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Peter Brooker Andrew Thacker

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THE AVANT-GARDE IN BUDAPEST AND IN EXILE IN VIENNA

A Tett (1915–16); *Ma* (Budapest 1916–19; Vienna 1920–5); *Egység* (1922–4); *Akasztott Ember* (1922); *2×2* (1922); *Ék* (1923–4); *Is* (1924); *365* (1925); *Dokumentum* (1926–7); and *Munka* (1928–39)

ÉVA FORGÁCS AND TYRUS MILLER

The rapid development of Budapest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries introduced the Hungarian capital city's public to modern European art exhibitions, new literary and philosophical tendencies, new musical venues, and art criticism in an expanding array of publications. Pre-exhibition 'vernissages', often featuring concerts, became regular events of city life, while around the turn of the century new picture-buying audiences emerged, inspiring artists to compete for critical and commercial acclaim and thus encouraging the accelerated production of art. By the 1910s, Budapest had succeeded in grafting together the various strains of European post-Impressionism and Expressionism, rapidly assimilated by Paris- and Munich-trained Hungarian artists; by 1915, the ground had been laid for the first genuinely avant-garde group of Hungarian poets, writers, essayists, and artists to emerge around the journal *A Tett*. Its editor was the poet, writer, editor, publisher, and artist Lajos Kassák, who remained central to the whole history of Hungarian avant-garde publication from World War I to World War II and whose direct influence extends, to a significant extent, up to his death in 1967.

Lajos Kassák, *A Tett*, and *Ma* in Budapest

A Tett (The Act) was the first forum for this idiosyncratic, working-class autodidact, whose artistry did not fit any existing category of Hungarian poetry, prose, visual art, or critical writing up to that time. As its title indicates, *A Tett* was fashioned, to a great

Fig. 48.1 Cover of *A Tett*, 2:13 (6 May 1916)

extent, after Franz Pfemfert's socialist-anarchist, Expressionist journal *Die Aktion* in Berlin (see Chapter 32). Kassák's editorship of *A Tett* lent Hungary a new literary voice, markedly different from the urbane aestheticism of the dominant modernist literary monthly, *Nyugat* (The West), first published in 1908, and itself a bold initiative against the stale cultural traditionalism of the late monarchy. In its language and contents, *A Tett* appeared coarse, jagged, and courageously innovative. This divergence between *Nyugat*'s elegant modernism and *A Tett*'s callow but vigorous avant-gardism led to a sharp polemic in print, in which *Nyugat*'s leading poet Mihály Babits debated with Kassák on the relative value of traditional poetic forms.

Twelve out of the seventeen issues of *A Tett* displayed the same cover (Fig. 48.1) with handwritten lettering and a schematic human hieroglyph, which had been designed by a young student of sculpture, Pál Pátzay, at the time an Expressionist. Other artists associated with *A Tett* had similar Expressionist leanings: Béla Uitz, József Nemes-Lampérth, Jenő Pászk, Andor Erős, Péter Dobrovits, and János Kmetty. The second issue featured Dobrovits's *Krisztus siratása* (The Wailing of Christ), which so patently evoked the suffering of the ongoing trench war that the issue was confiscated for blasphemy. The painting was reproduced again in issue 8.

Dezső Szabó, an already established writer, lent prestige and credibility to the first issue, thus supporting the other largely unknown contributors appearing before the Hungarian public. His introductory article, 'For Baptism', not only expressed his radical anti-war stance and declared the end of historic Hungary, but

also advanced the prescient view that the war was, to a great extent, the doing of imperial bureaucrats and their Hungarian hand-servants. Szabó thus discerned an aspect of modern war which in a few decades would escalate to genocidal intensity: the banally evil implications of an ethics of duty. 'The fate that moves everything is duty', Szabó wrote: 'Blind duty without promise, illusion, and questioning. This war is the horrendous, gigantic mystery of duty', which implied too, he argued, that 'Artistic and literary aestheticism is dead; not for the first time, but now for a long period of time'.[1] This established the tone and set out the political and cultural rationale for *A Tett*'s radical artistry.

Protest against the current events notwithstanding, Kassák and his group looked beyond the war to the future as well. Kassák's poem 'Az örömhöz' (To Pleasure) in the first issue of *A Tett* anticipated 'new messiahs', celebrated the beauties of nature and the metropolis, and exuded youthful exaltation over technology, revolution, and the joys of being young and male. Zoltán Haraszti's article 'A betüktől az istenig' (From Letters to God) in issue 3 analogously discussed the post-individualist era expected to follow the war. Haraszti's anarchist-pantheist views resonated with the young Hungarian Expressionists, who considered pathos in artistic expression a quasi-religious, redemptive act; many of them, likewise, embraced anarchism.

Along with his own Expressionist poetry and prose, Kassák's greatest discovery was the young poet Mátyás György. Among his expressive, though unconventional lyric poems, György's 'Hottentotta nóta' (Hottentot Song) also included elements of sound poetry: the fourth line of each of the four verses consisting merely of sounds like 'C c c c!' or 'Á á á á!'. 'Legény gajdol' (Singsonging Lad), dedicated to composer Béla Bartók, abounds in alliterations and musical effects as well. There is no evidence that György was familiar with Russian pioneers of sound poetry such as Alexei Khruchenikh or Velimir Khlebnikov, who had been active since the early 1910s. He may, however, have heard about some of the verbal experiments of the Italian Futurists, whose declarations had been widely disseminated across Europe, including in Hungary.

Kassák published his artistic programme in issue 10, which projected a 'new literature' and expressed hope that the war had generated the desire for a new worldwide unity and a post-war 'United States of Europe'. By defining 'new literature' in twelve points, Kassák evoked another revolutionary 'programme': the people's '12 points' in the 1848–9 independence war in Hungary. The ecstatic tone of the programme originated from Kassák's background in socialist agitation, Expressionist poetry, and profound faith in his own prophetic mission. Thus, '9. The new

[1] 'mindenek felett a mindent mozgató fátum: a kötelesség. Az ígéret, illúzió, kérdés nélküli vak kötelesség. Ez a háború a kötelesség szörnyeteges, óriási misztériuma... Meghalt a művészeti és irodalmi esztéticizmus, most nem először, de talán a leghosszabb időre.' Dezső Szabó, 'Keresztelőre', *A Tett*, 1:1 (1 Nov. 1915), 1. Unless otherwise stated, translations are the authors' own.

literature must be a pillar of fire arising from the very soul of the age! 10. The subject of the new literature is the entirety of the cosmos!' and '12. The glorified ideal of the new literature is Man, enlightening into infinity!'[2] Expressionist language was to be the true vehicle of a primordial force common to every human being.

Kassák's poetic language was influenced by Walt Whitman's free verse and the German poet August Stramm's Expressionism. Since neither free verse nor Expressionism had a tradition in Hungarian literature, these influences increased the Hungarian readers' sense that *A Tett* was outside the boundaries of Hungarian literature. This was true also in the sense that Kassák actively eschewed tradition and believed that art was validated only by staying close to the core issues of the age, the phenomena of great industrial cities and the mass social forces concentrated there.

Embracing avant-garde initiatives throughout Europe, Kassák published Hungarian translations of works by the 'enemy writers' Guillaume Apollinaire, Jules Romains, Georges Duhamel, and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in *A Tett*. Moreover, in the red-covered 'international issue' 16, which paralleled a similar publication by the German activist writer Franz Pfemfert, Kassák published Serbian, Russian, English, French, and other 'enemy' authors, knowing that this demonstration of literary internationalism would not go unpunished. It thus came as no surprise when his friend and collaborator, the poet Aladár Komját broke the news that the journal was banned and that copies of issue 16 had been confiscated while Kassák was visiting an artists' colony in summer 1916. He received the official notice on 2 October 1916.[3] The entire group of *A Tett* agreed that a journal under a new title had to be launched as soon as possible.

The title of the new monthly *Ma* (Today) expressed Kassák's profound desire to seize hold of the present and give shape to the future (Fig. 48.2). Having learned a useful lesson about censorship, however, he subtitled it 'a journal of literature and art', and put more emphasis on the visual arts than he had done before so as to confound with images censors more accustomed to blacking out suspicious words. Nevertheless, poetry remained very strong in the early days of *Ma*, and consistently Expressionist. The leading voices were Kassák himself, his sister Erzsi Újvári, her husband Sándor Barta, Árpád Szélpál, Mátyás György, Aladár Komját, Mózes Kahána, Róbert Reiter, and József Lengyel. *Ma* was financed by the honoraria that Kassák earned by publishing elsewhere and by the subscribers of *A Tett*. It could not offer payment to the authors; on the contrary, eventually they helped contribute to the printing costs.

[2] Lajos Kassák, 'Programm' [*sic*], *A Tett*, 2:10 (20 Mar. 1916), 155, trans. John Bátki, in Timothy O. Benson and Éva Forgács (eds), *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910–1930* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 161.

[3] The full document is published in Lajos Kassák and Imre Pán, *Izmusok: A Modern Művészeti Irányok Története* (Isms: History of Modern Artistic Tendencies) (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2003), 162–3.

