break as having been a sharp one.

Kassák's Dada interests, as indicated by his choice of material published in *Ma*, did not focus on the primitive, sexualized and machine-based aesthetic of Picabia, or on the caustic political jibes of the Berlin Dadaists, but rather on the poetic and textual experiments of Schwitters. The material sent by Spengemann to Kassák was published in the issue of January 1921, the first *Ma* number to fully reveal Kassák's engagement with Dada. Schwitters' most famous and influential poem "An Anna Blume" was translated into Hungarian in this issue. Kassák's initial interest in Schwitters likely came through his awareness of the artist via Herwarth Walden's German Expressionist journal *Der Sturm*, the circle of which Schwitters had joined in 1918.¹⁷ Kassák continued to take an interest in the work of Schwitters, publishing it — especially his literary work — throughout the Vienna years. However, only a few of Schwitters' Merz collages were ever reproduced, probably because Kassák found them flawed in their illusionism and emotionalism. As he put it in the *Képarchitektúra* manifesto: "Schwitters, just like Kandinsky, forms emotions into pictures... expresses his emotions through the totality of

materials.... And what can these pictures give to us? The illusion of a world that exists, once existed, or may exist."¹⁸ The greater value attached to Schwitters' literary output is not surprising, as Kassák himself was first and foremost a poet, and because expressionism was a quality Kassák would never emphasize in his own visual art. The reason Schwitters was Kassák's primary model is that Schwitters was attempting Dada experimentation in both literary and visual media, while Tzara, for example, was more concerned with literary than with visual production.

This same January 1, 1921 issue of *Ma*, the initial one that clearly displays an interest in Dada, is also the first to contain examples of Hungarian works that incorporate Dadaist elements. On the cover is Kassák's first published art work. This work manifests Dadaist inspiration in the mechanical elements such as wheels, belts and train signals included in the composition, as well as in the snippets of surrounding text that lack logical narrative order.

The first full text within this issue of *Ma* is Sándor Barta's manifesto "A zöldfejű ember" [The Green-headed Man], which can perhaps be best described as a diatribe against logic, responsibility and reason.¹⁹ An accomplished poet, Barta was one of the foremost practitioners of Dadaist poetry in Hungarian circles. By 1922, he would be extending the radicalism and anarchism of Dada into a political stance against bourgeois culture, establishing his own journal counter to *Ma*, and eventually joining the Communist party and leaving for the Soviet Union.²⁰ As Forgács has established, Kassák would later characterize this text by Barta in a letter to a colleague as one that Kassák published merely to appease Barta, whereas he and *Ma* "had nothing to do with the Dadaists."²¹ In fact, Kassák would characterize Dada as a "conservative school already", a comment that I would hold betrays Kassák's motives with respect to Hungarian emigre politics rather than his actual artistic inclinations in 1921-1922. Here, Kassák is taking pains to distance himself and his journal from a "school", an already established style (hardly conservative), but not one of his own creation. By early 1922 he would be more interested in promoting and defending his own creation, Picture-architecture.

To return to Barta's text, what is visually interesting about this essay, even if one cannot read Hungarian, is the typography that varies in size and type, and incorporates oversized exclamation marks, small black squares, and varies the spatial disposition of the text. This kind of clean, even printing and clear spacing produces a visually interesting and

dynamic composition of the text on the page that is reminiscent of the typographical work of the German Dadaists.²² The presence in the Kassák archive of Dada periodicals such as Tzara's *Dada*, Schwitters' *Merz* and Hausmann's *Der Dada*, demonstrates that they were present in his library early on. Thus a familiarity with Dada typography and composition is to be expected among the Hungarians in Vienna.

Another vital source of information for Kassák about Dada — particularly its German variant — and other avant-garde art in 1921/22 was László Moholy-Nagy in Berlin. Although Moholy-Nagy had some contact with Kassák's group of Activists in Hungary in 1918-19, and was profoundly influenced by their ethical and social attitudes toward art, he was by no means in the forefront of artistic activity in Budapest.²³ Like many others, he left Budapest after the fall of the Republic of Councils, and eventually made his way to Vienna. After a short period there, he moved on to Berlin by April of 1920. In the German capital he would mature into an independent and highly significant artist, a process culminating in the invitation to join the Bauhaus staff in 1923. It is precisely during this period that he had his most significant contact with Kassák and the journal *Ma*, and my treatment of Moholy-Nagy will extend only to these direct connections with Kassák rather than his other activities.

As Berlin during this period was the centre of international avant-garde activity, Moholy-Nagy was able to act as a vital pipeline of information for Kassák, as well as a source for numerous reproductions of the latest in avant-garde art that were published in *Ma*.²⁴ The first of his works in *Ma*, a Dadaist-inspired woodcut, appeared in the March 1921 issue. In September of 1921 Kassák published a special issue of *Ma* devoted to Moholy-Nagy, including the reproduction of a work on the cover, followed by an introductory essay on his work by Ernő Kállai, and ten more reproductions. We know that Moholy-Nagy was in contact with Hungarian artists just returning from Moscow late in 1921 and early in 1922, and that he met El Lissitzky around that time as well. These were the two most important sources for information on what was currently happening culturally in Soviet Russia, and so provided a crucial advantage to the development of Moholy-Nagy's artistic style at the time.

The January issue of *Ma* that proclaimed the interest in Dada also contains a report on the first public artistic matinee the group held in Vienna. Significantly, the report on the substantially Dadaist program of this matinee follows directly upon a synopsis of the Russian Evening held by the members of the *Ma* group on 13 November 1920, the Hungarians'

first chance to see some proto-Constructivist works being produced in the nascent Soviet Union.²⁵ The First Viennese Matinee was held on 20 November 1920, and consisted of a variety of readings from the work of Hungarian poets, performances of the music of Bartók and Debussy, Kassák's wife Jolán Simon's reading of poetry by Huelsenbeck, Schwitters and Apollinaire, and Barta's reading from his Dadaist work "The Green-Headed Man." The Dada emphasis of these programs is apparent in their content, and this emphasis would continue. For example, a fall 1921 matinee included Simon's reading of poetry by Schwitters, Arp and Huelsenbeck, Kassák reading from his epic Dadaist poem "The Horse Dies and the Birds Fly Away" (discussed below), and Andor Németh's reading from Tzara's "The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine."²⁶

The *Ma* group took a program on the road to Prague on March 16, 1922.²⁷ This program consisted of a lecture on the *Ma* group, followed by the recitation of poetry by Kassák and others connected with the journal, as well as poetry by the Italian Dadaist Libero Altomare, by Arp, Huelsenbeck, Schwitters, and finally, a multi-media performance by Barta that included music, puppets, choruses, projections and posters.²⁸ Karel Teige, who was in the audience, described the Hungarian program as an early example of Dadaism appearing in Czechoslovakia.²⁹ The Hungarian tour continued in Czechoslovakia, including visits to the former Hungarian cities of Kassa [Košice] in Slovakia and Ungvár [Uzhorod] in the Ruthenian region.³⁰

