4. Communicating Social Change through Architecture

Dites-vous bien que l’architecture a besoin de votre attention.
Le Corbusier, 1923

Karl Moser’s closing speech at the second CIAM congress, held in Frankfurt in 1929, identified the “relationship between architecture and public opinion” as one of four central problems the CIAM would need to deal with in the future. The Swiss father figure of modernist architects addressed the theme, helping to define the architectural and urbanist endeavours of Neues Frankfurt. Indeed, public relations avant-la-lettre became a key concern of the nascent organisation that the CIAM still was, and of modernist architects in general.

The previous chapter demonstrated how architects organised themselves in new transnational issue-based networks. These social issues required frameworks and they had to be both relevant and comprehensible beyond national borders. The latter depended to a large degree on the emergence of new printed and visual media as well as the emergence of a new communication space driven by a shared interest in the cause of modernist architecture. This space was defined not only by new media and by political change incurred by the post-First World War settlement (see chapter 1), but also by avant-gardists whose very hallmark was seeking to narrow the distances between languages, disciplines and nations and who organised themselves in new ways (see chapter 3). This new space could be used by a new strand of architects, who were internationally versatile and trained according to the new credo of modernist architecture, which emphasised the discipline’s technological and social dimensions (see chapter 2).
This chapter cannot do full justice to the various phenomena treated here – the plethora of new architectural journals which emerged during the interwar period, the new role of photography or architectural plans as a means of communication. Instead this chapter reflects on and outlines how these phenomena were employed and adapted by architects in East Central Europe in order to demonstrate changes in the cross-border communication of architects and to analyse how this new communication was a precondition for these architects’ rise to a new social, cultural and political prominence. The main themes of this chapter are the condensing of communicating social problems in architecture, the emergence of new frames of reference, and the communicative projection of things to come, namely a promising future defined by progress brought about by modernist architects.

The Spatial Structure of the New Discourse on Architecture

In his foreword to the 1995 edition of Henry Russell Hitchcock’s and Philip Johnson’s seminal book *The International Style*, Johnson is only half-joking when he refers to contributor Alfred Barr’s decision to “capitalize” *International Style* as one of great importance. Being an involved party Johnson might be biased but the point he makes on the relevance of branding the new architectural movement – as the authors did in 1932 – is convincing. Although Johnson himself, with hindsight, qualifies his book as flawed, it still provides a very revealing account of ‘making’ a phenomenon by describing it. In so doing the book also reflects the modernist architects’ early struggle to historicise their own achievements. Having allegedly earned Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe “big teaching jobs” in the US, Johnson was convinced that the hierarchy established in his book was about much more than description and indeed was of factual relevance in itself.3

Indeed, the itinerary the three men – Barr, Johnson and Hitchcock – followed on their trans-European car journey in 1930 and 1931 not only reflected but also established a mental map of modernist architecture. Incidentally, in 1995 Johnson noted that their visit to Brno, Czechoslovakia, was the book’s only true addition to an otherwise well-established route. Thus Johnson unwittingly reflects the East-West asymmetries in perceptions of modernist style which the three men in fact confirmed rather than questioned. At the same time their European travels just months before national borders took on a completely new significance is an urgent reminder of the pervasiveness of internationalism in not only providing a brand name but also being embraced by the three critics of architecture – and those they described. This internationalism was the basis for and enlivened by new forms of
communication, particularly visual ones, of which a new kind of architecture book was an important manifestation. The book *International Style* is also an apt example of this phenomenon.

The early establishment of modernist architecture as an international phenomenon and within an international communicative framework, in which internationalism was continuously stressed in a strategic manner, was part of the success story of modernist architects. By constantly reflecting their membership of an international movement these architects confirmed their expert status and their self-proclaimed relevance beyond their professional field in the narrower sense. Two aspects of what could be called an 'intentional internationalisation' need to be stressed: first, a reflection of one’s own role both historically and *vis-à-vis* the most important intellectual currents of the time – as Hitchcock and Johnson did, but also as the ‘inventor’ of a “new tradition” Sigfried Giedion did – and second, the emergence and rise in relevance of what could be called ‘hinge’ figures who served as links between the wider public and the architect-experts in a narrower sense. Giedion, along with Szymon Syrkus, Gropius, and Le Corbusier in certain respects, are all examples of this phenotype.

When considering what has been said in chapter 1 about the relevance of the ‘politics of comparison’ for East Central Europe, and the modernising alliance between state and architects described in chapter 2, it seems very likely that both dynamics of an ‘intentional internationalisation’ had a comparatively greater effect in this region. At the same time one might, for the same reasons, gain particularly revealing insights by looking at how these communicative mechanisms unfolded in East Central Europe.

Karl Schlögel’s remark on the “Wunder der Gleichzeitigkeit” (miracle of simultaneity), a term coined for *Art Nouveau*, was even more true with regard to the spread of modernism. For Erich Mendelsohn the “Internationale Übereinstimmung des neuen Baugedankens”, the international congruency of modern architecture, was one of its main characteristics. Considering the political divisions of post-First World War Europe, the popping up of flat roofs and ribbon windows in the suburbs of Paris, the pine-woods of German Dessau, and Budapest’s Napraforgó street, and even as far east as Balcic (now Bulgaria) or Eforie in Romania, and, of course, the Soviet Union, within a short space of time demands explanation. These buildings’ frequent reliance on new technologies, which had to be acquired and mastered, raises even more questions. This “miracle”, it seems clear, may only be properly understood when communication, and here particularly visual communication, is taken into account. It is equally clear, however, that new ideas of architecture did not sim-
ply spread in concentric circles due to technologies which made it easier and cheaper to communicate suggestive pictures of new designs. Of course, specific goals in each particular place were to a certain extent served by modernist solutions. And, of course, many of the local solutions were quite original in character. In our context, though, it is important that the communicative space in which new architectural designs and theories were discussed was structured in a new way, thereby allowing for a radically different manner of discussing architecture from the 19th century. Here the relevant question is: how did modernist architects use this new space to assign themselves a new role?

The modernist discourse extended far beyond the Bauhaus. However, the Bauhaus, located in the centre of Europe, was a communicative hotspot which should not be underestimated. From the mid-1920s onwards many of those architects who shaped the field of modernism in East Central Europe spent time in Weimar or Dessau. This was true of Fred Forbát and Farkas Molnár as well as Szymon Syrkus, who was not a regular student purely due to his age, and for the Bauhaus associate Karel Teige. Meanwhile, the themes set at the Bauhaus remained sacrosanct to those many architects in the region from a similar lineage who did not personally visit the Bauhaus. It seems as if the Bauhaus promise of providing a new holistic vision of a life in line with the demands of modern times was particularly attractive to modernist architects in East Central Europe who were willing to or entrusted with building new societies. Those from this region were clearly over-represented among the foreign students of the Bauhaus.

Gropius, who of course served as a link between the Bauhaus and the CIAM, also showed them how to introduce ideas into an organisation which in turn led to the production of influential books, articles and pictures filling the pages of new architectural magazines all over Europe. Apart from the Bauhaus it was Le Corbusier’s workshop, and the reputation of Le Corbusier, which outshone any other modernist architect in Europe. The Hungarian architect Károly Dávid studied with Le Corbusier, as did Ernest Weissmann from Yugoslavia, to name just two of Le Corbusier’s close followers.

In practical terms, Ernst May’s Frankfurt became an important reference point by the late 1920s, mainly because May’s housing project – in contrast to the few projects Le Corbusier had realized by then – proved that new architecture could deliver results on a large scale.