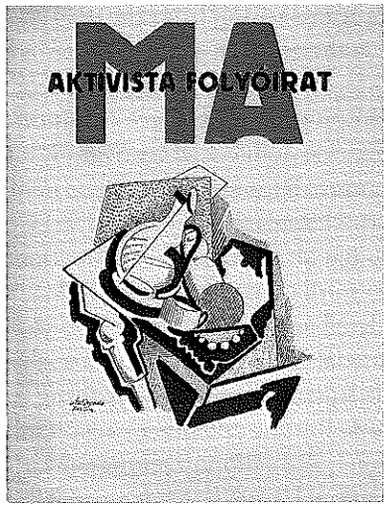

Fig. 48.2 Cover of *Ma*, 6: 6 (1 June 1919), illustration by Archipenko

The first issue came out on 15 November 1916, headed by Kassák's article 'A plakát es az új festészet' (The Poster and the New Painting), which celebrated the power of public, urban street art free for all, joyous, and colourful in contrast to what Kassák called the feeble aestheticism of painting. This issue included an ink drawing by Uitz and the news that Uitz had been awarded a gold medal for his prints at the international art exhibition in San Francisco, where he was the first artist to draw international attention to contemporary Hungarian art. In a 'Propaganda' section, Kassák directly addressed the readers, updating them about further projects. In the first issue he announced the establishment of a publishing house and plans to organize matinees, publish reproductions of art works, and 'pursue other projects in order to salvage an island of artistic value from the paralyzing power of business capital'.[4]

The second issue included an excerpt from the lecture 'Szintétikus irodalom' (Synthetic Literature) that Kassák had given in the progressive Galilei Circle on 3 December 1916, outlining a programme for an investigative, socially conscious literature, which aspires to the infinite.[5] Powerful Expressionist poems, ink drawings by Nemes Lampérth, and a vitriolic theatre review by János Mácza followed Kassák's article.

In the visual arts, *Ma* deliberately mixed works by unknown young artists with famed international names: reproductions of the Transylvanian lyrical Expressionist

[4] 'és egyéb eszközzel is dolgozni fogunk azon, hogy az üzleti tőke elnyomorító ereje elől minél több művészi értéket szigetre mentsünk'. 'Propaganda', *Ma*, 1:1 (15 Nov. 1916), 15.

[5] Lajos Kassák, 'Szintétikus irodalom', *Ma*, 1:2 (30 Nov. 1916), 18–21.

János Mattis Teutsch and the woman artist Gizella Dömötör alternated with works by Vincent van Gogh, Rembrandt, Max Pechstein, and Franz Marc. *Ma* published the original musical score of a Béla Bartók song and in the same issue introduced the young poet and critic József Révai with an essay on Henrik Ibsen. Révai helped found the Hungarian Communist Party in 1918 and edited its newspaper in 1919; he was a key figure in the German- and Hungarian-speaking emigration to the USSR in the interwar years and became the chief cultural authority and ideologue of the Stalinist dictatorship in post-1945 communist Hungary. In light of his career, it is intriguing to see how close he was to the avant-garde aesthetics and the social democratic politics of Kassák at this moment. Révai, like Kassák, wanted literature to make clear choices and assume social responsibility. In his essay, he reinterpreted the meaning of 'beauty' in a modernist vein: 'Beautiful is that which is grand. Stupefying. Loud action or the whirr of a railway station. The stock market, or a busy street, or a people's assembly. That which is monumental—[...], simple and direct: that which is primitive.'[6] Subsequently, however, their views parted along the fault line of power: together with the poets Mátyás György, Aladár Komját, and József Lengyel, Révai broke with Kassák to publish the politically engaged anthology *1918. Liberation* and soon moved towards affiliation with communism. Ultimately, whereas Kassák became a leading representative of a left-wing opposition to the communist politics of culture, Révai became a powerful party politician, enforcing the official version of 'socially committed' literature and socialist realist art.

Listed on the back of the 1917 issues were the books that *Ma* published; it also distributed books published by its German brethren, *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*. *Ma* advertised seminars on literature, art, and theatre; a free school for training actors, led by Mácza; and art exhibitions, the first of which was a solo show of Mattis Teutsch. Issue 8–9 of volume 3 announced the exhibition, 'A *Ma* demonstratív kiállításához' (Concerning the Comprehensive Exhibition of *Ma*) with Kassák's manifesto-like introduction, the key words of which were progress, internationalism, socialism, and youth.[7] He presented the thirteen participants of the exhibition as harbingers of the future and designers of a new world of social consciousness.

As a result of the pressure of the war, Kassák and *Ma* rapidly grew more radical and started to pay closer attention to the events brewing in Russia. Thus, for example, it marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of Russian writer Maxim Gorky's literary career. The writer Ervin Sinkó focused on the 'agony of the individual' ('az individuum agóniája') in Gorky's work, and the problem of the individual versus the community or collective remained one of the central topics of *Ma*. Two months

[6] 'A szép az, ami nagyszerű. Megdöbbentő. A hangos akció, meg egy állomásnak a zűrzavara. A tőzsde, vagy egy forgalmas utca, vagy egy népgyűlés. Egyszóval ami monumentális—(...) ami egyszerű és közvetlen: primitív.' József Révai, 'Ibsen és a monumentális irodalom' (Ibsen and Monumental Literature), *Ma*, 2:8 (15 June 1917), 126–9.

[7] For a translation see Benson and Forgács (eds), *Between Worlds*, 166–7.

later the journal opened with Kassák's poem 'Oroszok, 1917' (Russians, 1917), a visionary reflection on the February 1917 revolution in Russia.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire's fall at the end of World War I led to a revolution and the declaration of the Republic of Hungary on 16 November 1918. Count Mihály Károlyi, who had led the victorious National Council, was appointed Prime Minister and then President with Social Democrats and even Communists in his government. *Ma* greeted this historic event and marked it in print, somewhat ironically, with Barta's scathing review[8] of the anthology *1918. Szabadulás* (1918: Liberation), which included writings from renegades from the *Ma* masthead (Mátyás György, Aladár Komját, József Lengyel, and József Révai).

Yet other signs of revolutionary enthusiasm were more earnest. The last 1918 issue was subtitled 'international'. It was printed with a red headline, and included an updated programme by Kassák, and texts by the German Expressionist poet Ivan Goll, by the German anarchist-socialist Ludwig Rubiner (expelled from Switzerland for celebrating the Russian Revolution), and by several other progressive European poets. This issue also included a declaration by Soviet Russia's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, G. W. Chicherin, protesting the non-allied states' censuring of Soviet Russia for its oppression of the Russian bourgeoisie. Chicherin in turn accused the West of gaining huge profits at the cost of human lives. To Chicherin's article, *Ma* added a short editorial note that the Hungarian revolution 'is not the revolution of the proletariat' ('Ez a forradalom nem a proletariátus forradalma'), but rather that of the exploiting classes.[9]

Increasingly embracing communism, *Ma*'s editorial of the 26 January 1919 issue, entitled 'Merész játék. Rosa Luxemburg 1870–1919' (Bold Ploy: Rosa Luxemburg 1870–1919), accused the capitalist 'parasites' of having murdered Rosa Luxemburg and of wielding the sceptre of state terrorism against the real revolutionaries, the proletariat. German Social Democrats have plotted against the Spartacist communists, the article argued, but this is a dangerous game against the forces of history. Keywords like 'revolution', 'revolutionary art', 'bourgeoisie', and 'proletariat' became ubiquitous in *Ma* at this time. They released special editions, the first one featuring a woodcut by Sándor Bortnyik: a naked man striding ahead with a raised arm with 'Communist Republic' written behind him. The special edition's editorial bore the title 'Kiáltvány a kommunista köztársaságért!' (Proclamation for the Communist Republic!) and was collectively signed by the artists of *Ma*.

Starting with the 26 February 1919 issue, *Ma* was subtitled *Aktivista művészeti folyóirat* (Activist Art Journal); while with the 10 April 1919 issue, it became *Aktivista művészeti és társadalmi folyóirat* (the adjective 'social' now being added to 'artistic'). The first 'activist' issue (26 February 1919) starts with an obituary for the

[8] *Ma*, 3:11 (20 Nov. 1918).

[9] G. W. Chicherin, 'A bolsevizmusról a bolsevizmusért' (About Bolshevism, for Bolshevism), *Ma*, 3:12 (20 Dec. 1918), 140–1.

great Hungarian poet Endre Ady, symbol of rebelliousness, radical vitality, independence, and also—in an idiosyncratic way—Hungarian-ness. Ady was the emblematic modern Hungarian poet for both the *Nyugat* modernists and the young avant-garde, a model of how powerful literature could galvanize the nation's youth. Intent on educating his mostly working-class readers on international trends as well, Kassák published Apollinaire's essay 'Cubism' and Mácza's article on August Stramm and German Expressionism.