I will now focus specifically on a number of Kassák's poems and typographical layouts in *Ma*, in order to identify Dadaist and nascent Constructivist elements within them. The theory and visual forms of *Képarchitektúra* arise, I argue, through the experimentation with and combination of both Dada and International Constructivist practices within texts. One especially accomplished text by Kassák that includes a strong visual component is "Este a fák alatt" [Evening Under the Trees, poem #18], which was published in the January 1, 1922 issue of *Ma* (figure 1, see the appendix of illustrations to this article, page 40).³¹ It is the most lengthy, accomplished and visually striking of what Kassák called his *képversek* [picture-poems]. Kassák was producing a number of visual poems during the early 1920s, a practice that parallels his new-found engagement with visual art, and one that serves as an excellent example of his combined literary and visual thinking and practice. As noted by János Brendel, this work is actually composed of four self-contained poems that coincide with the four columns of the layout in the journal.³² Although the four

poetic units vary in internal length and number of words, Kassák balances them on the page through varying the weight and size of the typography, as well as through their spatial disposition. As Brendel has suggested, the cycle is likely Kassák's reaction to Hungarian events in 1919, and the despair of those involved in that failed political experiment who were forced into exile.³³ The latter two units of the cycle, which I will focus on here, are representative of Kassák's visually abstract form of poetry wherein the poetic text is arranged on the page like an abstract artwork on a plane. They are composed of discontinuous verbal elements, which vividly evoke feelings or certain images, but do not lend themselves to linear narrative readings. The non-narrative quality of Kassák's poetry is here underpinned and even heightened by the variations in the typography and the spacing of the textual elements on the page. Kassák's real accomplishment is the orchestration of the verbal and the visual in a way that makes the expressive intention of the work, rather than its narrative sense, its most notable characteristic. In fact, it makes this dynamic expressivity visual. The poem is visually more advanced than the poetic work of Tzara, and far more composed and meaningful than Marinetti's Futurist verse, that in comparison reads as staccato and disconnected listings of words with little intelligible cohesion. It is evocative, expressive, and formally structured on a level that is most similar to the various productions of that other poet/artist Kurt Schwitters. Indeed Kassák makes direct reference to Schwitters' "Anna Blume" ("Anna Virág") in this piece.

Kassák balances the varying size and weight of poetic units on the page through the manipulation of typography and graphic elements. The eleven-word unit on the right reads: "Anna, my little Anna / the Lord appeared above the waters and bitterly cries." The poem is dominated by the heavy lettering of the words "az Ur" [the Lord] and "sír" [cries]. The two lower halves of the page are integrated through the placement of the equally despairing words "jaj jaj" and "sír" in large, heavy lettering at the bottom of the left-hand unit. The upper and lower half of the poem on the right are connected by the elongated, transverse placement of the word "keservesen" [bitterly], that leads the eye downwards, and halts it at "sír" [cries]. The visual interest of the word "sír" is emphasized by the large, black disk above it, that can be likened to a black tear spot, but also functions visually to give weight and presence to this poem, one that is composed of relatively so few words.

I find Krisztina Passuth convincing in her comparison between the cover of the first issue of *Der Dada*, for example, and some of the work

produced by the Hungarians at this time, particularly Kassák.³⁴ It resembles "Este a fák alatt" in that letters and/or numbers are arranged vertically and diagonally as well as horizontally, and large amounts of blank space function as aspects of the overall spatial composition. We know that Kassák owned a copy of *Der Dada* number 2 of December, 1919, since it is housed in the Kassák archive today. This is not to suggest that the Hungarians simply copied the Germans. The members of the Ma circle were — given their collective experience with the failure of the Republic of Councils — in a different cultural and political mind-set than the German Dadaists by the early 1920s. Kassák is taking his Dadaist typographical experimentation in the direction of an integration of a Constructivist sensibility, and that is something that most of the German Dadas never did.

The dynamic placement and size of lettering used to visually express the vitality and disruptive force of the words even without narrative logic, characterizes Kassák's Dadaist verse. However, unlike most Dada poetry, "Este a fák alatt" is a highly crafted work that attempts to merge the vitality of the words with the carefully and subtly composed visual elements, in order to bring about a powerful and effective cohesion. It is my contention that it is Kassák's *combination* of the emergent principles of Constructivism with the textual practices of Dadaism that make this poem what it is. One important visual clue to follow in this text is the black disk. I would hold that this black disk has its source in Malevich's black disk. This form, which along with the black square had first appeared in print in 1916,³⁵ appeared again on the cover of Malevich's book *On New Systems in Art*, designed by El Lissitzky in 1919,³⁶ and was seen regularly in various journals throughout the early 1920s from *De Stijl* to *Veshch* to *G*. The quadrangular form would be featured in El Lissitzky's *The Story of 2 Squares*, designed in 1920 and published in Germany in 1922, a copy of which Lissitzky signed and sent to Kassák in 1922.³⁷ In the hand-drawn version of Kassák's poem that was published as a *Ma* picture book in 1922, the poem does not end only with the black disk, but with a more complex geometric form composed of a circle, square and several rectangles (figure 2, see page 41). Dawn Ades has pointed out that the black square, although a Suprematist form closely related to Constructivism, at times appears within the context of Dadaism, connoting a kind of Ur-form that indicates both destruction and construction.³⁸ It is the notion of construction that is especially relevant to Kassák's crafting of his *képversek*. I do not think that at this relatively

early date (the poem would have been written in 1921 to be published by the January, 1922 issue), Kassák (or any other European for that matter) had a complete grasp of the principles of Russian Constructivism or of Malevich's Suprematism. There are substantive claims that Kassák had access to some of the primary documents of Russian Constructivism and Suprematism by late 1921, and that he was thus familiar with the basic geometric forms and principles of these two styles, if even in a cursory way.³⁹

I will take this point up again when discussing Kassák's visual art works of 1921-22 below, but for now, what strikes me is that these geometric forms are imported into Kassák's literary texts as a partner to his words, not as singular visual elements on their own. Within the European context, these geometric forms generally carried the connotation of new construction, creation, and thoughtful placement and balance of forms, which are the composing principles underlying Kassák's two versions of "Este a fák alatt". Kassák adopted them into his poetry to establish the structured effect of his literary text. As mentioned above, some German Dadaist typography has also been identified as similar in its spatial disposition of elements on the page and its large areas of *reserve*, or white space. The addition of geometric Ur-forms to the poem reveals that Kassák is thinking about the disposition of the elements (both textual and formal) on a geometric plane. Kassák's accomplishment here is the integration of these primary geometric forms of the type used both in Suprematism and Constructivism, as geometric elements working in their spatial disposition with the freedom, vitality and expressive spirit of Dadaist text. These combined forces create the spirit and intention of Kassák's poem.

In the issue of *Ma* following the appearance of "Este a fák alatt", the journal featured two short visual poems by Kassák. These had originally appeared in *Világanyám*, the same volume of verse that "Este a fák alatt" had first appeared in.⁴⁰ (figure 3, see page 42) These works contain fewer words, and are more free-form in their structure than the previous example. With fewer words, Kassák could further explore the possibilities of the typography and structure of these poems on the page. Number seventeen takes a relatively simple text and repeats it with minor changes. Beginning at the upper left, above the small portrait, the poem's text that begins "Este várlak a kapúban" [In the evening I wait for you at the gate], is broken down into short segments that are arranged in a fan-like disposition. Only two words are not included in this arrangement,

"Teremtés" [creation], and "virágok" [flowers]. Completing the composition are four geometric abstract forms, that are reminiscent of the kind of artworks being produced and published in *Ma* by artists such as Bortnyik and Moholy-Nagy, compositions often identified as Dadaist and/or Constructivist in inspiration. This poem has been interpreted by Esther Levinger as a visual rendering of the concept "in the evening I wait for you at the gate with flowers," with the portrait, the word "flowers", and the geometric forms attempting to establish the three main components of the text's idea.⁴¹ It is not a particularly well-integrated or successful combination of words, forms and images, however. The portrait is little more than a caricature, and seems out of place in the company of the geometric elements, while the fanned layout of the text on the upper left seems too centripetal to successfully integrate with the sharp lines of the overall geometric structure of the piece. It does successfully function as a contrast to the other poem on the page that, instead of being characterized by linear geometric forms and lighter typography, is a rounded, and weightier work featuring heavy, black letters.⁴² In fact, it resembles the original, hand-drawn version of "Este a fák alatt" (figures 4 and 5; see the appendix, pages 43 and 44). Both are small-scale experiments with the idea of integrating text with geometric form, of treating text as form, and attempting to make the verbal and visual elements work in tandem.