Significantly, and unsurprisingly, all these hotspots – Dessau, Paris, and Frankfurt – were to be found in the West, thus reflecting an asymmetry which was the flip-side of the synchronicity just mentioned. The Soviet Union is the one import-
ant counterpoint to this picture. But it has to be kept in mind that what architects knew of the Soviet Union was hardly based on personal contacts and direct exchange mechanisms. The networks described in the previous chapter and which will be detailed with regard to the architects’ communication in this chapter included very few or no Russian architects.¹²

These asymmetries were also reflected in the languages used. None of the native languages of East Central Europe was likely to be understood in Western countries, while a knowledge both of French and German, and to a far lesser extent English, was simply assumed as given. Most of the architects of the region born before 1918 had studied at a German language university. It was thus unsurprising that the CIAM-Ost used German as common denominator to mark its geographic aspiration. The visual dimension of the modern project attained even greater relevance through this *lingua franca*, which of course never fully dominated East Central Europe and was in decline after 1918 whilst the languages of the new states gained importance.¹³

There is certainly something to be said for the argument that visual communication had a particular impact on the multi-lingual situation characteristic of the eastern part of Central Europe in the interwar period.

The Abstract Heritage of the First World War and the Logic of the Media

The impact of the First World War can hardly be exaggerated when explaining how complex architectural ideas of modernist construction, often packed in visual shorthand, spread so quickly. The war was a precondition for radically shaking up the established social and political orders. Whilst simultaneously embracing the allure of the machine, technology (i.e. the modern) seemed the only way to make sense of a catastrophic experience intrinsically entwined with the 19th century, at least to the avant-gardes and those seeing themselves as modernists.¹⁴ The term avant-garde, just like the term modern, attained a political connotation.¹⁵ Though it is impossible to gauge the exact impact of the First World War on the members of the avant-garde movement, it no doubt accelerated their ascent and provided them with a frame of reference. The New Man as a utopian concept and the building of visionary, improved societies almost appeared to be a logical imperative derived from the war experience. The manifesto of the Dutch group *De Stijl*, arguably the most influential of the avant-garde groups mushrooming around 1918, made explicit reference to the fact that “the war is destroying the old world with its contents: individual domination in every state.”¹⁶
For our perspective two particular links require attention. First, the First World War both radicalised and politicised avant-garde movements which had already existed in the years before 1914 – and were to a certain extent linked with each other. This implied that at least some of these avant-gardists were actively searching for tangible ways to build new, better societies and that at least some lessons were learned from the upheaval of war. New opportunities now existed to actively seek tangible solutions for building new, better societies and in so doing introduce entirely new approaches. This notion is equally present in the *Bauhaus* founding document as it is in the aforementioned *De Stijl* manifesto, though the *Bauhaus* also tried to compensate for the failure of the German revolution. It was no coincidence that many architects began to turn towards other forms of artistic expression in order to obtain a more holistic understanding of what they viewed as the needs of the new era. At the same time, artists looked to architecture as the most obvious concrete lever with which to build – in the widest sense of the word – a new society.

Second, the First World War was also a catalyst for new, more abstract forms of communication. The war, a deep social rupture, made the reductionist paintings of Mondrian or Malevich seem far less exotic than they might have appeared before the war. This new reduced design vocabulary easily crossed borders. The new visual language these paintings heralded also informed modernist architecture. An unintentional but important side effect was, of course, that these new buildings, with their lack of details and often dramatic gestures in spectacular concrete slabs, came across well even in small-scale photos. This change also entailed a revolution of established ways of perception. Walter Benjamin’s book *Einhahnstraße* noted that the end of the Gutenberg Galaxy had been brought about by the avant-garde obsession with advertisements and new visual forms. The pertinent example of Gropius’ *Totaltheater* and Syrkus’ *Teatr Symultaniczny* deeply reflected this change among modernist architects.

The history of the avant-garde in East Central Europe has received considerable attention in the last two decades, expressed through a number of high-profile exhibitions and their respective catalogues. These exhibitions have demonstrated in increasing detail the astonishing radical creativity, originality, and richness, including in sheer manpower, of Central and East European avant-gardists, as well as their tightly-knit networks. In Poland, links both with the Western – Berlin, Vienna – and Eastern avant-garde hotspots were strong. In the mid-1920s, however, with the establishment of the journal *BLOK* and the group of the same name, fascination with the Soviet Union prevailed. The journal *BLOK* functioned as a global transmitter, partly because members of the *BLOK* group, such as the constructivist
sculptor Katarzyna Kobro, had gained first-hand experiences in the Soviet Union. An iconic moment for the Polish avant-gardists was Kasimir Malevich’s visit to Warsaw in March 1927. *Praesens* organised an exhibition of his work in hotel Polonia and Malevich made a point of visiting the Syrkus couple’s workshop in Senatorska street.\(^{23}\)

For members of *BLOK* such as Kobro, herself of Russian, Latvian and German origin, the Soviet Union was an important frame of reference. Kobro had worked with Malevich and El Lessitzky. Karel Teige was heavily influenced by his travels to and contacts in Russia which dated from 1925. Arguably, “he became the best-informed expert on contemporary Soviet culture and architecture outside the Soviet Union”.\(^{24}\) *BLOK* was the first journal outside Russia to publish a theoretical text by Malevich.\(^{25}\) The journal sought unity in art, work and social life by embracing Constructivism wholeheartedly. The last two issues mainly focused on architecture as perhaps not the smallest denominator but a field which seemed to allow the high hopes of merging art, work and social life to be realized.\(^{26}\)

This setting almost naturally created new opportunities for those architects who “were intent on broadening the field of artistic intervention to encompass the whole of social and political life”.\(^{27}\) East Central Europe offered a fertile ground for radical solutions. It was no coincidence that the first museum of modern art in Europe was established in Polish Łódź in 1930. The works of Kobro and other artists from the group *a.r.* as well as many Western European examples of art were on display there. The many first-class pieces by European avant-gardists form a most revealing example of extremely dense networking, but also of the position that *Praesens* – and then *a.r.* – members were able establish for themselves in the second half of the 1920s.\(^{28}\)

Avant-gardism allowed for linking into universalist reference frames which was most attractive in countries which had literally only (re)appeared on the European map a few years earlier. As Syrkus stated in the first number of *Praesens*: “It is not the ornaments of the peasant-journal of Łowicz [a popular Polish vernacular-style, M.K.] which have contributed to Poland’s reputation but rather Copernicus who gave Polish science international renown. Poland will only find a place in the world of the twentieth century through the competitiveness of the Polish intellect and Polish inventions, not through folklore or ethnographic art.”\(^{29}\) In many respects, *Praesens* served as a sounding board, putting Syrkus’ name on the international agenda, and constituted an important precondition for the international attention Syrkus’ work attracted.\(^{30}\)
The *a.r.*’s “revolutionary” artists’ split from *Praesens* in 1929 was a telling moment for the emancipation of modernist architects from avant-gardism and the spilling over of avant-garde ideas into the realm of much more pragmatic and concrete attempts to change the world in the fields of housing and urbanism. Although *Praesens* suffered in terms of originality, the split also created opportunities for modernist architects in Poland to work collectively. The ideological struggles which plagued the Czechoslovak kindred spirits within the CIAM were far less pronounced in Poland.\(^{31}\)

There was, however, an important precondition for the impact of avant-gardist approaches which has not been mentioned yet: the emergence of new media. The post-1900 innovations in offset-printing, which facilitated the spreading of high-quality photographic images, had an enormous impact on the field of architecture. It is not too far-fetched to speak of a symbiosis of modernist architecture and new visual means. The symbolic dimension of technology certainly helped as the stunning technological achievements of modernist buildings adapted to the logic of the media in its longing for the outstanding.\(^{32}\) In a slight overstretching of the point, it could even be argued that modernist architecture was at least a media phenomenon or could in any case not have functioned, without its interaction with the modern media.

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30. The visual allure of modernism. The Brukalski couple’s own house covered in *Praesens* 1930

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31. 

32.
Beatriz Colomina has made the all-inclusive point that modernist architecture as such has to be understood as mass media. Architectural designs and manifestations thus have to be perceived as part of a wider ensemble of media such as architectural models, photographs or film. In fact, for a long time, the breakthrough of modernist architecture was restricted to paper. The high number of journals and books dedicated to modernist architecture was not commensurate with what for a long time was a very limited number of actual building realisations. Journals dedicated to architecture and often published in association with professional organisations had already emerged in the 19th century. Due to the long exposure required in early photography static architecture had for a long time necessarily been a popular photographic subject. It was only the breakthrough of off-set prints shortly after the turn of the century that made it much easier to reproduce high-quality photos in print. And only the new modernist buildings offered motifs which fully brought the strength of photography over traditional engravings to the fore.