The Károlyi government failed to cope with inflation, unemployment, and shortages. On 19 March 1919 the 'Vix Note' was presented to Hungary on behalf of the Allies, ordering Hungarian fervour to pull back from where they had been stationed, forecasting the new borders of the country with significant losses of territory. This sparked nationalist fervour and threatened the renewal of hostilities. Count Károlyi ceded power to the Social Democrats, who hoped to gain Russia as an ally in a coming war and turned to the imprisoned communist Béla Kun, who had good relations with Russian leaders. On 21 March 1919 the Hungarian Soviet Republic was declared in Budapest with the liberated Kun, formally Commissar for Foreign Affairs, the de facto leader.

Ma was pro-communist but not unconditionally. Kassák welcomed the Commune but sought to maintain his independence as writer and editor. He accepted official participation in the position of censor of street posters, but following a dispute with graphic designer Mihály Bíró he was demoted and reassigned to censor the Commune's theatre shows. At the end of March 1919, Kassák submitted to the cultural commissariat a memo signed by the *Ma* group of artists, presenting the merits of the group in furthering the proletarian dictatorship and making an emphatic request for administrative and financial support.[10] The monopoly over cultural life to which the group felt entitled was strongly expressed in Béla Uitz's article 'Diktatúra kell' (We Need a Dictatorship), where he declared that just as the dictatorship of the proletariat was the way forward politically, so too in the domain of art: 'the sole means of developing new cultural needs is likewise a dictatorship, an intellectual dictatorship.'[11]

The Commissariat for Public Education maintained tight control over *Ma*. A document dated 1 July 1919 ordered Kassák to give a written report because he had published a leaflet addressed to Béla Kun, without authorization to use paper or the print shop. This was Kassák's 'Levél Kun Bélához a művészet nevében' (Letter to Béla Kun, in the Name of Art),[12] a public response to the Commune's leader who

[10] Kassák Múzeum, Budapest, Km-an 12. Published in Ferenc Csaplár (ed.), *Magam törvénye szerint* (According to My Own Law) (Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 1987), 152–6.

[11] Béla Uitz, 'Diktatúra kell', originally published in *Vörös Újság* (Red Newspaper), 10 Apr. 1919, trans. John Bátki, in Benson and Forgács (eds), *Between Worlds*, 225.

[12] Kassák, 'Levél Kun Bélához a művészet nevében', *Ma*, 4:7 (15 June 1919), 230, trans. John Bátki, in Benson and Forgács (eds), *Between Worlds*, 230–3.

had criticized *Ma* at a party assembly as 'decadent' and denying its credibility as an organ of socialist culture. In his passionate reply, Kassák presented himself, the leader of the avant-garde, as more competent in matters of both art and internationalist politics than Kun, who had been a prisoner of war in Russia and in the Soviet Union while Kassák and his friends had conducted wartime propaganda work in Hungary.[13] An artist and organizer from the lowest ranks of society, Kassák regarded himself as a valid alternative to those in political authority in the proletarian republic.

As his challenge to the country's leader indicated, Kassák and the *Ma* group wanted the impossible: as old-time socialists, to play a leading part in the official culture of the Commune and, at the same time, to be entirely independent of its political leadership. They proudly declared that if 'The artists of *Ma* did not cater to the bourgeois society, they will not cater to the dictatorship of the proletariat, either.'[14] In response to Kassák's open letter to Kun, Vice-Commissar of Culture József Pogány banned *Ma*. This would be only the first of many instances in which Kassák would experience the ruthless fight for exclusive political power and the deep fault lines between communists and social democrats.

Ma in Vienna

On 1 August 1919, the Hungarian Commune collapsed, and the counter-revolution began, along with foreign occupation. Kassák, like many other supporters of the Commune, was arrested and imprisoned. Only five months later was his wife able to have him transferred to a sanatorium, from which he left the country secretly to go into exile in Vienna for the next five years. With characteristic stubbornness in the face of adversity, after nearly a year of interruption, in May 1920, Kassák recommenced *Ma* as a Hungarian-language publication in exile (with occasional pieces in German). Kassák and his circle gathered in Vienna and set up a renewed publication and publicity operation, including the journal, an associated book press, and a series of exhibitions and performance evenings in which work of the Kassák circle would be presented alongside works of the European avant-garde, especially from Germany. At the outset of the exile period, key figures in Vienna besides Kassák

[13] As Kassák put it: 'In case you did not know this, dear Comrade Kun, I feel it necessary to tell you that while you were still expending your energies in the struggles of our Russian brothers we were already agitating in spoken and printed words for Communism in Hungary.' Benson and Forgács (eds), *Between Worlds*, 230.

[14] 'A Ma művészei nem szolgálták ki a burzsoá társadalmat és nem fogják kiszolgálni a proletárdikatúrát sem.' Mózes Kahána, 'A *Ma*-t több ízben ért támadásokról' (On the Multiple Attacks against *Ma*), *Ma*, 4:6 (1 June 1919), 142.

included his brothers-in-law, the poet Sándor Barta and the painter Béla Uitz; his sister, the poet Erzsi Ujvári; the painter and graphic artist, later to spend time at the Bauhaus, Sándor Bortnyik; and the poets Mózes Kahána, Lajos Kudlák, Ödön Mihályi, and Róbert Reiter. The theatre critic János Mácza, who had fled the white terror to the historic Hungarian city of Kassa (Košice), which after the Great War was in Czechoslovakian territory and today is in Slovakia, also continued to contribute to the first several issues of the Vienna *Ma*.

Kassák led off the issue with a bilingual Hungarian/German, parallel column manifesto entitled 'An die Künstler aller Länder!' (To the Artists of All Countries!). The echo of Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto* was not accidental—the issue was, moreover, released on May Day 1920—yet neither was Kassák's change of the appeal from 'proletarians of all countries' to 'artists of all countries'. For, on the one hand, his manifesto was a confession of continuing faith in revolution: 'Our life is the revolution and our revolution is the most holy confession of love' ('A mi életünk a forradalom és a mi forradalmunk a legszentebb hitvallás a szeretetben').[15] On the other hand, however, it emphatically set itself apart from any revolutionary position that would subordinate the artist to the service of a social class and the material agendas associated with that class. 'We believe', Kassák declared, 'that serviceability for any class is only preparing a new variant of the present slavish form of society. We don't wish to help to elevate any new class to the place of the old one.'[16] Instead, Kassák appealed to utopian motifs already well-established in German Expressionist writings and adopted in *A Tett* and the Budapest *Ma* as well: the figure of a 'new man', a radical humanist ethics, the affirmation of 'life' as a value in itself, and the revolution of the idea and the soul above any institutional politics or material goals. 'The revolution is the goal itself' ('a forradalom maga a cél'), Kassák wrote.[17] These rhetorically exalted views were, moreover, the corollary to his sombre literary assessment of the recent revolutionary events as tragic. Kassák expressed an unmistakably tragic-pessimistic view of the masses' capacity for sustained revolutionary action in his '1919 Epic' 'Máglyák énekelnek' (The Bonfires Sing), a long, intense dithyrambic hymn of the failed uprising, which he began publishing in *Ma* in June 1920 and in subsequent issues, and again as a book with a Bortnyik graphic on the cover. It is unquestionably one of Kassák's most powerful and innovative works, and its epic force derives far more from the retrospective pathos of historical defeat than from the singing of heroic deeds or exhortation to coming revolts.

Beyond even Kassák's prickliness and authoritarian insistence on unquestioning loyalty from his followers, it was this continuation of the pre-exile utopian artistic politics and his disappointment with the possibilities of mass action that strained

[15] Lajos Kassák, 'An die Künstler aller Länder!', *Ma*, 5:1–2 (1 May 1920), 2.

[16] 'Szerintünk minden osztálykiszolgálás a mai rabszolgás társadalmi forma egy újabb variánsát készíti elő. A régi osztály helyébe nem akarunk újabb osztályt segíteni az ember fölé.' Ibid. 2–3.

[17] Ibid. 3.

the ties with other radicalized writers and artists to *Ma*. Several of these would break with the journal in the near future, partly due to the personal rivalries and intrigues that are endemic to avant-garde and exile communities, but also because of the increasing sway of communist politics and Proletkult tendencies in the arts (which János Mácza discussed critically in the essay 'Az új művészek és a proletkult' (The New Arts and Proletkult) in the 30 August 1922 issue of *Ma*). While coming out of the avant-garde artistic milieu and utilizing aspects of the typical avant-garde small press apparatus and artistic idiom, these politically radicalized apostates from Kassák's spiritual leadership argued for a more directly agitational function to the arts, which in their view should be placed at the service of a proletarian cultural revolution. One of these artists, Béla Uitz, was featured in a 'collective exhibition', for which the catalogue of works and an essay by Kassák appeared in the November 1920 issue. Kassák framed Uitz's work within the contemporary relationship of social revolution and artistic revolution. Yet ultimately for Kassák the relationship tipped in favour of a more elevated, even a leading position for art within revolution. Art was less an instrument of revolution than its goal, the epitome of all that revolution should bring into being: 'There is revolution in society and revolution in art. Revolution *for* art' ('Forradalom van a társadalomban és forradalom van a művészetben. Forradalom a művészetért').[18] Uitz would come to see this relationship inversely, with art subordinated to political and social revolution. Having already been more committed than Kassák to communist dictatorship during the 1919 Commune, in exile Uitz broke with Kassák over politics. In 1922, he aligned himself with the Hungarian Proletkult journal *Egység* and with the Soviet Union, which he first visited in 1921 before he permanently emigrated in 1926.