There is yet another composition relevant to my discussion, that of Kassák's epic poem, "A ló meghal és a madarak kiröpülnek" [The Horse Dies and the Birds Fly Away], which was published in Kassák's parallel and short-lived journal *2 x 2* in 1922.⁴³ (figure 6, see page 45) In a letter of December, 1922 Kassák proposed that Tzara might be interested in having Kassák's "somewhat epic poem" translated into French and published so that Kassák could have some "financial and moral success".⁴⁴ Kassák was likely referring to "The Horse Dies and the Birds Fly Away," his only poem of epic length.⁴⁵ Within the same letter Kassák notes that he is sending Tzara a copy of his single-issue journal *2 x 2*, the very place where "The Horse Dies and the Birds Fly Away" originally appeared. However, it was that promoter of German Expressionism, Herwarth Walden, rather than Tzara, who first published this poem in a language other than Hungarian. Because of the rarity of *2 X 2*, and the fact that it was published in Hungarian, it was in this period most accessible in the versions published by Walden. Walden featured the poem in *Ma-Buch*, the anthology of Hungarian avant-garde poetry he published, and he printed an excerpt from it in the journal *Der Sturm* in

1923. However, he greatly changed and simplified its original structure and typography. I will here discuss Kassák's original version.

The poem has been described as either Futurist or Dadaist in its imagery, use of language and typographical layout. In my estimation, both the emphasis in this work on a controlled, highly regulated structure of the textual element, and the accompanying visual compositions, are Constructivist-inspired, whereas the hand-rendered quality of the typography and the content of the poem are Dadaist in spirit. The poem relates Kassák's round-trip journey on foot from Budapest to Paris while a young man. The highly expressive and personal text was originally published in a rigorously controlled format consisting entirely of lower-case letters (and the occasional word rendered in capitals), and a solid body of text with line breaks marked by black asterisks and interspersed with full-page illustrations. The freely expressive, inventive language of the text is tightly encapsulated within a visual framework that asserts a high degree of control and measure, and that strongly affects our visual apprehension of the poem, and our overall appreciation of it. In my experience, the visual element dominates to the point that it colours the actual text. In other words, it affects its reading. We should recall that during this period of 1921-1922, Kassák shifts from being primarily a poet to being both a poet and an accomplished visual artist, and this shift is paralleled on the pages of *Ma*. Indeed, one could argue that the visual aspect of his poems at times dominate the content of the work, to a degree resulting in a lack of cohesion.

Kassák's development of *Képarchitektúra*, his variant of geometric abstract art, was not grounded in Russian Constructivism, but instead within a combination of Dadaist and Constructivist sensibilities that had largely West- and Central-European sources,⁴⁶ a combination that Kassák was also exploring in his poetry. Kassák's interest in Dadaist pictorial verse, for example, was unrelated to Russian avant-garde literary work, and is closest to that of his European contemporaries such as Schwitters or Theo van Doesburg. Although the Hungarians in Vienna during the 1920s were learning more about developments in Russian art, both through first-hand visits to Moscow and via the amount of primary Russian documents on art being translated into Hungarian in émigré journals,⁴⁷ Kassák refused to publish this material in *Ma*, publicly taking a stand to indicate the difference between his artistic interests and those of the Russian Constructivists. When one reads the *Képarchitektúra* manifesto, written to elucidate Kassák's intentions and goals about the power

of his visual art in the geometric style, the allegorical complexity and messianic tone is entirely unlike the workman-like pragmatism of Russian Constructivist texts. To quote a small sample: "*Képarchitektúra* does not resemble anything, tells no story, has no beginning and no end. It just is. Just like an unwallled city, a sailable sea, a wanderable forest or that which it most resembles: the Bible. It may be entered anywhere, and its whole can be apperceived at its any point. It just is, because it had to be born of its own strength. And in this existence it is merciless."⁴⁸ This poetically-modulated manifesto postulates a transformation and positive change in the very soul of mankind via Constructivist art, and that goal brings it closer to Malevich's Suprematism. Kassák could have read some of Malevich's texts on Suprematism, as Uitz would claim that he did. But I am struck as I read Malevich's texts that Kassák could have had access to, such as Malevich's introduction to his 1920 portfolio "Suprematism 34 Drawings,"⁴⁹ how very differently Kassák expresses himself. Words are critical to a poet like Kassák, and his manifesto reads as if on fire with the specificity and vitality of words intended to express and inspire. For him, visual art should be no less motivating, and its goals no less earth changing. Kassák, I have been arguing, develops his visual sense in tandem with his words and literary work, not separately from them. Malevich, no poet, writes text as a philosophical explanation of his art, and the text stands as a key that can be used to decode the political and cultural intentions of his visual work. His text reads not like poetry, but like very dense, even obtuse prose, drawing connections between Suprematist forms and modern machinery, utilitarian needs, and movement in space. Kassák's text reads as a poetic and elegant evocation of the purposes of artistic creation. Both use abstract geometric form to make visual art, but as their texts reveal, they thought very differently about how and why they did so. There are many tracks Kassák could have followed into the use of abstract geometric form, Russian and European, but given his dual development in poetry and visual art, and his spiritual or even mystical belief in art's ability to change the world (here his Expressionist roots are fully revealed), Russian/Soviet sources cannot fully account for Kassák's *Képarchitektúra*.

Both Dadaist and Constructivist interests were being explored during Kassák's development of *Képarchitektúra*, and a number of scholars have noted the role of both in Kassák's visual art. For several, Dadaist experimentation in his collages and other visual art, are identified as the paths by which he began to develop his art toward the next level of

abstraction formally, namely toward non-objective geometric art. This can be understood as a progression of formal elements toward increasing non-objectivity, and/or a strategy to create art more conceptually purposeful. Brendel has also noted that Kassák would at times use words not as signifiers, but instead as material elements in collage compositions.⁵⁰ My continuing emphasis is on Kassák's integrated developments in poetry and visual art.

The pages of *Ma* provide crucial visual evidence of Kassák's simultaneous engagement with Dada and with structured geometric art in 1921-22. By November of 1920, Bortnyik was developing an album of new works that would be the first examples of art that Kassák would label *Képarchitektúra*, and they were already underway before the *Ma* group's first exposure to contemporary Russian art via Umansky's slide lecture that same month, calling into question the notion of a Soviet source for Hungarian geometric abstract art. As noted, the year 1921 marked the height of the publication of Dada material in the journal, but in March of that same year Kassák signaled the development of *Képarchitektúra* with one of his own geometric works on the journal's cover. March was also the month that Kassák first used the term *Képarchitektúra* in print, in the introduction to Bortnyik's album of linocuts. Inside the March issue, Kassák, among other things, published Dada poetry by Blaise Cendrars, Arp and Huelsenbeck, plus Dada-inspired woodcuts by Moholy-Nagy. The June cover featured a Grosz collage, September's issue featured Moholy-Nagy's primarily Dadaist works, and the *Képarchitektúra* manifesto was first published as a separate booklet in September as well. That was followed by the Kassák issue in November, showcasing three full-page *Képarchitektúra* works. (figure 7, see page 46). The contents of this November issue demonstrate Kassák's interest in both spheres during this period, as it presents in sequence Schwitters' typographically inventive poem "Cigarren", an essay on Kassák and his geometric works by Kallái under a pseudonym, and Tzara's "The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine" as well as another text by Barta, interspersed among the *Képarchitektúra* works.