Hailing new technologies as such was a hallmark of avant-gardism. Novelty, along with an openness towards the fields of industry and technological change intended to further progress towards a new society, and the new medium of photography dovetailed with this conviction. It was not a coincidence that the then still relatively new visual medium of film was also enthusiastically embraced by avant-gardists as well as many modernist architects in East Central Europe. For example Syrkus, after finishing his studies in Warsaw, went to Berlin to gain practical experience in the new medium, amongst other things, by building sets and painting posters for the then leading UFA-film studios.

The visually mediated dimension of modernist architecture has attained much more attention in recent years. Both Le Corbusier and Giedion have been rediscovered as the photographers they also were and both men’s strategic use of what was then considered an advanced medium – photography – has been highlighted. While Giedion and Le Corbusier were necessarily amateurs, the 1920s also saw the emergence of the new vocation of architectural photographer. The German Werner Mantz was probably, along with Arthur Köster, the architectural photographer who did most to define the new visual style in Central Europe. Mantz shaped the genre of visualised modernist architecture with his oft-reproduced photos featuring stark contrasts of light and shadow and stressing rectangular angles as well as alignments in a systematic way. People’s understanding of modernist architecture was to no small degree a result of the work of Mantz and fellow photographers. This technique, to be sure, owed a lot to László Moholy-Nagy, who not only created
the *Bauhaus* iconography, but also theorised how to merge the new photographic language with new architecture.\textsuperscript{41}

Photography also allowed architecture from Europe’s margins to be easily and speedily admitted into the dominant discourse. Technical innovations made photography a much cheaper and accessible medium. Meanwhile, visualising the promise of glass and concrete proved particularly suggestive where the ghosts of defunct urban structures and social misery loomed large. Moreover, applying the new technologies also suggested being part of an encompassing international movement. Stressing the chances of the new building material concrete and referring to the most impressive cases abroad and at home lent a certain self-evidence to the issue.\textsuperscript{42}

31. The promise of reinforced concrete. Examples in *Praesens* 1926 and 1930

Syrkus’ correspondence with Giedion or Gropius – just like the correspondence between many other CIAM members – regularly concerned providing pictures of recent buildings (and sometimes the architects in question themselves).\textsuperscript{43} Giedion internalised the suggestive power of photography so much that he, in the aftermath of a CIRPAC meeting in 1936, proposed placing an “interesting photo” on the cover of the minutes.\textsuperscript{44} Reproducing modernist buildings from abroad demonstrated the capacity of the new strand of architecture, whilst adding pictures of one’s own designs, even without explicitly making this point, proved the point that one was in line with the pre-eminent trends of one’s time. The latter, quite obviously, was even more true when modernist architects managed to get pictures of their work printed in foreign journals.
All that said, by around 1925 an international, or European at least, strongly visually defined communication space had emerged, which allowed architects who subscribed to the credentials of the modernist movement to participate rather easily. As internationalism became the very hallmark of this new space it made sense – much more so than for the traditional journals – to refer to examples of modern architecture in the new states of East Central Europe. These countries’ entry into the space of modernism confirmed, in this logic, the ascent of the new idea of modernist architecture.

The following subsections will sketch out this space and attempt to better understand its mechanisms by employing examples from East Central Europe and Poland in particular.

Architectural Journals and Books as Architectural Programme

The most influential journal in Central Europe and East Central Europe for spreading the idea of modernist architecture was the short-lived Swiss avant-garde publication *ABC Beiträge zum Bauen*. *ABC* was edited by the modernist luminaries Hans Schmidt and Mart Stam and strongly influenced by El Lissitzky’s design and Vladimir Mayakovsky’s prose – that is, *ABC* to a considerable degree drew its inspiration from the young Soviet Union. By doing so in a consequential way the journal offered both a visual and conceptual reference point for the mushrooming avant-garde groups throughout Europe. Although not well-known, *ABC* also reveals a second important point for the communication of architects. Once the first buildings were belatedly realized according to *ABC* principles, these buildings turned into powerful icons. A good example is the private house *Mart Stam* built in the Baba quarter of Prague in 1928. The house was erected as part of a housing exhibition in Czechoslovakia and on the invitation of Karel Teige, using striking contrasts between glass and concrete in a conceptually modernist way.

Stam became a star of the developing field with his *Van Nelle* factory in Rotterdam. The factory not only featured the new materials and aesthetics which Le Corbusier popularised for private villas but it additionally promised to revolutionise the workspace. As explained in chapter 2, fostering general efficiency was one of the central concerns and promises of modernist architects. Stam’s, and *ABC*’s, take on architecture and the way architecture was to be communicated is emblematic for both the relevance and impact of new kinds of journals dealing with architecture. The modernist architects contributing to *ABC* and its impersonators had
clear aesthetic convictions which were applied almost as laws. But these aesthetics, as Stam and Schmidt claimed in their own works, had to be linked with promises of societal change. While the classic architecture journals principally confined themselves to reproducing buildings, discussing their technical background and aesthetic values, the new type of journal brought in social aspects which reached far beyond architecture proper. *ABC* also published influential technical and scientific articles, whilst urban planning was an important topic in the journal from the outset – for example, Mart Stam’s planning for the town of Trautenau in Czechoslovakia.\footnote{146}

*ABC* had considerable influence on the CIAM – both in terms of personal links and the way the social mission of architecture was conceived and framed. In some respects, the CIAM also served as an attempt to formalise the journal’s strategies and to extend these through holding events such as congresses.\footnote{147} In its clear focus on architecture *ABC* differed from avant-garde magazines with a broader scope such as the Dutch *De Stijl* and *i10*, published in collaboration with Oud and László Moholy-Nagy, among others, and succeeding *De Stijl* or El Lissitzky’s Russian-French journal *Veschied Gegenstand Objekt* which in a variety of ways influenced avant-gardists. Despite *ABC*’s short lifespan, from 1924 to 1928, this characteristic left a marked imprint on efforts to find adequate publicity for the cause of modernist architecture and inspired, for example, the journal *Praesens* and numerous other journals in East Central Europe.\footnote{148} This transfer was massively facilitated by the iconic typography introduced by *De Stijl*, which in a brand-like manner signalled membership of the “corporate identity” of modernism for all those who incorporated it.

Modernist architects stressed the connection between architects and typographs. El Lissitzky, who referred to himself as a “book constructor”, serves as the best case in point for the “typographer-architect”.\footnote{149} During his stay in Germany in 1922 Syrkus grasped the power of new typographic forms, particularly that these forms provided a powerful tool given that the new visual language was also understood in the West.

For architects in East Central Europe the easy ‘linking-in’ allowed for by the corporate brand modernism became was particularly attractive. There were close links between *De Stijl* and Poland and *De Stijl* and *BLOK*, and later *Praesens*, and members of all these groups corresponded extensively.\footnote{150} In 1925 *BLOK* featured a cover depicting the global spread of the magazine’s reach under the headline “Where to find Blok”, including cities in China, Japan and Brazil.\footnote{151}
Those European journals which covered and promoted architecture in a new way had become consolidated by 1930 while trend-setting magazines like Le Corbusier’s and Amédée Ozenfant’s *L’Esprit Nouveau* (in 1925) and *ABC* had expired. In 1932 the originally radical avant-garde group *de 8* from Amsterdam joined forces with the more moderate Rotterdam-based *De opbouw* to publish *De 8 en opbouw*, which was less zealous than *de 8*’s original 1927 manifesto suggested but was nevertheless a very influential publication.52 Two years earlier *L’architecture d’aujourd’hui* (AA) had already been established in France. In contrast to *De 8 en opbouw* and the other examples described, AA was not a result of artistic avant-gardists looking towards architecture. Founded by André Block and Marcel Eugène Cahen, the journal was run in the 1930s by Pierre Vago, of Hungarian-Jewish descent. The journal reflected Vago’s interest in opening up architecture to new technological opportunities and connecting it more strongly to the social questions of its time. The journal also aspired to offer a forum for what was now a well-established new architectural scene, particularly by using high-quality illustrations and thus capturing the visual power of what was new.
Le Corbusier received ample attention in AA, but the journal also covered his less radical colleagues. This, combined with a decisively European perspective, made it almost self-evident that AA became the main forum of European exchange and of defining hierarchies and systems of belonging and relevance in the wider field of modernism. In this, AA was much more successful than Vago’s second pet-project, the Réunions internationales d’architectes (RIA). The first issue of AA contained an eight-page section on “L’architecture d’aujourd’hui en Pologne” accompanied by stunning images. The pictures of realized projects and designs, particularly of exhibition architecture, as in this case the General Exhibition in Poznań, of 1929, catered to the visual standards established by the Das Neue Frankfurt journal’s Bildberichte (visual reports).