The first eight numbers of *Ma* (June 1920–February 1921) following its transplantation to Vienna retained a format very similar to that of the Budapest *Ma*: fifteen to twenty-five-page issues, black-and-white graphics and plates, and a distinctly 'Expressionist' quality to the imagery. A woodcut from Mattis Teutsch, who had been long associated with the activists, appeared on the cover of the first issue; the second and fourth issue bore a Bortnyik woodcut; the third reproduced a Marc Chagall drawing; and the fifth was a black-and-white picture poem by Kassák, with letters and machine parts and musical staffs and smokestacks disposed in a chaotic Cubo-Futurist or Dadaist scattering of fragments. With the March 1921 issue, the cover format began to change, indicating new artistic influences as well. This issue featured on its cover a black abstract Constructivist design in woodcut by Kassák, and for the first time since the exile, also bore the letters 'MA' in bright primary red. The red, black, and white design clearly communicated the affinity of the activist journal with the abstract art beginning to arrive from the Soviet Union to Berlin, Vienna, and Paris: Malevich, El Lissitzky, Rodchenko, and Tatlin.

[18] Lajos Kassák, 'Béla Uitz', *Ma*, 6:1–2 (1 Nov. 1920), 10.

Two Hungarians residing in Berlin furnished *Ma* with crucial conceptual tools and fresh knowledge of generically 'Constructivist' trends emerging in Germany, Holland, and the USSR, which allowed this improbable exile publication in a 'minor language' to develop into a fully enfranchised international participant in the avant-garde of the early 1920s: the bilingual critic Ernő (Ernst) Kállai and, more briefly, the charismatic artist, art-theorist, and pedagogue László Moholy-Nagy. Kállai's first article in *Ma*, 'Új művészet' (New Art) in the 1 June 1921 issue under the pseudonym Péter Mátyás, surveyed the European art scene from the perspective of what he called 'objektivizmus' (Objectivism). With this term Kállai polemically steered *Ma*'s readers away from Expressionism's extreme subjectivity. Referring positively to recent works of Carlo Carrá, George Grosz, and the Section D'Or (a Paris group that offered a geometric-Purist alternative to Cubism) as the 'newest classicism', Kállai championed solidity and self-contained forms opposed to the subjectivist chaos of the Expressionist idiom. He praised the clarity and order of modern machinery, transportation, and architecture as a standard to which the new arts should attain. Much of what Kállai described is suggestive of what soon would come to be known as Constructivism; he even used 'construction' in a sense very close to, but a year earlier, than its use by artists associated with the Soviet INKhHUK such as Alexander Rodchenko, Vladimir Tatlin, and Lyubov Popova.

Nevertheless, for some time, the general direction of *Ma* could be said to be eclectically inclusive of a number of avant-garde tendencies whose own representatives would have been seen as mutually incompatible, but who became strange bedfellows in the second-order environment of the exile *Ma*. Thus, the 15 March 1921 issue, with a red, black, and white abstract design on its cover, contains within its pages Expressionist-styled drawing and woodcuts by Uitz, Moholy-Nagy, Bortnyik, and Mattis Teutsch, while the next several issues featured covers and reproductions of artworks by such different international luminaries as Alexander Archipenko, Georg Grosz, Viking Eggeling, Moholy-Nagy, Kassák (as abstract visual artist), Ivan Puni, Hans Arp, Theo van Doesburg, and others. The texts included, likewise, often create another dimension of stylistic clash and counterpoint with the featured artworks. Hence, in the issue featuring Moholy-Nagy's work, there are poems in translation by Hans Arp, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Jorge Luis Borges, a Dada-style prose manifesto by Barta, and a derisive Dadaistic short 'drama' by Mácza, 'A fekete kandúr' (The Black Tomcat). On two facing pages of the 1 May 1922 issue, an architectural design by Dutch architect J. J. P. Oud is flanked by Dadaistic poems by the American writer Gorham Munson (associated with the little magazine *Broom*) and a typographically extravagant composition by the Hungarian poet Ádám Csont (the pen name for communist poet Antal Hidas), as well as a translation of a poem by Blaise Cendrars.

Although eclectic, idiosyncratic, and inclusive with respect to the various European avant-garde 'isms', an important bridge from the journal's earlier Expressionist roots to its later Constructivist orientation was nevertheless its brief flirtation

with Dadaism. Thus, for example, the 1 January 1921 issue has a striking picture poem by Kassák, a clearly Dada-influenced manifesto by Barta, and translations of texts about and by Kurt Schwitters, including Mózes Kahána's Hungarian rendering of Schwitters's notorious poem 'Anne Blume'. This transitional conjuncture in *Ma* of Dadaism with abstract and Constructivist tendencies paralleled, in fact, analogous tendencies in the broader art world, especially in Germany, where Dadaists and Constructivists were temporarily aligned against Expressionism, an alliance that would have its acme in the May 1922 Congress of International Progressive Artists in Düsseldorf. In some instances, most prominently with Hans Richter, Theo van Doesburg, and Kurt Schwitters himself, single artists might be producing work related to both Dadaist and abstract artistic currents. This was equally true for Lajos Kassák as well, who as editor, artist, and author vacillated between tendencies throughout the period between 1921 and early 1923.

Underlying Kassák's editorial practice was the aspiration to artistic synthesis, in which the journal itself became a kind of meta-artwork and multimedial composition. This idea of the journal itself as a synthetic 'Gesamtkunstwerk' extended, implicitly, even beyond the boundaries of a single journal, to encompass an international network of affinity: several issues of *Ma* thus sport a back page that advertises other allied avant-garde journals throughout the world. For example, the back cover of the 15 October 1922 issue is an interlocking grid-like display of thirteen allied journals and the locations of their publication: *De Styl* (Weimar), *Mécano* (Weimar), *Der Sturm* (Berlin), *2×2* (Vienna: another venture by Kassák), *Broom* (Berlin),[19] *Der Gegner* (Berlin), *Die Aktion* (Berlin), *Ça Ira* (Brussels), *L'Esprit Nouveau* (Paris), *Út* (Novi Sad), *La Vie Des Lettres* (Paris), *Clarté* (Paris: more a communist and pacifist political journal than an artistic one), and *Zenit* (Zagreb). This back page at once fulfilled the practical need for collaborative reciprocity that helped support the avant-garde through a semi-barter economy and, at the same time, symbolically situated the single journal within an ideal community of like-minded, internationalist artists active through publication in the major capitals of modernity.

Late in 1922, there was a notable change in the physical format of *Ma* when it shifted from the more conventionally sized page to a large format square page which more clearly aligned it with the geometrical designs of Suprematist, Constructivist, and other abstract art tendencies, to which Kassák would add his own designation of 'képarchitektúra' (Picture-Architecture). This concept could justifiably be seen as the precise pivot of Kassák's orientation between the free figurative extravagance of Dadaism and the new rigour of Constructivist discipline, particularly since it was introduced in the 15 October 1922 issue alongside prominent exemplars of both artistic trends. Raoul Hausmann's essay on sound poetry, 'Optofonetika' (Opto-phonetics); a number-poem

[19] *Broom* was at different times published in Rome, Berlin, and New York.

(composed entirely of numerical digits) by Kurt Schwitters; and an essay by El Lissitzky on his 'prouns' flank Kassák's programmatic essay on 'Bildarchitekur', his red-white-black 'picture-architecture' graphics, and his picture-poem that filled the square page with large letters reading 'Destroy in order to build and build in order to triumph' ('Romboljatok hogy építhessetek és építsetek hogy győzhessetek').[20]

The abstract, Constructivist, and spatial-architectonic orientation became ever more pronounced in the remaining issues of the journal, largely displacing the earlier Expressionistic and Dadaistic elements. From mid-1923 onwards, architectural drawings and reproductions also appeared in the journal, anticipating the socially effective realization of the avant-garde's formal and constructive idiom. The July 1923 issue, accordingly, reproduced black-and-white architectural graphics by the Bauhaus-trained Hungarian artist and architect Farkas Molnár, followed by an architecture-themed literary work, Jean Cocteau's *Les mariés de la tour Eiffel* (The Eiffel Tower Wedding Party), an absurd drama about a wedding taking place in the Eiffel Tower. The 15 April 1924 issue led off with an essay on architecture by Ludwig Hilberseimer and reproductions of two Walter Gropius buildings; the 1 July 1924 issue reproduced photographs of several Arthur Korn buildings; while the final issue, dated 15 June 1925, was notably dedicated to the Junge Schlesien (Young Silesia) group of architects, who would also receive further notice in the journal that would succeed *Ma* after Kassák's return to Budapest, *Dokumentum*.