We can now return to Kassák's image verse "Este a fák alatt," which appeared in the following issue of January 1922, and draw some conclusions. Seen in the context provided by *Ma*, "Este a fák alatt" can be recognized as the fruit of the combination of Dadaist poetry and *Képarchitektúra*. Here Kassák has melded the Dadaist text with the structure and geometric elements of his *Képarchitektúra* compositions. He has

framed the passion of what is being expressed in the words within the discipline of the ordered structure of the arrangement on the page. We can now recognize the source of that order and structure as being Kassák's contemporaneous experiments with creating geometric compositions in the *Képarchitektúra* mode. In comparing one of the *Képarchitektúras* reproduced in the November issue (figure 7, see page 46) to the page from "Este a fák alatt" (figure 1, see page 40), one might note that the visual similarities are striking. Thus, the directional elements provided by diagonal lines and the diagonally arranged lines of text; the curved lines and arcs of text; the black disk, and the blocks of text acting as compositional elements on the page, all function visually as do the equivalent geometric shapes in the *Képarchitektúra* composition. More comparisons could be made with several of the compositions published in *Ma*, such as the cover of the January 1922 issue. Recall, too, that "Este a fák alatt" was produced in several different versions, and each reveals the spirit of combination as well. The hand-drawn version produced as a separate *Ma* picture book in 1922 breaks the text down differently on the page, and mixes within it visual compositions, some clearly geometric in character, others more Dadaist (figures 2, 4 and 5, see pages 41, 43 and 44). The major poem of 1922, "A ló meghal és a madarak kiröpülnek," submits the Dadaist poetry to the rigid structure of a continuous block paragraph with lines of the poem indicated by an asterisk, the title encased in a geometric composition, and the poem interspersed with thoroughly geometric illustrations, again a combination of the two modes.

The foregoing examples indicate a period of experimentation in Kassák's work during the period 1921-22, during which the artist was negotiating a fission between Dadaist literary experimentation on the one hand, and Constructivist visual form on the other. But how did Kassák understand the connection between the two? The standard account of this connection in terms of visual art is that Dada acted as a way of effecting a *tabula rasa*; both a sweeping clean and a new start for art in order to be able to communicate the future as newly envisaged. Constructivism then follows as the style of visual art to best construct that vision. This evolutionary relationship is expressed by Kassák's composition *Romboljatok hogy épithessetek és építettek hogy győzhessetek* [Destroy so that you may build and build so that you may be victorious].⁵¹ Dada also advocated the destruction of traditional formal strategies. It used radically new materials, and it pushed the limits of what could be considered to be a work of art. All of these were important lessons for Kassák during this

period. In the pivotal Jubilee issue of 1922 of *Ma*, a statement was published that was both a summation of the group's recent history, and a position statement on the future plans of the journal and the group.⁵² In it, Kassák makes clear that for those who want to move forward, it is not only necessary to make changes in the current environment, but it is also crucial to enact a "*tabula rasa*" within oneself.⁵³ Kassák would later separate himself publicly from the "conservative school" of Dada, as noted above, in his efforts to position Picture-architecture as a development beyond Dada. It is significant that this involves primarily his visual art, and that the resistance gravitates around Kassák's unwillingness to be labeled as representing a certain style or school. Instead of seeing Dadaism as the opposite of the sobriety, seriousness and geometric rigidity of International Constructivism, it can be better understood as an important and sometimes simultaneous part of the entire process of imagining the world anew during the 1920s. It is very likely the case that an acquaintance with elements of Russian Suprematism and Constructivism would have encouraged Kassák to continue experiments in the vein of geometric abstraction. But these connections speak of the relations between varieties of *visual* art. What is missing in these accounts is the realization that — despite his production of Dadaist collages and drawings — Kassák's primary engagement with Dada was in the sphere of literature, essentially poetry. At the centre of Kassák's experiments with Dadaist poetry and Constructivist structure — which would culminate in *Képarchitektúra* — was a concern with how these two modes produce meaning, especially through the means of the arrangement and interaction of text and form on a two-dimensional surface before the viewer.

I would consider both facets of Kassák's work as *texts* in the expanded sense described by Elizabeth Grosz: "Texts, like concepts, do things, make things, perform actions, create connections, being about new alignments. They are events — situated in social, institutional, and conceptual space."⁵⁴ While Kassák was first and foremost a poet, a man of words who would continue to write poetry throughout his life, he also made works of visual art. In 1921-22 he combined these two aspects of his creative self in order to express his views on the human condition in modernity, and to communicate his vision of the future. Both Kassák's poetry and *Képarchitektúras* are exhortations that communicate a message, and attempt to reach and uplift the reader/viewer. In other words, they are proactive texts of a sort, produced in tandem, with like goals.

Kassák was not alone in believing that structured, geometric constructive art could communicate much about the planned future. Actually, most Constructivists, both International and Russian, artists and theoreticians, also believed this. What I wish to point out here is that Kassák reached this conclusion via a particular path — as a poet who saw a vital connection between poetic text, visual arrangement, and how both can be shaped or structured to produce meaning. Kassák was devoted to the notion of art having a moral and transformative purpose for society, and his poetry and other texts were crafted with that goal in mind. There is no reason to believe that he would intend anything less for his visual art, and he was, in fact, especially adamant throughout his career that visual art's purpose was never to be merely decorative or to be *l'art pour l'art*. Kassák's trajectory followed a path between literature and visual art, and along that path, Dada and Constructivism were conceptual and stylistic elements that the artist wove together. For Kassák, it would be a logical step to relate the disposition of words in a text to the arrangement of geometric elements in visual art, both composed to convey content and communicate an intention. Kassák intended the viewer to project herself or himself mentally into the space of the *Képarchitektúras* in a dynamic, experiential way, as one might project oneself into the experience of the words of a text. But can abstract, geometric art such as Constructivism function successfully in this manner? Kassák clearly hoped that it could. Much of the *Képarchitektúra* manifesto consists of a string of single lines of text that motivate or enlighten, rather than define or explain: "The artist's only scale of values is his world view. The artist with a world view can create anything. Creation is the constructive good deed. Construction is architecture... Art is that which does not give us order, but which makes us capable of the most. Art transforms us and we become capable of transforming our environment." Within the manifesto, Kassák describes the power of the works as reaching out to the viewer, transferring a vision of the new utopia, changing ways of thinking, and moving the viewer to action. Clearly Kassák intended that the *Képarchitektúra* works would convey these goals directly to the viewer, via their geometric forms on the plane. Here there is no interwoven poetic text, because the manifesto is detached from the visual works.

The problem is that it is necessary to read the text of the *Képarchitektúra* manifesto in tandem with the works in order to receive the content of Kassák's ideology; the works of art do not communicate this on their own. This is a serious problem for Kassák given the specific goals

and intentions of his art. Not to see his meaning, not to be transformed or enlightened, is for the works not to achieve what Kassák made them for. To merely enjoy their formal arrangements as visual compositions is to grossly miss Kassák's point. They are of course stylistically similar in their geometric abstraction to other examples of International Constructivism or Malevich's Suprematism, but that estimation does not account for what is different about Kassák's Constructivism, nor why and how it appealed to him or seemed right for his goals. This is more serious than the issue of not recognizing the artist's intentions due to changes in audience reception, this is closer to a failure of the work to visually communicate right from the beginning.

It was primarily the Berlin-based Hungarian art critic Ernő Kállai's essays on Constructivism published in *Ma* that explained the political and social implications of the style.⁵⁵ The primary differences between types of Constructivism, and the various intentions and goals of the producers of this work, are available foremost and most immediately in the manifestos and other written texts, not in the visual works themselves. Sophisticated art viewers can discern visual qualities that vary from a Malevich to a Mondrian to a Kassák, and know the importance of reading Constructivist theory. However, sophisticated art viewers were not the target audience of the Constructivists, European or Russian. The public at large was, yet it had neither the training nor preparation to receive this work in the manner intended. The gap between the visual work of art and the complex theories it was made to convey, may explain the inability of the Constructivist style to speak to the majority of the population as intended, and therefore, it may account for its failure to enact the change it was hoped it would enact. In Kassák's work more than that of many of his peers, we witness the shuttling between Dada and Constructivism; we may follow the attempt to forge new possibilities and meanings out of the combination of the two, out of the interplay of the verbal and the visual. Both were central to Kassák's activity in the early 1920s, and he was struggling with varying degrees of success to interrelate them. Kassák engaged in this process as a means to communicate, not in a pursuit of an art of pure opticality - one that verges dangerously on being merely decorative.