33. ‘Architecture today’ in Poland and exhibition on architecture in primarily Central European countries, AA, 1930, 1933

The Neues Frankfurt was a prime example of how far the notion of a corporate brand, evoking social progress, new technology and urban improvement, could be taken. Further, Neues Frankfurt provided ample examples of how powerful it was to visualise the new architectural successes and the promises this approach held for a
better future by pushing through Ernst May’s reform agenda. To this end the journal used photomontage in new ways, thus setting an example for other journals and, not coincidentally, raising architect May, the man behind the journal, to celebrity status by the late 1920s.

Journals devoted to architecture were not, of course, an innovation of the inter-war period. However, during that period two important changes shook up the existing scene. The first was the rise of avant-gardism and its manifestos which were, in a certain sense, serialised as highly conceptual journals – such as De Stijl or ABC. The second was the establishment of new nation states with their ensuing needs to reflect and propagate their aspirations for social improvement. Moreover, the ongoing shake-up, which led to these journals’ establishment, not only increased the number of such – still nationally defined – journals, but also their thematic scope.

The reciprocal perception of the development of modernist architecture in eastern and western countries reflects the asymmetries sketched at the beginning of this chapter. It was much harder for Polish, Hungarian or Czechoslovak modernist architects to gain coverage in a German or French journal than vice versa. That said, these architects found reception in Die Form, the Bauwelt or AA, which earned them, in their home countries, comparatively greater prestige than, say, an article on Gropius in a Polish journal would do. Moreover, articles on the achievements of modernist architects in East Central Europe in Western journals were not written in a hierarchical tone but instead stressed the common ground of modernism and highlighted the relevance of the region’s achievements. Wasmuth’s Monatshefte had already in 1928 reported on the achievements of modernist architects in Poland. In 1934 De 8 en opbouw published an article by Szymon Syrkus on modernist architecture in Poland.

AA offers an interesting case in point. The journal, as Hélène Jannière termed it, exhibited a “politique étrangère”, with correspondents for Hungary (Pierre Vago’s father Joseph Vago) and for Poland (Szymon Syrkus). In addition, the renowned architectural critic Julius Posener, who was instrumental in the journal from its start, functioned as correspondent for Central Europe and also covered Czechoslovakia. AA dealt with work by architects from these three countries on several occasions, particularly in the early 1930s. The journal thus placed these architects’ work in a hierarchy of modernism but also incorporated these works into this body. An article on Czechoslovakia from 1932 shows pars pro toto how the East Central European examples featured as news from an experimental space which was of relevance to the rest of Europe and the architectural profession as such.
particular interest in building achievements in the realms of health, schooling and sports in Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁶⁷

Linking-up with this interest allowed for entering a communication space attractive for both sides – the journal and its contributors from the ‘new states’. Syrkus used this new space virtuously. He was a regular contributor to AA, serving as a correspondent during the journal’s first four years, appearing as part of a survey, complete with picture portrait in the AA’s first issue. Syrkus also published in Dutch and German journals. He employed the group *Praesens* as a means to legitimise himself as head of a substantial movement in Poland rather than operating as a single individual. Via *Praesens* Syrkus not only connected himself both to other avant-garde movements and the more moderate strand represented by AA, but he also drew on an extensive body of completed projects in the relevant fields for the new kind of journals covering architecture. *Praesens*, moreover, offered examples of collective work and of transcending the narrower confines of architecture proper.

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34. S. Syrkus in AA, 1937

This illustration has intentionally been removed for copyright reasons.
To view the image, please refer to the print version of this book.
Syrkus raised radical arguments even in contributions which at first sight concerned technical issues. His article in AA on the question ‘Maisons basses, moyennnes ou hautes?’ on the main theme of the CIAM’s Brussels congress, ended with the statement “Constructions Des villes nouvelles, LES VILLES FONCTIONNALISÉES AUX MAISONS HAUTES PARMI LA VERDURE.” Similarly, in an extensively illustrated article in the first AA issue of 1932, Helena and Szymon Syrkus clarified their intended programme to construct 100,000 flats yearly by using new methods in steel construction.

These articles reflect a win-win situation for a journal seeking to create a clearer profile for its programme of modernist architecture as an international phenomenon as well as a phenomenon of social relevance. This win-win situation played out particularly for modernist architects in the ‘new states’ in need of an international sounding board for their far-reaching ideas. The sheer number and synchronicity of new journals dealing with modernist architecture established in the late 1920s in East Central Europe speaks to the impact of new forms of communication and the attraction of the promise of modernist architecture in the region.

The journals were interconnected in a variety of ways via modernist architects who met in other frameworks – avant-garde groups, exhibitions, or organisations such as the CIAM. Larger journals such as AA featured a Revue des Revues, reporting the content of other journals, many foreign but generally likeminded, and in this way strengthened the idea of a wider movement of which one was part. The table of contents of the Polish journal DOM and the Czechoslovak Stavitel (The Architect), for example, were regularly reproduced in AA. The same was true for the contents of AA or leading German periodicals of architecture which found their way into the Polish Architektura i Budownictwo (Architecture and Building, AiB). AiB, just like its Czechoslovak and Hungarian counterparts, was keenly aware of recent international trends and projects.

New journals on modernist architecture sprang up in the whole region in question. Even a small country like Czechoslovakia produced the more mainstream Stavitel, and Stavba (Construction), edited by Teige, which tended towards a radical modernism and published numerous articles from L’Esprit Nouveau but also work by Gropius. Moreover, the avant-garde group Devětsil, masterminded by Teige, published the more specific but short-lived magazines Revue Devětsílu, Disk and Pásmo which covered art more broadly but also considered modernist architecture. In 1930 the group Levá fronta, which had replaced Devětsil, established a journal of the same name (1930-1933) which was closely connected to the Czechoslovak communist party. This strand reflected the politicisation of Czech modernist archi-
tects as well as the tensions which, as described in the previous chapter, prevented these architects from substantially contributing to the CIAM for several years.73

While journals such as *Levá fronta* did not exist in Hungary or Poland the general trend of diversifying journals covering architecture and these journals devoting more attention to modernism also emerged here – and in the wider region. In Hungary, the most eminent example of a modernist movement publication was the journal *Tér és Forma* (1928-1948), edited by Virgil Bierbauer, which counted Farkas Molnár among its regular contributors.74 Outside this study’s narrower geographic confines, but exceptionally influential within them, was the Yugoslav journal *Zenit*. The journal and the current of *Zenitism* form a prime example of how an initially broad avant-garde movement came to focus more and more on architecture and its modernist promise while still sticking to key avant-garde principles in visual language and a quest for the ‘New Man’.75

This general pattern may be well studied for the Polish example: while the first half of the 1920s saw the rise of avant-garde journals with a generic focus on the arts, in the widest sense, the progress of more formal organisations ushered in more focused, and often stable, publications. Avant-garde magazines in Poland, such as Tadeusz Peiper’s *Zwrotnica* and the less radical *Rytm*, were followed by *BLOK*, a longer-lasting journal which embraced technology and thus developed a more concrete programme and a more clearly directed dynamic with regard to modernist architecture. In many ways *Zwrotnica* served as a hinge pin between the early avant-garde and a second stream of journals with an emphasis on architecture. Peiper had (as discussed in chapter 2) defined the masses and the new technical world of the machine as the most important points of departure and thus focused on the city. He had also introduced the Polish public to the works of Le Corbusier. Peiper described the journal’s mission as “implanting in our people a sense for the present age”.76 He thus helped to establish Constructivism, which fulfilled such an important bridging-function in East Central Europe – a bridge between radical avant-gardes and the more concrete tasks of architecture.