One exception to this concentration of the later *Ma* on architecture was the 'Music and Theatre' special issue of 15 September 1924, highlighting the International Theatre Exhibition in Vienna. This issue included texts and images from the Russian, Italian, French, German, and Hungarian avant-gardes, such as a theatre manifesto by Marinetti; texts by El Lissitzky and Alexander Tairov (who in 1923 had published in German the influential text *Das entfesselte Theater* (Theatre Unbound)); a short essay by Kurt Schwitters on 'Merz-Bühne'; a concrete film scenario by Moholy-Nagy; and photographs of stage works by Chagall, Grosz, Léger, and others.

Magazines in exile: *Egység, Akasztott Ember, 2×2, Ék, Dokumentum, Munka*

By 1922 political and aesthetic fault lines divided the Vienna *Ma* circle into several factions. Kassák's embrace of Constructivism in early 1922 and his hostility to Proletkult as the road to socialism led to multiple splits in the group. The first to break away was Uitz, who was entranced by the Russian avant-garde and became a card-carrying member of the illegal Hungarian Communist Party. He joined Aladár Komját—a former dissenter from Kassák, who, in point of fact, supported Kun's condemnation of the Activists—to publish the journal *Egység* (Unity) in Vienna,

[20] Lajos Kassák, 'picture poem', *Ma*, 1922:1 (15 Oct. 1922), unpaginated.

Fig. 48.3 Cover of *Egység*, 1 (May 1922)

May 1922 (Fig. 48.3). Other defectors from the group included the Berlin-based Moholy-Nagy, who stopped sending images to *Ma*, and the critics Andor Rosinger and Iván Hevesy, who both sided with Uitz.

Egység, Irodalom, Művészet (Unity, Literature, Art) represented one of the key attempts by artists and writers previously aligned with Kassák and *Ma* to break with Kassák's ideologically autonomous avant-gardism and align themselves with the new universal culture they believed was incipient in communism. Moreover, the intellectuals associated with *Egység* explicitly conceived their artistic activities as one branch among others in the larger class struggle for proletarian power. In solidarity with others the *Egység* group sought to overcome the capitalistic 'anarchy' of individualism and develop a new synthetic communicative instrument through which to influence the masses. This meant, in practice, both connecting art more closely with political ideology and overcoming the beaux-arts division of labour in favour of collective productive forms; their ideal was modern architecture, as a synthetic, monumental, socially practical, and collectively appropriated 'art form'. The journal's general programme attracted, for a time, not only the core group in Vienna, but also the Berlin-based Hungarian Constructivists Moholy-Nagy, Kállai, Alfréd Kemény, and László Péri, who announced their association with *Egység* in a 'Declaration' in the fourth issue, in February 1923.

A key illustration of these aspirations can be found in the first issue, which reproduces Béla Uitz's 1919 fresco plan 'Emberiség' (Humanity) (the realization of the fresco itself had been precluded by the collapse of the Commune and Uitz's flight into exile). Uitz implicitly drew upon arguments earlier advanced by radical intellectuals such as György Lukács and Iván Hevesy, who considered medieval religious

culture as a model for a future socialist culture; despite different doctrinal contents, these thinkers believed clear, iconic forms could reflect and reinforce unifying world views. Accordingly, Uitz designed his work with an explicit allegorical coding of space and motif, as he explained in a text accompanying the reproduced image of 'Humanity'. The work as a whole was to illustrate a process of redemption, which moved through four parts: man's origin, his suffering, labour, and final redemption.[21] The central portion of the plan represented love, the source of everything, and into which everything flows, whether ideological or artistic.[22] Admittedly, he conceded, the work also failed to overcome its limits as being still, essentially, just a painting, rather than a genuine example of a radically new, synthetic, socially useful art form.

A further profession of Uitz's faith in this artistic-political vision can be found in the same issue, in his report on the Third Congress of the Comintern in Moscow, 1921 when he had come in contact with key figures and works of new Soviet art. In the second issue, in June 1922, Uitz reflected on the various manifestations of 'revolutionary' art in Russia in 1921. He concluded that just as in the economy the Soviet Union was showing the way by concentrating industry in the state, so too in the domain of culture, concentration and unification would be needed, along with the subordination of the arts to proletarian ideology.

The *Egység* group was at pains to distinguish this cultural-political orientation from most other left-wing, avant-garde positions taken by their fellow exiles in Vienna. Thus, the second issue included an article by Andor Rosinger, criticizing the 'revolutionary' ideology of *Ma* as individualist and petty-bourgeois, that is, 'counter-revolutionary'. The polemic with *Ma* continued in the third issue, in September 1922, with a reply to Kassák's response to the June attack. The editorial group accused Kassák of subjectivism, obscurantism, epigonism, lack of connection to the worker's movement, and opportunism. Once again, they unqualifiedly placed him in the camp of the counter-revolution. In the fourth issue, published in February 1923, *Egység* extended their criticism even to their fellow renegades from Kassák's orthodoxy, taking on Sándor Barta's recently founded journal of political Dada, *Akasztott Ember* (Hanged Man; Fig. 48.4).

Kassák's brother-in-law, Sándor Barta, favoured a satirical approach instead of what he saw as the austerity and discipline of Constructivism. He launched *Akasztott Ember* on 1 November 1922. The title had multiple origins and implications. It came from the poem 'Hanged Man' Barta had published in the 15 July 1920 issue of *Ma*, commemorating those executed in Hungary after the defeat of the Commune; and it referred to the absurd-grotesque motif of a hanged man in German Dada collages and Barta's other earlier works. In the first double issue of *Akasztott Ember*, Barta published a 'Manifesto' writ large, that is all in upper case letters, ending with

[21] Béla Uitz, 'Az emberiség', *Egység*, 1 (1922), 11.
[22] Ibid.


AKASZTOTT EMBER

Az egyetemes szocialista kultura orgánuma

Manifesztumnak

Als Manifest

Kettős szám ára: 4500 osztr. korona, 5 s. korona, 8 dinár, 12 lei, 120 márka.

Fig. 48.4 Cover of *Akasztott Ember*, 1:1–2 (1922)

'TODAY WE AS PEOPLE FEEL HANGED. AND THOSE WHO DO NOT FEEL HANGED BELONG TO THOSE WHO HANG US AND KICK US.'[23]

Unlike the editors and collaborators of *Egység* who followed selected examples of the new Soviet art but who took their cue about communism and its culture from the German press, Barta was closer to representatives of the hard-core Berlin left: Wieland Herzfelde's Malik-Verlag, writer Franz Jung, and Dadaists like John Heartfield and George Grosz, whose drawings graced many of the pages of *Akasztott Ember*. Barta did not hesitate to draw sarcastic literary caricatures of all his contemporaries. In 'The First Meeting of the Mad in a Garbage Bin; or We Shall Be Popular, Popular; or What Is the Difference between an Active and a Passive Corpse',[24] characters include Lajos Collective (referring to Kassák); Jolán Simple (performer Jolán Simon, Kassák's wife); Alexander the Great, 'or the first serious talent on earth' ('vagy az első komoly tehetség a földön'); 'People, Suprematism, Subscribers, Dr Cinquecento, Mr Rodchenko' ('Nép, Szuprematizmus, Előfizetők, Dr Csinkvecsentó, Mr Rocsenko [*sic*]').[25] A sequel to this persiflage was published in the second

[23] 'ÉS MINT EMBEREK MA AKASZTOTTNAK ÉREZZÜK MAGUNKAT. AKI PEDIG NEM ANNAK ÉRZI MAGÁT AZ A MI AKASZTÓINKOZ ÉS MEGRUGDALÓINKHOZ TARTOZIK.' Sándor Barta, 'Kiáltvány', *Akasztott Ember*, 1:1 (1922), 4. See translation of 'Az őrultek első összejöveletele a szemetesládában' as 'The First Gathering of the Mad in a Garbage Bin', in Benson and Forgács (eds), *Between Worlds*, 328–32.

[24] 'Az őrültek első összejövetele a szemetesládában, vagy népszerűek leszünk népszerűek, vagy mi a különbség aktív és passzív hulla között'. *Akasztott Ember*, 1:1–2 (1922), 10.

[25] Ibid. 13.

double issue of *Akasztott Ember*, where Barta used child-like drawings of stick figures and other simple motifs to spoof Kassák's typography, his picture-poems, and the Expressionist and abstract art that *Ma* carried.

