

*language: PROUN: music*

was commissioned by the Hungarian Cultural Institute New York (Balassi Intézet): I was asked to provide a reaction to an exhibition of works by the Hungarian painter, sculptor, and Bauhaus director László Moholy-Nagy shown in 2016 at the Guggenheim Museum. The piece explores the rhythms inherent in freely-flowing speech, which are quite different from those normally deemed "musical". While hip-hop or the use of recorded speech by, say, Steve Reich seeks to adapt speech flow to conventional musical rhythms, I do the exact opposite. Singing in a rhythm as if she were reading the text, the soprano acts as a conductor; the other musicians follow her speech. Of course, this cannot be done accurately, so the result evokes a smudged charcoal drawing rather than geometric pencil draughtsmanship. This, along with the piece's eclecticism as it traces the atmospheres of different styles of early 20th-century art, might seem un-Bauhaus-like. Rather than respond to Bauhaus by adopting its aesthetic, I wanted to build on its spirit of constructivist risk-taking, exploring a new sense of balance and symmetry. The term "Proun", of obscure meaning, was coined by Russian avant-gardist El Lissitzky to describe his abstract geometric paintings.

TEXT for *language: PROUN: music* by Lajos Kassák, translated by Lukas Ligeti

Motion is life. Eternal motion equals the eternal preservation and reconstitution of equilibrium, as life, eternally in motion, doesn't result in a diversity of motion, but in a condition of infinite stability deriving from the cumulative motion of the forces of the world. A living construction or organization whose internal forces come to a standstill collapses and dies. Thus we understand that motion is the manifestation of life, while the totality of motions amounts to stability and universal life. Man, too, owes his existence to the power of motion: he became capable of living, filled with energy for motion, part of the landscape of moving forces, as yet another moving force. And within the human organism we see the never-ending fight of the physical and psychological forces to maintain the "normal condition", the equilibrium required for life, just as we see the battle between revolutions and counterrevolutions for social equilibrium.

Our era is a period of unbridled and uncontrolled motion. The human of our age is a distraught human. The art of the contemporary human is a dynamic art. This phase of art was initiated by futurism as a discovery of the sensations of life, found its continuation in suprematism with heightened aesthetic ambitions, and finally manifested in the Proun. Futurism: the liberation of inchoate, as yet directionless forces from the shackles of the classical aesthetic. First and foremost a flexing of muscles and tendons. And futurism's trombonists, those with the most powerful lungs, sailing under the banner of the magic words of freedom and heroism, headed blindly into the throat of the greatest of known cannibals, the world war.

Expressionism chimed in as an immediate reaction to futurism. Thus arrived the final flourish of the sentimentally intensified soul of petit-bourgeoisie, deathly amorous of all art attached to the sickened soul.

Cubism is the first artistic direction of modernity that recognized the unity of material and form.

And cubism is a style with an analytical method, doomed to find destruction at the hands of its analytical method. The entire movement ground to a halt through self-examination, and before having had a chance to realize itself and its new laws, it became flaccid in a state of color- and motionlessness.

Dadaism is essentially a tragic scream of our entire social order, lending coherence to the bankruptcy of Cubism through its sudden collapse of all order. Cubism endowed us with the belief in the search and the longing for purity. In Dadaism, we affirm the fanaticism of destruction. And undoubtedly the latter were the greatest heroes of our age, and their work was the most revolutionary deed, as they did not go about it with the intention to live in a better world, but because life in this world, under these circumstances, was no longer bearable.