Additionally, Peiper turned *Zwrotnica* into the first Polish avant-garde magazine “to be noticed in wider Europe”.77 Subsequently, *BLOK* and later, briefly, *Praesens*, enjoyed similar fame. *Praesens* highlighted architecture and reflected the splitting of the avant-gardists into those pursuing radical visions in the arts and those seeing architecture as the tool to bring about concrete social improvement.78 *Praesens* was founded in 1926, not least because Syrkus and his fellows in spirit were deeply unhappy with the mainstream position of the AiB. Syrkus felt that AiB’s failure to pay attention to the *L’Esprit Nouveau* pavilion in Paris was almost scandalous. More-
over, AiB almost completely ignored the *Międzynarodowa Wystawa Prac Architektonicznych*, the International Exhibition of Architecture in Warsaw in 1925, a showcase of modernism.

35. Czechoslovak modernist designs in *Præsens*, 1930

AiB had emerged in 1925 in Warsaw connected to the faculty of architecture at Warsaw University of Technology and to *Kolo Architektów*. While certainly not part of the avant-garde, AiB also distinguished itself clearly from the established journal *Architekt*, founded in 1900 in Cracow by the *Krakowskie Towarzystwo Techniczne* (Cracow Society of Technicians). AiB preceded AA in also covering the general topics of planning, technology, and social change in urban space, championing a modernist but not radical architecture. AiB prided itself rightly on its international outlook and systematically following-up developments in other European countries. From its inception the journal accompanied its articles with many high-quality photos. AiB included among its regular contributors architects from the modernist camp, as well as those who were open to new solutions but had rather
classically professional careers. In this sense AiB not only served as a communicative bridge linking Poland with the rest of Europe, but also between the different camps in the country itself.

An interesting insight into the allocation of relevance is provided by a letter by the German architect Heinrich Lauterbach – whom AiB introduced as “our German friend” – to Birbauer published in Térer és Forma and reprinted in AiB in August 1930. Lauterbach, an expert on Polish architecture, sketches the particular challenges architects faced in the new state of Poland. He states that it is thanks to Szyman and the group Praesens that one is able to grasp the most relevant Polish architectural advances. He introduces Syrkus as the Polish architect of greatest renown in Germany due to his role in the CIAM congresses at La Sarraz and Frankfurt, his publications on the housing question, and his architectural realisations, in particular the artificial fertilizer pavilion at the General Exhibition at Poznań in 1929.80

In contrast to comparable German journals, for example, AiB contained a much higher proportion of international references, and not only in the extensive sections specially devoted to foreign journals.81 A strong preference for the technical and social dimension of architecture, including housing, also emerges while questions of style played a proportionally less important role.82 The editorial of the first issue linked the journal closely with the dynamics of the new capital while the second issue featured an extensive comparison of urban development and urbanism in different European capitals and opportunities and needs for planning accompanied by futurist designs for Warsaw by architect Lech Niemojewski.83

36. Lech Niemojewski, plans for a future Warsaw, commercial district and street lay-out, 1925
Niemojewski’s sketches, and the photos of modernist buildings abroad and in Poland in particular, showcased the achievements of modern technology. The combination of new forms of visual representation and the modern technologies these represented, one would imagine, had a particularly strong pull for the reader of AiB. In the close interaction between articles illustrating the novel and arguing for the potential of, say, improved sanatoria or modern housing, AiB achieved a double translation which was potentially more convincing in Poland than, for example, France. The latter is to say that AiB, apart from almost literally translating foreign works on architecture, managed to translate the abstract promise of modernism into concrete examples, which were explained in visual and textual form and provided architects with a forum to explicate the whole range of their vision. Articles by Edgar Norwerth, architect and critic of architecture, which reflected on exactly this link, frequently featured in AiB. Thereby, AiB also fulfilled an important role in reflecting the shared goals of professional architects. The SAP’s Rocznik (Yearbook), in contrast, limited itself to organisational matters.

A typical issue of AiB comprised 40 pages and covered three to four topics – mostly exemplary large-scale building projects – in depth. These themes were often drawn from foreign architectural realisations. In the first ten years of its existence AiB referenced 27 Dutch case studies, while the larger countries of Germany and France unsurprisingly received even more attention. These references attest to an enormous density of exchange, which followed certain asymmetries. There was certainly no clear concept that the Netherlands and some other countries were leading the way while Poland was only a recipient of foreign ideas as underlined by the many reproductions of Polish works in foreign journals.

An important question is to what extent this international exchange was channelled into domestic debates. By far the most relevant example in Poland in this respect was the journal DOM which was the organ of the Polish movement for housing reform described in the previous chapter. The richly illustrated monthly served both as a transmission belt for the housing debate and a concretisation of abstract debates. This also has to be seen as part of an intensive information campaign aiming to familiarise the public with the goals and achievements of international functionalist architecture. This effort was even more fully expressed in the WSM’s own publication Życie WSM, a newspaper published by the Szklane Domy association of tenants to inform on developments in the housing estates.
37. Examples of interaction between picture and text. Sport facilities in AiB
DOM’s interconnectedness with the urban transformation of Warsaw and the city’s new housing projects was clearly inspired by May’s *Neues Frankfurt*. In a similar way, DOM translated the grand themes of modernism into concrete solutions, in particular with regard to new solutions in housing. Simultaneously, DOM reflected the importance of the WSM, turning the abstract *Præsens* discussion into solutions which could be realized and thus tried out and then communicated again.

Both in terms of the form chosen and in content, regularly reporting foreign examples, DOM and AiB were part of an international publications scene dealing with modernist matters which emerged from the mid-1920s on. DOM sought an international example of concrete relevance for Poland and thus often looked to neighbouring countries in similar situations. Both DOM and AiB regularly reported on CIAM events and initiatives. The Polish CIAM group, and again Syrkus in particular, used this structure to spread news of the CIAM programme in Poland. Still in 1938, in an internationally extremely tense political situation both domestically and internationally, DOM published an extensive double-issue on the CIAM’s 1937 congress in Paris.

DOM and AiB both demonstrate the new opportunities architects gained from international exchange around the issues which defined modernism – both social and aesthetic. Nowhere is the dramatic change in communication methods more apparent after the First World War than in the medium of architecture books. The genre was almost reinvented due to a twofold profound change. First, the technical precondition of cheap high-quality reproductions enabled and quickly made it much more common to visualise architecture in book form. Modernist architecture, as has been discussed before, leant itself particularly well to photographic reproductions and would, in turn, have been much less impressive in the traditional hand-drawn format. Moreover, and connected with the former, the cause of modernism galvanized the existing publication format. While it had previously been common to cover exemplary buildings from the past or assess the state-of-the art in recently erected buildings, often of an inherent significance due to their function, new kinds of books dealt with promise and vision. The few early examples of completed building projects represented *pars pro toto* the opportunities and possibilities of new technologies and a new functionalist approach. Concrete examples were often taken from the field of industry, namely buildings which before the war had been confined to specialised publications.

A few revealing examples highlight what was at stake. Architectural critic Walter Müller-Wulckow’s central role in the breakthrough of modernist architecture has only recently received adequate attention. Müller-Wulckow was the mastermind
behind a series of four books featuring modernist architecture in the bestselling *Blauen Bücher*, a German book series which both established and spread the cannon of modernist architecture. During the First World War Müller-Wulckow had already envisaged a new society ushering in a new type of art and was a member of a short-lived avant-garde movement. At that time Müller-Wulckow had also contacted architects asking them for pictures of buildings he regarded as representative of his time. The planned book was to contain “Buildings of Labour and Traffic”. Müller-Wulckow’s *Blue books* sold in five digit numbers, which, given their rather specialised theme, was a remarkable success.