Besides poetry by his wife, Erzsi Újvári, and smaller contributions by a few other authors, most of the articles of the first issue were written by Barta himself, several of them discussing issues of form and content in the visual arts, and redirecting the discourse from faraway future goals to the actual problems of the present. Barta wrote the editorial for the second issue, too, on 'The Development of the New (Socialist) Literature, and Its Ideological and Formal Rules' ('Az új (szocialista) irodalom fejlődése, ideológiai és formai törvényszerűségei') offering an overarching view on the latest art and literature by pointing out the duality of 'bourgeois' and 'socialist' tendencies. Barta also exploited the dark satirical possibilities of photos and captions in *Akasztott Ember*, for example, by including photos of starved children with the caption: 'Composition from the Volga Area. (Extremely satirical, artists and poets should be looking at it for at least 5 minutes, without interruption).'[26]

Moholy-Nagy and Kállai responded in the journal's pages to Barta's provocative stance. In 'Vita az új tartalom és az új forma problémájáról' (Debate about the Problem of the New Form and New Contents) Moholy-Nagy redirected attention from the romantic visions of the new technologies and skyscrapers back to the everyday reality, and pointed out that the visual arts—first of all, cinema—have the potential to psychologically influence masses of people. Kállai defended Constructivism accusing *Akasztott Ember* of deliberately rejecting it as purely formalist, as if it lacked socialist contents altogether. 'Constructive art is fuelled by socialist ideology', he wrote, 'constructive art is not representational, because... its social contents are inherent' ('A konstruktív művészetet szocialista ideológia fűti. [...] A konstruktív művészet nem ábrázol, mert szociális tartalma [...] immanens').[27] The Berlin-based Kállai wrote this article at the zenith of his commitment to Constructivism. From mid-1923 on, his outlook became more pragmatic and critical.

The last issue of *Akasztott Ember* (no. 5) included an article by Mácza on the new Russian literature, an exhibition review by Kállai on the First Russian Art Exhibition in Berlin, and a polemic article by Bortnyik attacking Kassák and Constructivism. Barta would soon identify himself fully with the communist movement, eventually becoming a significant cultural figure among the German-language emigrants in the USSR in the 1930s. Acting as an agent of Stalin's purges among the literary intelligentsia in the USSR, he fell victum to the same process; Barta was arrested and executed in 1938.

Akasztott Ember sarcastically commented on a subscription advertisement by Kassák and writer and former vice-president of the Galilei Circle, Andor Németh,

[26] 'Kompozíció a Wolga (*sic*!) mellől. (Rendkívül szatirikus, képzőművészeknek és versművészeknek legalább 5 percig nézendő).' *Akasztott Ember*, 1:1–2 (1 Nov. 1922), 15.

[27] Ernő Kállai, 'Konstruktív forma és szociális tartalom', *Akasztott Ember*, 1:3–4 (1923), 4–5.

Fig. 48.5 Cover of *2×2* (1922), unattributed design

who were going to publish a new journal entitled *2×2 Új művészek folyóirata* (2 × 2: Journal of New Artists) to be printed in 500 'amateur' copies only, at the luxury cost of 50,000 coronas each.[28] *Akasztott Ember* saw this project as a gesture to the moneyed bourgeoisie and hastened to declare Kassák a representative of an ex-avant-garde lagging behind the curve of history. *2×2* was edited half-and-half: the first thirty-two pages by Németh, the second thirty-two pages by Kassák. This was their first collaborative work, to be followed in the later 1920s by the publication of *Dokumentum* in Budapest. *2×2* appeared in one unique issue only.

2×2 was a journal of high artistic quality, although both editors also aimed to express social contents through the works they presented. In its typography, *2×2* had a Constructivist-related design, using thick horizontal and vertical lines to orientate the reader, bold diagonals on the cover (Fig. 48.5), and a Suprematist black square on the inner front page indicating the number of the issue. Németh's section opened with German anarcho-socialist Gustav Landauer's essay 'A Dilettantizmusról' (On Dilettantism), included poems by Tibor Déry, *Ma*'s former contributors György and Lengyel, the poet Béla Balázs, and a drama by Németh himself. Kassák's section included an introductory note; an essay by artist László Medgyes, passionately arguing in favour of abstract art, and poems by Jean Cocteau and August Stramm. But the true sensation was his own mega-poem 'A ló meghal a madarak kirepülnek' (The Horse Dies the Birds Fly Away). The poem tells in a montage-like succession of images a central episode in Kassák's apprenticeship as an avant-garde poet of his age: a walking trip, several years earlier, from Budapest to Paris and back, where he

[28] '2 × 2 = 50,000', *Akasztott Ember*, 1:1 (1922), 18.

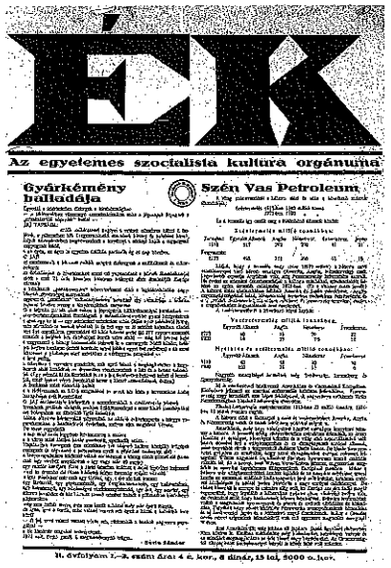

Fig. 48.6 Cover of *Ék* (1923–5), published throughout with same headline design, artist unidentified

confronted hunger and adventure, unexpected charity, European cities, arts, and political ideologies. He goes home ready to become a prophetic poet of a world in upheaval: 'I am LAJOS KASSÁK and our heads twist up for the flight of the nickel samovar.'[29]

The sixty-four pages of *2×2* offer a multifaceted image of experimental poetry, prose, drama, and essay writing as of 1922. Besides literary works, Kassák made a foray into the discourse on psychoanalysis, adding an article that sharply criticizes Sigmund Freud (by Jean Epstein). He also published a review (by Mácza) with mini-essays on Russian literature at home and on émigré writers, along with a brief survey of the trilingual, Berlin-based journal *Veshch. Gegenstand. Objet* (Object), edited by El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg, which mediated between Russian and Western artists during its short existence (see Chapter 36). This is followed by a survey of various European books and 'little journals' (by Endre Gáspár), such as *Ça ira*, *La vie des lettres et des arts*, *L'Esprit Nouveau*, *Der Sturm*, and the American *Broom* (see Chapters 6, 14, and 32).

Ék. Az egyetemes kultúra orgánuma (Wedge: Forum of Universal Culture; Fig. 48.6) was the continuation of *Akasztott Ember* as well as *Egység*. It was edited by 'Az Ék munkaközössége' (The Working Collective of Ék) that included Barta, Uitz, and Mácza, and combined Barta's *Tendenzkunst* and Dadaist stance with Uitz's and Mácza's Proletkult concept. Its clearly articulated goal was to complement the Communist

[29] *Hungarian Quarterly*, 186 (2007), 6–20, trans. Edwin Morgan.

Party's economic-political fight with the struggle against bourgeois culture, that is to 'transfer class struggle into the field of culture' ('az osztályharc átvitele a kulturális területekre is').[30]

Uitz published a programmatic article, 'Kisérlet az ideológiai forma felé' (Experiment towards an Ideological Form), underlining once again the need for proletarian dictatorship.[31] Clearly indicating *Ék*'s continuity with *Akasztott Ember*, painter Lajos Tihanyi contributed to the previous journal's debate on the new form and new contents. However, this article, among several others, indicated that *Ék* did not speak in one voice. While Uitz wanted dictatorship, Tihanyi spoke for spiritual and intellectual values, claiming that 'We have to recognize the individual because our revolution has to be ethical' ('El kell ismernünk az individuumot mert a forradalmunknak etikusnak kell lennie').[32]

Despite these internal differences, *Ék* was the forum of Proletkult closest to the Moscow meaning of the term. For *Ék*, Moscow was the centre of all new, progressive thinking; the world was interpreted as a Manichean dichotomy of capitalism and socialism. Its editorial board remained publicly an anonymous collective. The headline was printed on the top portion of the cover page, not only in order to economize on paper, but also to demonstratively eschew the luxury of a separate sheet for the cover.

Return to Budapest: *IS, 365*

IS. Irodalom, Képzőművészet, Zene, Gyakorlati élet, Tudomány (ALSO: Literature, Art, Music, Practical Life, Science) was edited by the brothers Imre (Mezei) Pán and Árpád Mezei, joined by poet György Gerő, and contributing poets Ágost Karly and Károly Kristóf (Fig. 48.7). It was a Surrealist-oriented theoretical and literary forum of mostly French inspiration, though informed by Freudian psychoanalysis as well. Árpád Mezei published an essay on form, mapping the road from physical sensation to intellectual operations and, ultimately, beyond consciousness in artistic creation. Pán, who later collaborated with Kassák on several occasions, published poems that were both Expressionist (showing the influence of Kassák) and Surrealist; the same applies to Karly's prose and poetry. Gerő's most interesting contribution was a film script entitled 'Béla', which he compared to musical notes inasmuch as it described purely visual sequences, not meant for discursive reading, in this way following Breton's dictum to deprive the viewer of a frame of reference.

[30] 'Leszögezés' (Statement), *Ék*, 1:6 (1 Nov. 1922), 6.
[31] *Ék*, 1:1 (20 Mar. 1922), 6.
[32] Lajos Tihanyi, 'Kultúrforradalom', *Ék*, 1:1 (20 Mar. 1922), 9.