At the beginning of this essay I spoke of the muteness of such geometric abstract works, the fact that they are now usually seen to be a largely aesthetic and/or optical enterprise, even one that is purely decorative; in any case a visual enterprise that alienates many of its viewers.

Now we may suspect that such work is mute not because it necessarily intended to be purely optical, but rather because of its failure to successfully translate its intended message — that is communicated only through textual addenda — fully into the visual medium. Perhaps it is time to reconsider much Constructivist art on these terms.

NOTES

¹ This point of view was given one of its most persuasive articulations in Rosalind Krauss, "Grids", in *The Originality of the Avant Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). Krauss' take on abstraction cannot be reduced to this text, but it does at least rehearse the main points of the argument.

² I was helped in my thinking about the relationship between language and abstraction by W. J. T. Mitchell, "Ut Pictura Theoria: Abstract Painting and Language," in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

³ Mark A. Cheetham has discussed the issue of purity versus language in conjunction with abstraction in the early 20th century, most compellingly in the work of Mondrian and Kandinsky. See Mark A. Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity: Essentialist Theory and the Advent of Abstract Painting* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁴ In this study, I will be differentiating between what Stephen Bann has referred to as "International Constructivism," i.e. the the geometric-abstract Central and West-European-based manifestation of Constructivist art of the 1920s, and Russian Constructivism. On this difference, see Bann's introduction to *The Tradition of Constructivism* (New York: Viking Press, 1974; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1990), 25-49 (page references are to the reprint edition) as well as John Elderfield, "On the Dada-Constructivist Axis," *Dada and Surrealist Art* No. 13 (1984): 5-16, and Christina Lodder, *Russian Constructivism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 2-3, 237. For the sake of brevity in this essay when I use the term "Constructivist" I will be referring to International Constructivism, and when referring to Russian Constructivism, I will name it so directly.

⁵ Andrei B. Nakov, "Dada gives me an intolerable 'malaise...'," in *Dada-Constructivism: The Janus Face of the Twenties*, ed. Annely and David Juda (London: Annely Juda Fine Art, 1984), 12-13. See also the article by Dawn Ades, "Dada-Constructivism," in the same catalogue.

⁶ All references to the journal are based on the facsimile reprint of *Ma*, published in Budapest in 1971 by Akadémiai Kiadó.

⁷ The role of *Ma* as a platform for the Hungarian avant-garde, and as a medium of interaction with international avant-garde culture is the subject of my unpublished dissertation *Modernism Between East and West: The Hungarian Journal Ma (1916-1925) and the International Avant-Garde*, The Ohio State University, 1997. For those wanting more background on Hungarian modern art, an extensive bibliography is available in *Standing in the Tempest: Painters of the Hungarian Avant-garde 1908-1930*, ed. S. A. Mansbach (Cambridge: MIT Press for the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1991), 213-27, compiled by Oliver A. I. Botar.

⁸ Reproduced in Ferenc Csaplár, *Kassák az európai avantgárd mozgal-makban* (Budapest: Kassák Múzeum és Archívum, 1994), 18. The letter is dated to July 25, 1920, and is in the Schwitters Archive in Hannover. A number of Kassák's letters to various members of the avant-garde are included in this source, 18-23.

⁹ In *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ma* 7, no. 4 (March 15, 1922). This issue includes a cover by Arp.

¹¹ This "Anthology" contained a wide variety of French poetry, including works by Arthur Rimbaud, Pierre Reverdy, Paul Eluard, Guillaume Apollinaire, Jean Cocteau, Marcel Sauvage, and Philippe Soupault.

¹² Tzara did provide material for Kassák and Moholy-Nagy's *Book of New Artists* of 1922, which is mentioned several times in the letters between Kassák and Tzara. Tzara also sent Kassák more manuscripts and other material, but requested their return in mid 1922, as Kassák did not have the budget to print the material. Csaplár, 22, letter dated to August 25, 1922.

¹³ *Ma* 7, no. 1 (November 15, 1921): 140, 142. The Hungarian title is "Antipirin úr első menyebeli kalandja" (sic), [The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine]. For the French original see Henri Béhar, *Tristan Tzara Œuvres Complètes: Tome I (1912-1924)* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 77-84. The other poems are "Kis falu szibériában" [Little Village in Siberia], *Ma* 8, nos. 5-6 (May 1, 1922), 6 and "Tavaszi" [Spring], *Ma* X. Évfolyam Jubéiumi Szám (January 15, 1925), 183.

¹⁴ *Ma* 7, no. 4 (March 15, 1922): 54-56. The inclusion of this essay in *Ma* garnered criticism from the Hungarian community in Vienna, including Béla Balázs, the dramatist, film theorist and colleague of György Lukács, as noted in Lee Congdon, *Exile and Social Thought: Hungarian Intellectuals in Germany and Austria 1919-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 143.

¹⁵ An English translation of this manifesto is available in a translation by George Cushing in *The Hungarian Avant-Garde: The Eight and the Activists* (London: The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1980), 114-17. A revised English translation of the manifesto is appended to Oliver A. I. Botar, "Constructed Reliefs in the Art of the Hungarian Avant-Garde: Kassák, Bortnyik, Uitz and Moholy-Nagy 1921-1926" *The Structurist* no. 25-26 (1985-86): 96-98.

¹⁶ See Éva Forgács, "Constructive Faith in Deconstruction: Dada in Hungarian Art," in Stephen C. Foster, ed., *The Eastern Dada Orbit: Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, Central Europe and Japan*, Volume IV of *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998), 63-91 and "Between Cultures: Hungarian Concepts of Constructivism," in Timothy O. Benson, ed., *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation 1910-1930* (MIT Press for LACMA, 2002), 146-164.

¹⁷ For a thorough discussion of the importance of Schwitters, German Expressionism, and its poetic style to the work of Kassák, see my article "The Art of Visual Poetry in Central Europe: Kassák & Schwitters Between Dada and Constructivism" *Hungarian Studies* 12, no. 1-2 (1997): 205-221.

¹⁸ Quoted from Botar's revised translation of the manifesto, 97, as in note 15.

¹⁹ *Ma* 6, no. 3 (January 1, 1921): 22-23.

²⁰ For more on Barta's politics and his journal *Akasztott Ember* [Hanged Man], see Oliver A. I. Botar, "From the Avant-Garde to 'Proletarian Art': The Émigré Hungarian Journals *Egység* and *Akasztott Ember*, 1922-23," *Art Journal* 52, no. 1 (Spring, 1993): 38-39.

²¹ Forgács, "Constructive Faith," 89, note 42. She believes the letter to have been written in early 1922.

²² Krisztina Passuth first noted the similarity of the German pamphlet "Dadaisten gegen Weimar" to the kind of typography being produced by the Hungarians, especially Kassák. See Krisztina Passuth, *Magyar művészek az európai avantgarde-ban 1919-1925* (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1974), 112.

²³ See Krisztina Passuth, *Moholy-Nagy* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 13-16. More information on the early years of Moholy-Nagy is also available in *László Moholy-Nagy: From Budapest to Berlin 1914-1923* (University of Delaware: The University Gallery, 1995).

²⁴ Some indication of the volume and variety of material being exchanged is contained in a letter from Moholy-Nagy to Kassák of February 1922 translated and reprinted in Ferenc Csaplár, *Kassák az európai avantgárd mozgalmakban 1916-1925* (Budapest: Kassák Múzeum és Archívum, 1994), 21.