Müller-Wulckow thus facilitated, and partially initiated, a process which also occurred in France and other European countries. The first half of the 1920s saw the publication of a number of books characterised by their vision or daring use of pictures, or both. In 1923 Le Corbusier published all his articles from the journal *L’Esprit Nouveau* as a book entitled *Vers une Architecture*, providing thus a reference point, as the title suggested, for the future of the discipline. In the Soviet Union Moisei Ginzburg, the founder of the OSA organization of modernist architects and editor of the modernist journal SA, published *Style and Epoch* in 1924. With regard to its visionary character the book is often likened to Le Corbusier’s *Vers une Architecture*. Another fine example of this new kind of missionary book which claimed to be life-changing is Sigfried Giedion’s *Befreites Wohnen* of 1929. It was deliberately aimed at a wide audience. These books which were ahead of their time, depicting not only a new architecture but a better future and therefore reaching out to the widest possible audience.

This had been attempted systematically by the series *Bauhausbücher*. These books, inspired by Gropius, fulfilled different functions: canon building, providing an outlet to showcase the Bauhaus’s achievements, and disseminating the vision which Gropius summarised in his *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, first published in English in 1936. In France, books published in collaboration with AA attempted an equal degree of cohesion.

One of the storytellers of modernist architecture, Adolf Behne, offers an example of how communication and disseminating the cause quickly merged with the very issue of modernist architecture in only 50 pages in *Eine Stunde Architektur*. Behne assembled the most important statements around the promise of housing, the idea behind *Sachlichkeit*, and some concrete examples in the form of slogans, hammering his message into the mind of the reader.

Unlike Behne, most other “propagandists” of new architecture, a contemporary term, relied on the visual power of photos. Partly in order to provide examples
which still did not exist in one’s own country, and partly seeking to acknowledge the relevance of one’s own cause by referring to the ubiquity of the modern movement, landmark books on modernist architecture emphasised the international character of their theme. A good example is the book *Internationale Baukunst* edited by Ludwig Hilberseimer in co-operation with the *Deutsche Werkbund* of 1927, which offered a visual state of the art. In a similar vein, Gropius presented his book *Internationale Baukunst* of 1927 as a “Bilderbuch moderner Baukunst”, a picture book of modern architecture. Gropius explained in his preface that the fact that all the examples shared common characteristics was a “sign of their relevance, pointed to the future and indicated a general desire to design in a completely new way.”

Almost as suggestive as the signifier ‘international’ was the reference to the two promised lands in the West and the East. Erich Mendelsohn’s 1926 *Amerika. Bilderbuch eines Architekten* made a deep impression even beyond Germany due to its visual impact. Bruno Taut’s *Die neue Baukunst in Europa und Amerika* of 1929 strengthened the transatlantic link. Le Corbusier’s *Quand les Cathédrales étaient blanches: Voyage au Pays des Timides*, could be seen as a counterpoint, in a sense answering exaggerated expectations. This echoed the early transatlantic urban exchange in the years immediately after the First World War in embracing and rejecting examples from the New and Old World. For Le Corbusier, his disappointment with the US followed his disillusion with the USSR, which had initially caught the imagination of European modernist architects, most vividly captured in the success of El Lissitzky’s *Russland. Die Rekonstruktion der Architektur in der Sowjetunion*.

As Elisabetta Bresciani has rightly pointed out these books served as a projection screen for the modernist programme while at the same time providing models for modernism themselves. Architecture books spread the idea of a “single modern architecture and modernity” to a greater degree than the comparable journals which, despite their international references and contacts, were still largely dependent on their national context. Most of these books were reviewed in AiB and other journals, which in turn set the tone and synchronized the resulting discourse.

**Travelling, Gathering, Thinking Alike: Architects as Modern Men**

Those architects who defined the movement had to become writer-architects. These writer-architects, like Le Corbusier, Gropius or Taut, became authors who quickly showed greater trust in the impact of the visual than in the written and took into account that modernist built icons mainly gained attention through pictures rather
than direct encounters. Their books, to be sure, also significantly contributed to what could be called personal branding of the human icons of modernist architecture. Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris changed his name to Le Corbusier in 1920. He wanted to make sure that his work and written output as an architect would be distinguished from his work as a painter.

Le Corbusier fashioned himself as a new type of architect and was seen as such. A special issue of the AA on Le Corbusier summarised this development thus: “Le Corbusier n’est pas un architecte, mais un réformateur social”. Le Corbusier had already transformed himself into the first star of the modernist movement by the late 1920s. In Poland he was acclaimed by the Praesens group. Over the years AiB regularly covered Le Corbusier’s work. Particularly remarkable is an article by Lech Niemojewski on “Le Corbusier as a Writer”.

Both Gropius and Le Corbusier transformed their image into trademarks. In their cases it was often more important to know who had said something rather than what exactly they had said. Personality and charisma alone can hardly explain their rise to public fame. Instead perhaps the combination of embodying technological progress, a talent to boldly and verbally name the new opportunities, and also their abilities to and talents in leading exceptionally modern lives themselves can serve as an explanation. An idea of this combination may be vividly grasped in László Moholy-Nagy’s film The Architects’ Congress, shot at the CIAM IV congress and attesting to these architects’ self-perception as harbingers of modernity.

Le Corbusier and Gropius functioned as agenda-setters and communication anchors. The critics of architecture can be found on a different, more refined and reflected level, where they quickly turned themselves into key figures of the new movement. Adolf Behne, Sigfried Giedion, Theo van Doesburg, and Lewis Mumford no longer confined themselves to reporting on evolutions of style or the criticism of single buildings, but rethought the task of architects as such as well as the architect’s place in society. Another example is Adolf Loos, born in Brünn (Brno), who early on celebrated American advances in modern building technologies and became an important interlocutor within what had formerly been the Habsburg empire, particularly through his many personal contacts.

The aforementioned men saw themselves as drivers of change, much more than, say, Julius Posener, who regarded himself as an interlocutor between France and Germany and a chronicler of the modern movement. Mumford viewed himself as a theme-builder. A self-professed “disciple” of Patrick Geddes, Mumford became an advocate for community building, using new technologies in housing. In this Mumford is an example of a fruitful misunderstanding that led to American ad-
miration for the social standards of housing in central Europe, while architects in the Netherlands or Germany prided themselves on their Fordist approach towards housing, their “dwelling machines,” or as Dutch modernist architect Jacobus Oud described their products their “dwelling Fords.”

Giedion, in particular, used all available formats to spread his message, including high- and low-brow media. From the mid-1920s on, Giedion became one of the most eminent ‘translators’ between the general public and the technical sphere and promoter of new expert groups, a paradigmatic techno-intellectual of a new kind who helped to widen the frame of what was perceived as territory for expert action. Michel Callon has stressed the importance of “traduction”, that is the requirement that experts should frame a problem by making a case for its solution. In Bruno Latour’s terminology those who enabled this translation could be referred to as “group talkers, recruiting officers.”

Yet, men like Le Corbusier or Gropius, who in part owed their development to men like Giedion or Behne, or, for that matter, Hitchcock and Johnson, not only featured on newspaper covers because of the glamorous nature of their projects, but also because of the vision they espoused – to cure the ills of the past and modernity alike with the means of modernity. Le Corbusier and Gropius, highly controversial in their home countries, were hailed as problem solvers with a potentially global reach. The visionary potential inherent in urbanism reflected back on the experts who personified this potential. Their celebrity-like fame could be understood as an advancement on the seemingly promising future where social and political tensions would be eased or even wiped out by technological advancement and new planning insights. Men like Le Corbusier also attest to the remarkable personalisation of technological progress and the expectations attached to it.