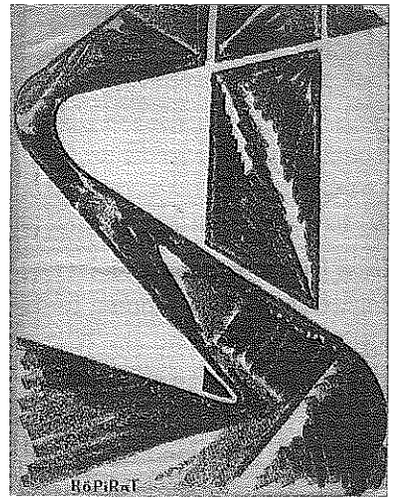

Fig. 48.7 Cover of *Is* (1924), original lithograph Hugo Scheiber

IS and its editors belonged to a circle of artists and thinkers who exploited multilayered Surrealist imagery and were interested in the psychoanalytical interpretation of art works. They were also close to Kassák but, although socialists, they did not share his political activism. *IS* appeared only twice, but it took on retrospective importance as a precursor of the crucial post-World War II Hungarian modernist tendency in the visual arts, the Európai Iskola (European School), which brought these earlier Surrealist strivings to fruition. The editors of *IS* also brought out another journal, *Index*, in 1931.

In 1925, the last year of *Ma*'s publication, but prior to Kassák's return to Budapest, the poet Aladár Tamás started the journal *365 Művészeti, Dokumentum* (Artistic, Document) which was evidently imitative of Kassák's *Ma* in content and format, just as Tamás's poetry of the time was closely indebted to the free-verse 'numbered poems' of the elder poet, which Tamás also carried in his journal. Literary texts typical of *Ma*, such as the poetry of Róbert Reiter and József Nádass, appeared alongside images from Russian avant-garde artists such as El Lissitzky, architectural reproductions of the Junge Schlesien group, and essays by long-term Kassák associates such as Endre Gáspár, Andor Németh, and Ernő Kállai, who contributed his notable essay 'Ideológiák alkonya' (The Twilight of Ideologies).[33]

In fact, Kassák had hoped to return home and connect with *365* as a continuation of *Ma* back in Hungary. Yet Tamás was already moving in the direction of a commitment to the Communist Party, which in 1927 granted him the editorship of the important communist cultural journal *100 per cent*. From its inception, *100 per cent*

[33] Trans. John Bátki, in Benson and Forgács (eds), *Between Worlds*, 615.

was a bitter rival to the independent socialist journals that Kassák subsequently founded upon his homecoming in 1926, *Dokumentum* (Document) and *Munka* (Labour).

Dokumentum

By 1926, with Prime Minister István Bethlen's process of consolidation of a national unity government in Hungary already functioning for five years, the reining in of extra-legal counter-revolutionary forces, and the re-legalization of a weak Social Democratic party and unions, Hungarian political conditions were sufficiently changed for leftist intellectuals such as Kassák to consider returning from their post-1919 exile in Vienna. Upon his arrival in Budapest, Kassák set about quickly to reconstitute his previous role as an avant-garde organizer and editor, as a magnetic pole of attraction for the intellectual work of others, as well as a major poet, critic, social commentator, and visual artist himself. As he recounted in *Az izmusok története* (The History of Isms), assembled in the early 1960s, but only published posthumously in 1972, he intended his new journal *Dokumentum* to maintain the intellectual, political, visual, and typographic orientation of *Ma* in a new form.[34] Indeed, in many formal and rhetorical respects, *Dokumentum* resembles the late period of the Vienna *Ma*; yet in its title and some of its content, it also implies a displacement of international Constructivism towards a more documentary aesthetic, still more fully to be realized by its successor *Munka*.

Kassák's new monthly journal lasted only six issues, from December 1926 to April 1927. Its short life was at once symptomatic of the difficulty of reviving the pre-war and wartime avant-garde under the repressive and impoverished conditions of inter-war, post-imperial Hungary as well as indicative of the change in direction that Kassák was already undertaking in his editorial aesthetics and cultural politics. Although the journal was subtitled *Művészeti és társadalmi beszámoló* (Artistic and Social Reporting), the accent still fell heavily on the 'artistic' side. While in its general advocacy of a range of developments in modern thought, art, urbanism, and technology it adumbrated the more holistic notion of socialist 'culture' that would characterize the journal *Munka*, its horizons remained those of a total 'modernism' implicit in the complex montage of materials, rather than an articulate critical concept of a new collectivist culture.

A strong literary component was present throughout the journal's run. Kassák regularly featured the poetry and other writings of a few distinguished poets who also constituted the central editorial personalities behind the journal: Tibor Déry,

[34] Kassák and Pán, *Izmusok*, 239.

Gyula Illyés, Andor Németh, József Nádass, and Kassák himself. Other Hungarian literary figures represented in the journal included the eccentrically singular poet and novelist Milán Füst, who contributed a short theatre piece to the April 1927 issue, and less renowned associates such as Gáspár, Reiter, Zoltán Zelk (Zelkovits), and Pál Szegi. Through Déry and Illyés, who had strong ties to the literary culture of Paris, an element of Surrealism often characterized the literary contributions, both in their own original work and in translations of French writers such as Paul Éluard and Pierre Reverdy. In addition, Kassák published several of his own 'numbered verse', unpunctuated and untitled short sequential lyrics that draped Apollinaire-like, syncopated flows of perception and thought over the syntactical units of sentence and line.

In addition to the poems, short plays, prose poems, and short narratives that populated the pages of *Dokumentum*, critical essays dealing with questions of poetics appeared regularly, such as Németh's 'Kommentár' (Commentary), which indicated the journal's anti-generic orientation with the opening proclamation that 'there is no new poetry, just as for centuries there hasn't been any sort of poetry, only literature, intelligent literature and less intelligent literature' ('Uj költészet nincs, mint ahogy évszázadok óta nincs semmiféle költészet, csak irodalom van, intelligens és kévesbbé intelligens');[35] Illyés's criticisms of incompetent translations of French poetry into Hungarian, in the January 1927 issue, as well as his exploration of the creative process in the March 1927 issue; Moholy-Nagy's essay on 'total theatre' in the March 1927 issue; and Déry's reflections on new verse in the final issue. Even more remarkably, however, the journal published in Hungarian translation two critical essays by the then relatively obscure German Marxist critic Walter Benjamin, one on the Writer's Union in the Soviet Union in the April 1927 issue, followed by a report on Russian film art in the May 1927 number.

As in *Ma*, the new literature was presented in *Dokumentum* in productive dialogue with developments in other areas of modern art and culture, especially with technical art forms such as photography, film, and architecture and collectivist forms of culture such as sports, urbanism, mass performance, and working-class pedagogy. Each issue carried numerous graphics and photographic reproductions which was typical of the illustrated magazines experiencing a commercial boom during the 1920s. This resonance with a popular, commercial, and journalistic format, however, was also critically displaced by the montage of images from modernist artists such as Henri Laurens, El Lissitzky, or Picasso; reproduced film strips of avant-garde films by artists such as György Gerő; performance photographs of the modern dancer Palucca; architectural images and vitrines by Hans Mayer and by Marcel Janco; a photograph of a Marcel Breuer furniture design; a set design drawing for Ernst Toller's Expressionist play *Masse Mensch* (Mass Man); as well as

[35] Andor Németh, 'Kommentár', *Dokumentum*, 1 (1926), 6.

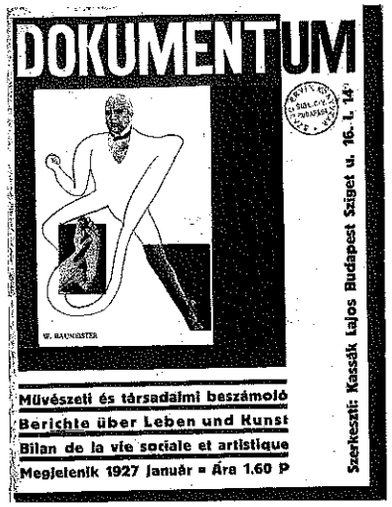

Fig. 48.8 Cover of *Dokumentum* (Jan. 1927), illustration W. [Willi] Baumeister

snapshots of cityscapes, circuses, airplanes, dry docks, and other disparate sites of modern life. As with Le Corbusier's illustrated books or Kassák and Moholy-Nagy's 1922 collaboration, *Buch Neuer Künstler* (Book of New Artists) the sheer diversity, unexpected analogies, montage-like shifts of visual materials and context, and interplay of textual and visual elements made the journal issue itself a sort of composed object, a multimedia meta-work of art, in which collective authorship was organized by the editor as 'collective individual' (an earlier locution of Kassák to describe his vision of the modern artist).