²⁵ *Ma* 6, no. 3 (January 1, 1921): 36. This "Russian Evening" has garnered considerable attention in art-historical accounts of the development of Hungarian variants of Constructivism, and has fostered an emphasis on possible Russian influence on Hungarian art. Esther Levinger in "The Theory of Hungarian Constructivism", *Art Bulletin* 69, no. 3 (September, 1987): 466 suggests that it was only after disappointment with the Russians that Kassák turned to various representatives of International Constructivism, a claim that does not seem to be born out in the pages of *Ma*, where we see the Hungarians publishing examples of, and responding to the major issues and players in International Constructivism far more than any interest Kassák would display in Russian art. Oliver Botar has

also pointed out that any art shown in November of 1920 by Umansky could not have been strictly speaking Constructivist since the Constructivists had not yet organized at the time. See "Constructivism, International Constructivism and the Hungarian Emigration," in *The Hungarian Avant-Garde, 1914-1933*, ed. John Kish (Storrs, Conn.: The William Benton Museum of Art, 1987), 90-97, and "Constructed Reliefs": 91. What is significant for my argument, is that the introduction to and further exploration of a Constructivist spirit in art takes place *simultaneously* with a processing of Dada, not *after* Dada.

²⁶ *Ma* 7, no. 1 (November 15, 1921): 151.

²⁷ This is described in Csaplár, *Kassák az európai avantgárd mozgalmakban*, 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.* This was actually not the Prague public's first exposure to Dadaism. As discussed by Elderfield in his *Kurt Schwitters* (123, 175), in September of 1921 Hausmann, Hannah Höch and Schwitters had visited the city on their "Anti-Dada und Merz" tour.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ma* 7, no. 2 (January 1, 1922): 18-19.

³² János Brendel, "The *Bildgedichte* of Lajos Kassák: Constructivism in Hungarian Avant Garde Poetry," in *The Hungarian Avant Garde: The Eight and the Activists*, Arts Council of Great Britain (London: Hayward Gallery, 1980), 33. The author notes that this cycle of poems was first published in the book entitled *Világanyám* [My World-Mother], where it covered seven pages and was not so clearly divided into these four parts. For more on Kassák's poetry of the Vienna period, the reader may also consult Pál Deréky, *Ungarische Avantgarde-Dichtung in Wien 1920-1926* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1991).

³³ Brendel, 34-36.

³⁴ Passuth, *Magyar művészek*, 112.

³⁵ Susan P. Compton, *The World Backwards: Russian Futurist Books 1912-1916* (London: The British Library Board, 1978), 112.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

³⁷ This copy remains in the Kassák archive, and a reproduction of the dedication page is reproduced in Csaplár, *Kassák az európai avantgárd mozgalmakban*, 25.

³⁸ Dawn Ades, "Dada-Constructivism," in *Dada-Constructivism: The Janus Face of the Twenties*, ed. Annelly and David Juda (London: Annelly Juda Fine Art, 1984), 35.

³⁹ Uitz was the one to primarily press this claim. See Botar, "From the Avant-Garde to 'Proletarian Art'", 34-37.

⁴⁰ *Ma* 7, no. 3 (February 1, 1922): 34. This is the volume entitled *Világanyám*, published in Vienna in 1921. These two small works are poems number seventeen and fifteen (seventeen was numbered differently in the book),

"Este a fák alatt" had been number eighteen. The poems published in *Ma* written by Kassák were henceforth numbered.

⁴¹ Esther Levinger, "Hungarian Avant-garde Typography and Posters," in *The Hungarian Avant-garde 1914-1933*, ed. John Kish (University of Connecticut, Storrs: The William Benton Museum of Art, 1987), 115.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ The single issue of this journal edited by Kassák and Andor Németh appeared in October of 1922. During this period Németh was on staff at the Hungarian émigré newspaper *Bécsi Magyar Ujság* [Viennese Hungarian News], that funded the journal (Congdon, 143-44). Congdon describes this journal as Dada-inspired. He bases this assessment on the fact that the two editors agreed to each edit half of the journal, unaware of what the other was preparing. The resulting combination was to benefit from the possibility of any happy accidents due to this blind juxtaposition. For a list of the contents of the journal see Ilona Illés, *A Tett (1915-1916) Ma (1916-1925) 2 x 2 (1922) repertórium* (Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 1975), 195-98. All subsequent reproductions of the poem under discussion broke it down into verse lines, and deleted the original striking typography and illustrations. The original layout and illustrations are reprinted in György Somlyó, *Arion 16: Nemzetközi Költői: Kassák 1887-1967* (Budapest: Corvina, 1988), 59-68.

⁴⁴ Csaplár, 23. Letter from Kassák to Tzara, dated December 10, 1922.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Kassák describes it as being approximately 500 lines in length.

⁴⁶ For a good account of the development of Hungarian Constructivist art and theory, see Levinger, "The Theory of Hungarian Constructivism," 455-66. While I do not entirely agree with her emphasis on the role of Russian Constructivism in Kassák's development of *Képarchitektúra*, there is much of value in this article. I follow Oliver Botar in his questioning of whether we can speak of anything consistent and unified enough to be called "Hungarian Constructivism," especially if we consider the diversity of the interactions with Constructivism among artists such as Kassák, Béla Uitz or Moholy-Nagy. See Botar, "Constructivism, International Constructivism and the Hungarian Emigration," 92.

⁴⁷ To be noted is the pioneering role of Hungarians such as Uitz and Alfréd Kemény, who were among the first foreigners to have knowledge of events at the Soviet VKhUTEMAS and INKhUK, after their visit there in 1921. All Hungarians in Vienna had access to this material in Hungarian translation by mid-1922, in rival journals. See Botar, "From the Avant-Garde to 'Proletarian Art': 34-45, especially on Uitz' claims concerning Kassák's knowledge of, and failure to admit to, Russian Constructivist and Suprematist influences.

⁴⁸ Quoted from the Botar translation, 98.

⁴⁹ K.S. Malevich, *Essays on Art 1915-1933*, ed. Troels Andersen (New York: George Wittenborn, Inc., 1968), 123-28.

⁵⁰ See in particular Passuth, "Képarcitektúra (Dada és absztrakció)" in *Magyar művészek*, 93-126; Júlia Szabó, "'A nagy kerék'" in *A magyar aktivizmus művészete 1915-1927*, (Budapest: Corvina Kiadó, 1981), 93-101; Loránd Hegyi, "Adalékok Kassák képarcitektúrájának értelmezéséhez," in *Kassák Lajos 1887-1967*, 51-63; and Brendel, "From Material to Architecture: On the Hungarian Avant-garde of the 1920s." *Polish Art Studies* no. 4 (1983): 49-52. A scholar who has dealt with Kassák's poetry extensively is Géza Aczél, *Kassák Lajos* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1999). He has described Kassák's *visual verse* as both Dadaist and Constructivist, a combination of poetry and visual art, but has dealt less with Kassák's visual art. Brendel's work remains the most interesting and suggestive in terms of considering Kassák's work in both the verbal and visual realms as interconnected in important ways.

⁵¹ *Ma* 8, no. 1 (October 15, 1922): 9. Kassák noted this as an important function of Dada in several essays, and in the *Képarcitektúra* manifesto Dada is mentioned as something that *Képarcitektúra* has "stepped over." On page 145 of his book Congdon notes the importance of this graphic, as does Passuth in *Magyar művészek* (p. 113), where she also describes it as illustrative of the fusion, or simultaneity of Dada and Constructivism in *Ma*.

⁵² "Mérleg és tovább", *Ma* 7, nos. 5-6 (May 1, 1922): 2-4. The article was signed by Kassák, but no doubt was understood as a statement on behalf of the journal and its contributing Hungarian members.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Grosz, "Architecture from the Outside," in *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995): 126.