Stanisław Brukalski reflected this development in 1935. The challenge now for experts, Brukalski claimed, was to win over the public to one’s visions and insights. The successful expert was a propaganda expert. In terms of the modernist content of his work, Brukalski also drew inspiration from Le Corbusier, Gropius and others. Similarly, the architect Roman Feliński, who represented a more moderate modernism whilst still being a pioneer of urbanism in Poland, heavily relied on his extensive publicist activities. Feliński advertised the opportunities of the new discipline of urbanism via the popular press, radio transmissions and other media, employing the Towarzystwo Reformy Mieszkaniowej (Society of Housing Reform, TRM) as a transmission-belt to the wider public. This worked very well because of the social significance of Feliński’s mission.
Enhancing one’s standing as architect by successfully communicating one’s idea was also very typical of Szymon Syrkus. Syrkus was, just like Le Corbusier in France and Gropius in Germany, a writer-architect who devoted a considerable amount of his time and professional energy to his intellectual positioning. Syrkus played a central role in the AA network of correspondents. In this role Syrkus entered a space which was characterised by asymmetries, but equally offered enormous opportunities. The new journals and new forms of books presented a communication framework while the common cause of modernism offered a communication structure in which those who furthered the cause participated in its prestige.

The role Behne or van Doesburg played on a European scale was played in Poland by Edgar Norwerth and Alfred Lauterbach. Both used the columns of AiB to systematically report on the developments of modernist architecture in countries further west and at the same time reflect the progress of modernist architecture in Poland. The absence of a potent market – and the fact that most of those professionally interested in architecture in East Central Europe easily read German or French – seems to have impeded the publication of these books in Eastern European languages. The example of East Central Europe in this sense confirms the hierarchies partially established by the new kind of architecture books – and the status the authors of these books had gained both as intellectuals and architects.

Syrkus and the architects of the Praesens group used their standing and contacts in the CIAM to enter the described communication space. The CIAM tried to use all media channels. Giedion strategically planned journal issues in order to spread the CIAM programme. The CIAM congresses held before the war were accompanied by book publications and other PR-activities and publicity formed a constant and structural category of the CIAM correspondence. From the moment Szymon Sykus joined the CIAM, he exchanged ideas with Giedion on how to spread the appeal of the congresses in Poland. Already in 1929 Sykus had stressed, with a view to the CIAM’s publication strategy, that the organization’s ideas were gaining “ever more ground in Central Europe”.

Syrkus’ publicity activities included concrete projects such as exhibitions and material for books, published in Zurich and in Warsaw. In 1935 the CIAM, through Giedion particularly, proposed its own International Journal, although due to the intensifying political situation it never materialised.

The CIAM-Ost offers a good case in point of how these mechanisms worked. Immediately after its inception the new sub-organisation set up a secretariat under Farkas Molnár. The secretariat obliged the national member groups of CIAM-Ost to: 1) regularly report on their progress vis-à-vis the Paris CIAM congress of 1937,
2) inform on “progress in realising modernist architecture in the respective countries” and 3) every national group was obliged to build an archive “which assembles publications, newspaper clippings and photos which were of relevance from the perspective of CIAM”.133

This said, it would be highly misleading to interpret such efforts as merely strategic. From all we can see in the CIAM correspondence and in the CIAM meetings, for which the CIAM members had to make enormous investments in terms of finances, time, work and intellectual commitment, the modernist cause was a deeply-held conviction which almost formed a defining personal characteristic. For the sake of clarity, albeit in somewhat exaggerated form, this bearing comes to the fore in a quote by the French avant-garde artist and typographer Francis Picaba, who stated that “my personality will always be more modern than my oeuvre”.134

Both Le Corbusier and Gropius styled themselves as modern men, which included the way they led their private lives and, in Gropius’s case, not conforming to established marital convention.135 Gropius’s correspondence with Fred Forbát provided numerous examples of the sense of belonging to a new formation. The sense of being modern overrode divisions of nation, generation, status and standing: Forbát was Hungarian, 14 years younger than Gropius, an employee in Gropius’s private workshop and never achieved the same renown as Gropius.136 None of these significant differences prevented them from using a personal tone in the correspondence which reveals mutual interest in family affairs and personal sensitivities. This intimate tone and mutual interest were nourished by a very clear sense of an ‘us and them’ idea of who belonged to the progressive camp and shared a new concept of how to lead one’s life and those who did not.

In a telling observation Andrew Saint hinted at the significance of the zip-pulllover Hannes Meyer featured on a portrait of 1928, only three years after the zip was invented.137 One could with equal right refer to a portrait of Barbara Brukalska, showing the architect as a very stylish example of the modern woman and all the features this epitome encapsulated.138 As design professionals both architects had a clear sense of the communicative aspect of their work, of the message they sent. The same was true of the deliberately informal clothing style which distinguished CIAM congresses – and their visual representation – from the much more formal gatherings of the, say, IFHTP. Modernist architects made a point of freeing themselves from the conventions of a bygone time and of giving up traditions which defined the specific fusion of professional calling and the personal way of life. The choice – or calling – to be modern, often had stronger implications and stemmed from stronger motivations in East Central European societies, which often still com-
prised traditional social structures and were just developing metropolitan scenes, than in the West. Even in the exceptional situation of Szyman Syrkus’ internment in the Auschwitz concentration camp the Syrkus couple recalled the glass-plate of their table at home as a reminder of their shared ideals of modernism. In East Central Europe the modernist redefinition of a vita activa merged with the sense of being on the cusp of a new era during the post-1918 period. Piotr Piotrowski characterised the “wish to be modern, the will to shape the new situation, to acquire an active gaze oriented towards the real life” as typical in its opposition to the “melancholic reflexion” on death which dominated the decades before 1918.
Communicating Social Change through Architecture

The observations made on the correspondence between Gropius and Forbát can be easily complemented by numerous examples from the CIAM. A tone of closeness in the correspondence and constant confirmations of friendship, of continuously asking about the well-being of family members, who often took part in the correspondence, prevailed. In the passages of his memoirs devoted to the CIAM Forbát accentuated his friendship with the Syrkus couple and recalled that “soon everyone [i.e. within the CIAM] fell in love with Helena”. While it was still men like Giedion, Gropius, Van Eesteren, Le Corbusier and Szymon Syrkus who stood in the limelight, they never questioned the role of women as active participants in their quest for a modern world. It was the closeness engendered by a shared cause, of fighting against resistance, of hoping for a better future to prove this cause right, which particularly facilitated proximity across linguistic, national and generational borders. This belonging was not so much expressed in simple invitations to join common meetings but rather in making a point of embracing a modern position towards all aspects of life, e.g. when Helena Syrkus told Gropius in a letter that she had always been proud of “not being uptight”. This informal matter-of-fact gaze comes to the fore even in Forbát’s letters, written in extremely restricted personal living circumstances from a train-waggon while overseeing the progress of the Soviet city Magnitogorsk. For the believer in modernist solutions the awkward situation he found himself in formed a challenge to be overcome by rational planning and superior designs.

This culture of closeness under the umbrella of the shared cause also extended to and included travelling and international exchange. These were no longer mainly or exclusively purpose-driven – that is serving knowledge exchange and professional affairs – but became a defining feature of one’s persona as modernist architects. AA organised trips to the USSR and Poland – through Szymon Syrkus – in September 1932 and to Czechoslovakia Hungary and Austria in 1935, which also served to emphasise the bonds between the brothers-in-arms of modernism in these countries and to then visually give evidence of the shared journey by reproducing the latest buildings of modernism in the journal.

Within the CIAM framework gatherings and travelling attained a new level of importance. Of course, the financial aspect of travelling was a constant point of concern. However, the financial commitments that the Syrkus couple, for example, was willing to make seem to confirm the argument just made: attending CIAM gatherings and being in the company of kindred spirits justified mobilising the very last financial resources. Szymon Syrkus summarised his earlier commitments in a letter a few days before the outbreak of the war: “Whether she [Helena, M.K.] will
be able to come is not dependent on us. It is also not determined by finances – which was never the deciding factor for us, as you know, as we are easily-swayed and greatly prefer collaborating with the CIAM to material wealth. We were never really concerned that the cost of travel was beyond our means.”