The final issue, May 1927, invites special comment, because it was explicitly presented as containing a special supplement on the work of a fraternal artist group in Germany, 'Young Silesia'. This supplement was, in fact, a follow-up to a special issue—the final one—of *Ma* that had appeared two years earlier, which was one of the first attempts to publicize the work of this Breslau-situated group of architects and artists. The covers, too, also signalled Kassák's desire for continuity with *Ma*. Two are simplified, geometrical, Constructivist designs, with elementary forms, primary colours, and streamlined Bauhaus-like modern typography. The January 1927 issue (Fig. 48.8) was graced by a Willi Baumeister photomontage, in which a cut-out naked runner's leg and a finger pointing to the bottom of a large foot are connected by a drawn outline of a body to the head of a man wearing a collar and bow tie. Another bears the image of an airplane in flight, while the final issue has a reproduction of an architectural model by a Young Silesia architect: two ways, one might say, in which space, dwelling, and perception were being restructured by modern technology and design. Yet in the end, the changes in the context since the founding of *A Tett* and the re-establishment of *Ma* in Vienna would prove stronger

than the intention to carry on the same project. The wave of the avant-garde, along with that of socialist revolution in Europe, had crested and already was palpably in retreat or retrenchment. As Kassák reported, the editors realized how much the situation had changed in Hungary since 1919. It meant that the struggle moved to different fields and required new people and new methods. They decided consequently to end *Dokumentum* and to start a new journal and new movement, fit for the new times.[36]

Having taken to heart his unsuccessful attempt with *Dokumentum* to revive the avant-garde editorial programme of *Ma* in consolidation-period Hungary, Kassák founded a new journal more emphatically oriented towards an independent socialist culture, *Munka* (Labour, or Work). Over the sixty-five issues that would follow between 1928 and 1939 when the journal was closed, the documentary tendency became more central and less closely tied to narrowly artistic concerns. Progressively more page space was dedicated to social and political analysis, while the literary and artistic content was attenuated. The journal once more bore the subtitle *Artistic and Social Reporting* up to mid-1930, followed by three years with a new emphasis on 'socialist' reporting, and then from 1933 simply on 'cultural' reporting, reflecting Kassák's new assessment of the status quo in Hungary.

As before, Kassák's vision of culture encompassed the manifold genres of artistic and literary creation, but also now ever-wider swaths of politics, media, everyday life, architecture, leisure and entertainment, sexuality, and related potential spaces for socialist cultural resistance and self-determination. In his opening words for the first issue, Kassák emphasized *Munka*'s independence from party factions, monetary interests, and narrow political aspirations, which allowed the journal to give space to discussions of social developments and to bring to the awareness of readers the products of culture to help them prepare mentally and affectively for socialist change. With *Munka*, particularly after its first few years, Kassák evidently attempted to position himself not just as an acknowledged if not always esteemed literary figure, but also as a stubbornly independent political and organizational voice, relentlessly advocating a critical, non-communist socialist culture. Accordingly, in terms of sheer page space, Kassák's political polemics and reports were as likely to appear in *Munka* as one of his poems or stories. This fact indicates not just how Kassák was devoting his energies during the decade of *Munka*'s publication, but also, more substantively, how he envisioned the role of the socialist 'cultural worker' and the pedagogical work of socialist culture in interwar Hungary.

Kassák's editorial policy targeted a new social group: young, socially conscious, skilled workers; it sought to represent a tendency towards a broadly conceived (non-Bolshevist) socialist collectivism. Representing social facts was of primary importance to this project. The first issue included an essay by Kállai, then editor

[36] Kassák and Pán, *Izmusok*, 241–2.

of the Bauhaus's journal, challenging the idea of aesthetic 'style' in favour of the more pragmatic notion of 'form'; a translation by the socialist poet Attila József of a text by the left-wing American writer John Dos Passos; reports on the new Russian novel and film; an article on artificial languages such as Esperanto (which were seen at the time as an instrument of pacifism and the overcoming of nationalism); an article on choral recitation (an emerging form of collective literary performance), which informed the Munka circle's formation of its own recitation group and the authoring of texts for collective performance; a report from a 22-year-old factory girl; a report on 'collective mass sports'; a photograph from the Bauhaus artist Moholy-Nagy; and a print by one of the politically progressive painters of the period, János Kmetty. Kassák also opened a correspondence column and a sports section, intended to attract young readers to the journal. While formally and typographically *Munka* was less radical and more 'classicist' (in Kállai's sense) than *Ma*, there remained a degree of continuity in the editorial poetics, despite Kassák's ideological shift from Futurist-Constructivist avant-garde 'art' towards a documentary-focused socialist 'culture'.

Compared with the graphic innovations of *Ma*, *Munka* was more visually sober and spare. Articles and other items fell into relatively standard genres and lengths, and the printed texts were occasionally spaced out by small graphics, full page images, or more rarely, plates. Yet even given this less ostentatious or inventive use of visual materials, Kassák signalled unwavering commitment to modern art through regular inclusion of a striking drawing or graphic on the front and/or back cover and usually one or two pages in the issue. Set amidst colourful monochrome rectangular blocks (often bright red or yellow), the graphics and printed text of the cover (Fig. 48.9) offer the eye a striking image resembling the modern advertising images and book covers that Kassák also designed commercially, drawing from his experience with Constructivist collage. In many cases, the graphics, though modest in themselves, are by major artists with whom Kassák was acquainted personally or by correspondence as a long-standing editor in the network of the European avant-garde. Among the contributing artists there were major Hungarian painters such as Dezső Korniss, Ernő Schubert, János Kmetty, János Nagy Balogh, Róbert Berény, and József Rippl-Rónai, as well as foreign artists such as Marc Chagall, Pablo Picasso, and Georges Braque. Other notable instances of visual arts included a reproduced photograph by Moholy-Nagy in issue 1 (1928) and his film scenario for the short abstract film, *Lichtspiel: schwarz-weiss-grau* (Lightplay: Black, White, and Grey), in which, in the eventual filmed version, Moholy-Nagy used his rotating kinetic sculpture *Light Space-Modulator* to create visual spaces dynamically formed out of shifting masses of light, shadow, and reflection. Kassák and others regularly contributed reviews of current artistic exhibitions or individuals, ranging from the 'K.Ú.T.' (acronym for Képzőművészek új Társasága, New Association of Artists) exhibition (issue 12, 1930) to the painter Gyula Derkovits (issue 39, 1934), to an international poster exhibition and a large-scale exhibition of paintings and sculptures from fascist Italy (issue 48, 1936).

Fig. 48.9 Cover of *Munka*, 2:11 (Jan. 1930), unattributed design

Even more important for the journal's visual poetics and politics, however, was the new centrality of photography as a documentary medium. Kassák organized several photo exhibitions and the Munka circle included a 'socio-photo' group. He regularly reproduced works by major Hungarian 'sociographic' photographers in more than one issue, including Sándor Frühof, Gyula Halberg, Ferenc Haár, and Lajos Lengyel. Inspired by the Constructivist tendencies pioneered by international figures like Moholy-Nagy and Rodchenko, these photographers employed documentary technique and modernist composition to register Hungarian social realities, especially the impoverishment and social physiognomy of urban and rural working-class life. They paralleled on the left the social photography of the right, which in the 1930s treated similar subject matter in populist, sentimental, and nationalistic ways.

Despite this notable presence of the arts, however, the journal was dominated by social and political commentary, and became more so the deeper it extended into the troubled 1930s. Though much of this dry, once-topical polemic and commentary is no longer of great interest to a present-day reader, there are some important exceptions. The February 1934 issue, for example, bears on its cover a map of Vienna, indicating the areas of urban combat during the suppressed workers' uprising there. The issue carried various reports and testimonies from the dramatic events in the working-class housing complexes of Red Vienna.

Of considerable interest, moreover, is the pronounced anti-Stalinist note in Kassák's own contributions and in the editorial policy overall, as Kassák the committed socialist wound a difficult path through interwar Hungary's ideological

forest: the reigning right-wing politics of official Hungary, the left-liberal modernism of the periodical *Nyugat* (with which Kassák still had tense, but collegial relations), the socially critical but also nationalistic and sometimes anti-Semitic 'populist' writers, and the ideologically ossifying Hungarian Communist Party. Kassák bravely faced head-on the increasingly conservative and repressive tendencies in the Soviet Union of the 1930s and was sharply critical of writers such as Ilya Ehrenburg, Maxim Gorky, Henri Barbusse, Anna Seghers, and André Gide for their connivance with Stalinist smear-campaigns and falsifications; he openly defended pariah-figures such as Leon Trotsky and Victor Serge. One of the most dramatic instances of Kassák's unflinching political honesty appeared in the November 1936 issue, in which he delivered a blistering denunciation of the silence of the French left-wing writers upon the execution of sixteen 'old Bolsheviks' on 25 August 1936 in the course of the Moscow Show Trials.

Contrasting with this public address was the singular document of mourning and personal grief of *Munka* 63, dedicated to Kassák's wife, the performer Jolán Simon, who committed suicide on 25 September 1938. The issue contained the tributes of friends and fellow writers to Simon, including Kassák's heart-wrenchingly unadorned expression of pain 'Halk kis ballada' (Pale Little Ballad) as well as a beautiful, playful earlier verse by Attila József, who himself had committed suicide ten months before Simon:

> Were there a collective craftsman's bench,
> It would produce her winter shoes,
> Were there a true-hearted billygoat,
> It would baa out her many virtues.[37]

[37] 'Ha volna kollektiv iparosfa, | téli cipőjét megteremné, | ha volna igazszivű kecske, | az ő dícséretét mekegné.' Attila József, 'Simon Jolán', *Munka*, 63 (1938), 2170.