⁵⁵ There are a number of studies on Kállai. Three that are available in English are two by Éva Forgács, "Ernő Kállai: The Art Critic of a Changing Age," *New Hungarian Quarterly* 27, no. 64 (Winter, 1976): 174-81 and "New Perspectives on Ernő Kállai's Concept of Constructivism," *Acta Histriae Artium* 35 (1990-92): 29-33, and Oliver A. I. Botar, "Ernő Kállai and the Hidden Face of Nature," *The Structurist* no. 23-24 (1984-85): 77-80. Levinger, "The Theory of Hungarian Constructivism" also deals substantially with Kállai's writings. In German, see Monika Wucher, "Attribute des Konstruktivismus—Die Ordnungsversuche des Ernő Kállai," in *Die Konstruktion der Utopie: Ästhetische Avantgarde und politische Utopie in den 20er Jahre*, ed. Hubertus Gäßner, Karlheinz Kopanski and Karin Stengel (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 1992), 190-96.

Figure List

Figure 1: Lajos Kassák, "Este a fák alatt" (#18) [Evening Under the Trees], *Ma* Vol. 7, no. 2 (January, 1922): 18-19. (Courtesy of the Kassák Múzeum, Budapest). See page 40.

Figure 2: Lajos Kassák, hand-drawn version of "Este a fák alatt", as printed in *Ma képeskönyv* [The Illustrated *Ma* Book], Vienna, 1922. Page unknown. (Courtesy of the Kassák Múzeum, Budapest). See page 41.

Figure 3: Lajos Kassák, two picture poems, *Ma*, Vol. 7, no. 3 (February, 1922), page 34. (Courtesy of the Kassák Múzeum, Budapest). See page 42.

Figures 4 & 5: Lajos Kassák, hand-drawn version of "Este a fák alatt" [Evening under the Trees], as printed in *Ma képeskönyv* [The Illustrated *Ma* Book], Vienna, 1922, pages unknown. (Courtesy of the Kassák Múzeum, Budapest). See pages 43 and 44.

Figure 6: Lajos Kassák, "A ló meghal és a madarak kiröpülnek" [The horse dies, the birds fly away], 2 x 2, 1922, page 40. (Courtesy of the Kassák Múzeum, Budapest). See page 45.

Figure 7: Lajos Kassák, *Ma*, Vol. 7, no. 1 (November, 1921), page 141. (Courtesy of the Kassák Múzeum, Budapest). See page 46.

EsTe

de mégis
az ér a legkeve-
sebbet
akinek
értelme van

ne nyulj a virághoz
mert kihullanak
a fogaid
az asszony akkor
kinyitott az ura előtt
és azt mondta
én
te
ő

VILÁ
GOS
SÁG

aztán
minden
átsétált az egyesbe
még két napig aludtunk

ez pedig a JÓ emberek me-
nedékháza előtt történt

BÉCSBEN

aztán kimentem
az országutra s a
határkövek alól
fölszedtem a meg-
fótt tojásokat 1234

ÉNEKELJETEK

LÁNYOK
ÉNEKELJETEK

A 12 KAMASZ pedig

24 VATTAGOMOLYA

GOT

HAJTOTT KI A VÁSAR
RA

EKKOR

már va-
lamennyien együtt voltunk
a pap levette reverendáját s
kijelentette ezenül csak este
hajlandó a kutba nézni

A FÁK ALATT
LISPITZ UR
FÉSÜLGETI
SZÉP HAJÁT

LE HÁT
A

HÁLÓ
SIPKÁKKAL
ELMULT

A 19 NAP

mária átölelte fiát
és könnyeket virágozt
de ez sem ért már semmit
elröpültek

A MÁDARAK
elusztak
A HALAK

A
S
Ö
V
É
N
Y

M
E
L
L
E
T
T

örökre
elaludt a kötélen
elaludt
szegényke
kivilágított
városok fölött

S
A HARAN
GOZÓ

de ez is csak két fabatkát
és három gombot ért
tudni kell hogy

ISTEN
SZEME
MINDENT

LÁT
ÉS ÉN

de az em-
ber tenge-
reket és le-

AZ ÖREGASSZONY
BATYUJÁT ÁTVIT
TEM A PATAKON

roskadtt hidakat cepel a szemeiben
s hiába hogy valaki homlokunkra kente

A CSILLAGOT

szamarak nem mernek vízbe
ereszkedni a sósákokkal

ÉN ÉHES
VAGYOK
TE ÉHES
VAGY
Ő SZÍN
TÉN ÉHES

KÜLÖNBEN IS
SWARTZ UR MÉRLEGÉN
MINDENT LE, LEHET
MÉRNI

UTAK
MENTÉN

SÁRGA KUTAK
FOROGNÁK

és a dombokon

GYEREKEK

tenyereben kinyitak a
liliumok
kinél tehát máma
kinél pedig holnap
török el a korsó

nincs töb-
be
nincs töb-
be

TESTVÉR
SÓGOR

KÖVÉR LUDAK ÜLNEK A HOLD
ALATT

Ő mindenki

Ő mindenki

TEGYES BE HÁT
FEJÉBE
A TÖLCSÉ
REKET

nekünk nem marad más
csak egy kis
sziget

A JÉGTÖRŐ
FÜLE MÖGÖTT

ÉS

JAJ
JAJ

MERT MINDENNEK EGY A VÉGE

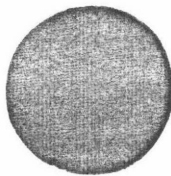
ANNA
ANNÁCS
KÁM

AZ
UR

megjelent a vizek fölött

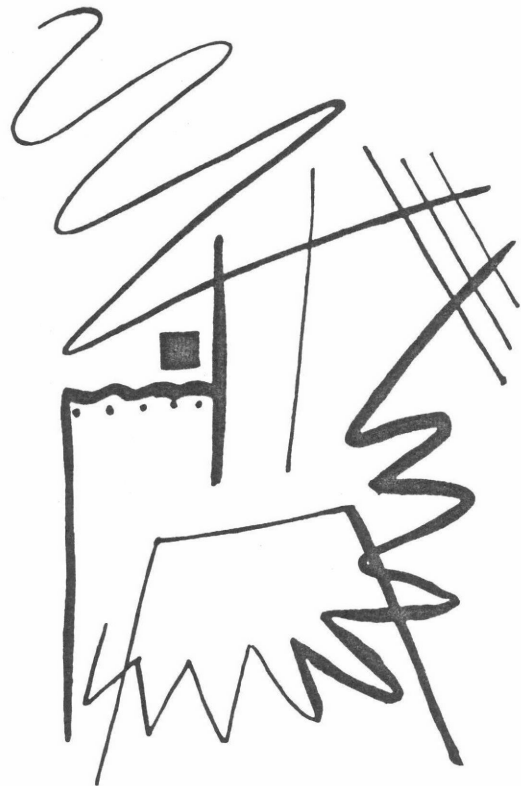
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SIR

KASSÁK LAJOS



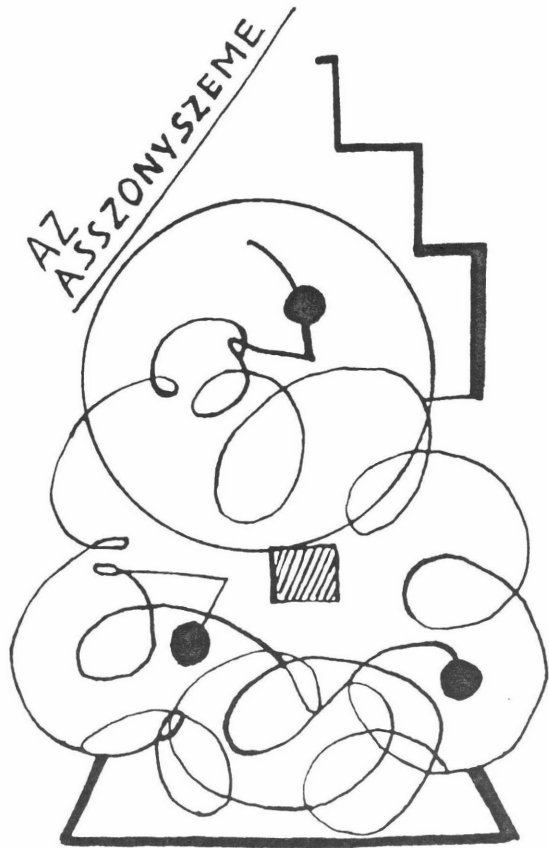
ANNA
ANNA G. S. M.
K. M. M. AZ
UR

megjelent a virsek fölött

REUSSEY S. M.
VESSEN
SIR

Képköltmények Kassák Lajos „Világnyám“ című könyvéből





de ez is csak két falotthát
 és három gombot ért
 tudni kell hogy

**ISTEN
 SZEME
 MINDENT
 ÉS LÁT
 ÉN**

de az em-
 ber tungs-
 recet és le
 rokkant

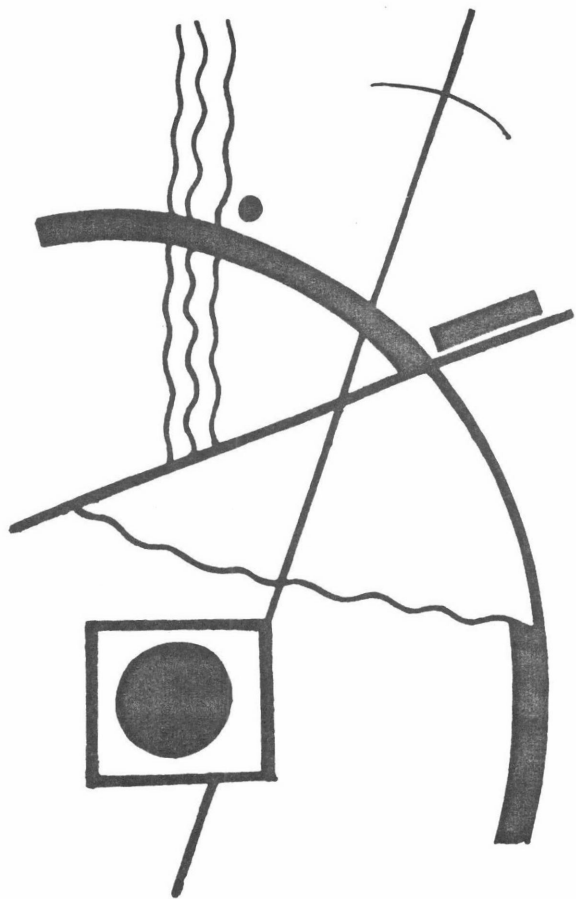
AZ ÖREGASSZONY
 BATYUJÁT ÁTVIT
 TEMA PATAKON

hisz a hat évvel a nemében - hiába
 hogy valaki gondolomtra kente

→ ACSILAGOT ←

spanorall nem mernek - viz-
 le ereszkedni a vízszínnel

ÉN ÉHES
 VAGYOK
 TE ÉHES
 VAGY
 ÖSZIN
 TEN
 ÉHES



KÜLÖNBENIS
 SWARTZ UR MÉRLEGÉN
 MINDENT LE LEHET

MÉRNI
UTAK

MENTÉN

SÁRGAKUTAK
 FOROGNAK

és a dombokon

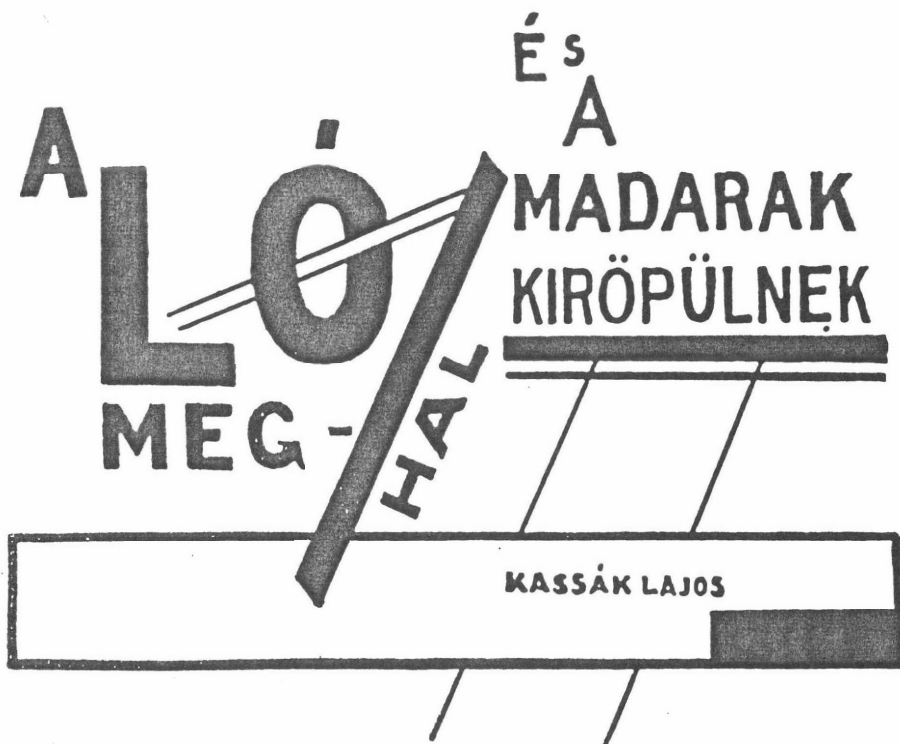
GYEREKEK

Tenyereiben kinyíltak a
 lililismok
 kinnél tehát máma
 kinnél pedig holnap
 törik el a korró

nincsen több
 le **TESTVÉR**

nincsen több
 le **SÓGOR**

KÖVÉRLUDAK ÜLNEKAHOLD
 ALATT



Az idő nyertett akkor azaz papagályosan kinyitotta a szárnyait mondom széttárt vörös kapu * szeretőmmel kinek fekete gyémántok voltak befalazva az arcába s 3 gyereket cepelt a kétségbeesésében * a gyárkémények alatt ültünk * tudtuk holnap a görbe vonalak * ho zsupp ho zsupp * azt mondta elmész KASIKÁM és én elszáradok a pódiumokon s nádler ur mázsolmányában * nyilván * nyilván * az uristen megfelekedzik a szépasszonyokról * már jött is a félkrisztus faszobrász * fiatal volt és gyalázatosan igazságszagu * holnap tul leszünk a magyar határon * hát igen hm igen * nyilván nyilván * a város rohant mellettünk * ide-oda forgott és néha fölágaskodott * láttam az apám kajla szalmakalapját amint uszkál a hóüveg fölött a patikától a szentháromság-szoborig és vissza * valamikor azt hitte az öreg 21 éves koromban káplán leszek az érsekujvári plébánián * de épen 10 esztendővel előbb sporni ur lakatosműhelyében ettem a füstöt * az öreg már csak nagyon ritkán járt közénk haza * később az én szépen elgondolt jövőmet is beitta és kipisálta a sörrel * szerelmes lett egy öreg takaritonőbe * kihullott a haja s csak a cigányokkal barátkozott * 1907 április 25 * Párisba készültem gyalog a faszobrásszal * a kisváros ült a pocsolyában és harmonikázott * levezem rólad a szárnyaimat ó szent kristóf te sohse leszel az apád fia * egy részeg ember kirokodikönyveket sirt az „Arany Oroszlán“ szálló falának