39. Banquet for French architects in Warsaw 1932, in AA

Obviously, certain personal characteristics were necessary to flourish in these environments, and these did not only involve architectural capability or adherence to modernist principles. Helena Syrkus’ international background – including her command of the German, French and Russian (in addition to her native Polish) languages – was one of her attributes which helped her to quickly acquire a key position in the organisation. In her reflection on the relevance of the CIAM in general and for her in particular Helena Syrkus constantly stressed the like-mindedness and close personal contact with her fellow-travellers from the CIAM, based on a broad set of shared personal interests far beyond shared professional interests even many decades after the last congresses.
Communicating Problems and Solutions via Language and Exhibitions

Of course, the common basis of a belief in modernist solutions and leading a ‘modern life’ oneself did not prevent severe conflicts over just how to resolve issues. Le Corbusier’s 1929 conflict with Teige over the Mundaneum, discussed in chapter 3, is a good illustration of the potential fault-lines. The conflict also illustrates well how much the specific collaboration of modernist architects in the CIAM and beyond was driven by themes of change rather than a mere general collaboration or knowledge transfer.

It has been remarked that Functionalism has to be understood not so much as a style but as a “specific historical way in which architecture found a place in knowledge, politics and public discussion.” The “language of modernism”, which Adrian Forty analysed, conceived of the relationship between architecture and society in a new way – and was a language understood across the barriers of national idioms.

In particular, two new generic terms structured the communication on modernist architecture and kept its loose ends together: Sachlichkeit and Constructivism transported the rise of technology and linked modernist architecture to numerous other fields in the arts and technology, as well as wider society as such. These terms suggested a revolution in living conditions. Sachlichkeit or Neue Sachlichkeit
retained the spirit of a disillusioned Weimar Republic after post-war expressionism and was coined during an exhibition of the same name in 1925. The term soon came to be used beyond Germany as well. When Le Corbusier, in his Defense of Architecture, directed at Teige, confessed that he was guilty of “lèse-Sachlichkeit” he indirectly confirmed the all-pervading establishment of its rule. Sachlichkeit in Le Corbusier’s reading meant architecture according to strictly functionalist principles and with a clear social edge and a practical rationale – and thus not in line with the greater flexibility and stress on aesthetic principles which characterised the ‘Romanic’ faction within the CIAM – and Le Corbusier. In their agreeing to disagree, Le Corbusier and Teige, however, proved that Sachlichkeit captured a crucial and central category of what modernist architecture should be. Their disagreement showed not only how communication despite diverse backgrounds could work while at the same time giving an idea of the dynamics of this discussion. For Teige, but also for Syrkus and many others, who all – at least initially – admired Le Corbusier, the promise of Sachlichkeit was immense. The sober approach of a form of architecture predominantly understood as a technology to improve society seemed to offer the greatest possibility of solving their countries’ housing problems while aesthetics seemed to be more of a luxury problem. Further, Teige’s, and to lesser extent Syrkus’, leftist convictions could easily be combined with the essence of Sachlichkeit.

The more relevant term for East Central European architects was, however, Constructivism. The term fulfilled a twofold function. Constructivism was the rallying cry under which an international avant-garde assembled. Heterogeneous as this movement was, Constructivism revealed an integrative power. Moreover, Constructivism was, to a greater extent than Sachlichkeit, a dynamic term with a promise for the future and made use of concrete examples in the Soviet Union. Constructivism and the OSA group were clearly linked with – and abroad associated with – the Russian Revolution. Vladimir Tatlin’s famous tower encapsulated the dynamic of progress on the verge of the utopian. The Hungarian László Moholy-Nagy, when joining the Bauhaus in 1925, was deeply inspired by Constructivism. Artist-architects, he claimed, were in a position to shape humankind by organising vital processes of life. As Tzvetan Todorov has rightly stated, “architecture was the logical apotheosis of Constructivist experiments: inspired by artistic principles, the architect would fashion the world building real houses, life-size cities and landscapes". Here Constructivism is a telling example of how a new dynamic field opened up a communication space around what in this case was a largely utopian issue. This dynamic, as well as the concrete grounding of Constructivism in its interest in new materials, made it highly attractive to artists and particularly to
architects in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{156} Journals and Constructivist avant-garde movements emerged in all three countries, in many respects motivated by the promise of radical change to a deeply depressing situation right after the First World War. In all three countries the artists and architects built on the networks established during and in the aftermath of the 1922 Düsseldorf congress of the *Union Internationaler Fortschrittlicher Künstler* (International Union of Progressivist Artists), later *Konstruktivistische Internationale* (Constructivist Internationale, KI), which established Constructivism as slogan. At that meeting utopian visions had been combined with an emphasis on the opportunities of practical progress already made, particularly stressing the need for and opportunities of international communication. El Lissitzy and van Doesburg used the KI to build networks and journals, of which *BLOK* was an important part. The article “What is Constructivism” written jointly by members of the Polish group *BLOK* was inspirational for Theo van Doesburg.\textsuperscript{157}

The dynamics which the concepts of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and Constructivism entailed are to be found in the communication structure which the CIAM, along with many other things, also was. This is best visible in the thematic congresses which were one of the hallmarks of the CIAM. Following its establishment in Swiss La Sarraz, the next gatherings in Frankfurt (CIAM II, 1929) and Brussels (CIAM III, 1930) both tackled critical topics around the overall question of housing.

With the establishment of the CIRPAC and its working groups as problem-solving committees the CIAM tried to move on from framing problems to solving problems. While this aspiration was never fulfilled in the way the CIAM architects hoped for, the Frankfurt congress clearly shows the novelty of and opportunities afforded by this approach. The congress in effect coined a term for a complex problem by using the catchphrase ‘minimum-dwelling’ and placed it on the political agenda, thereby functioning as a unifying agent of the respective discourse. It was largely through international comparison that the congress established that problems existed, were urgent and universal in kind. This reflects the attention to making rules expressed in the urbanists’ struggle to achieve unified maps.\textsuperscript{158}

Being able to refer to concrete manifestations of the CIAM problem-solving potential in Ernst May’s Frankfurt, the congress at least attempted to function as a pace-setter. The constant comparisons, yet another hallmark of the CIAM, gave a sense of urgency to the themes of change which the CIAM had introduced or at least taken up and framed internationally.\textsuperscript{159} Moreover, Frankfurt was put on the international map as a front-runner in taking on the greater social question of housing. It was no coincidence that May, who, along with Gropius and Le Corbusier, was
one of the international celebrities of social architecture, was soon thereafter hailed in the Soviet Union as a master of far-ranging urban planning.  

The mechanism behind this could partly be described, as David Kuchenbuch has pointed out for housing and urbanism in general, as “crisification”, a strategy to frame, and therefore also dramatize, social problems in order to push through or speed up social politics. The Weimar Republic saw an immense upsurge in statistical and scientific work on the “Kleinwohnungsfrage” in the late 1920s, which was dictated by the crisis of political legitimacy and austerity there. The CIAM congress provide excellent examples of how this discursive framing of problems was taken to the next, concrete level – and throughout Europe. Right after the Frankfurt congress, AiB reported the results, referring to its earlier coverage of the congress.

The focus on exemplary buildings of modernism often avoided the fact that these buildings cannot be separated from the wider urban infrastructure, the “urban machinery”. Measures undertaken in order to improve this “machinery”, also via the CIAM, became part of a Europe-wide communication and exchange of experts. Cities also had to position themselves in a pattern of urban progress, particularly the capital cities. The activities of the Polish housing reform movement give ample evidence of this twofold process of drawing inspiration and concrete knowledge from international examples as much as using these new frameworks to position oneself. The 1932 campaign, *Tani Dom Własny* (An Affordable Home of Your Own) disseminated via an exhibition of the same name, as well as a special issue of DOM serve as good cases in point.
The clout of the IFHTP and the organisation’s specific knowledge was used in a similar way by urbanists in Czechoslovakia to establish an Institute for Urbanism. With the help of the IVW a Czechoslovak Association for Housing Reform was established during an IVW conference in Prague in 1935 and the theme thus placed on the public agenda. In order to understand why this went so smoothly we have to take into account how comparisons worked within the new field of urbanism. From its very beginnings and in an increasing manner, the development toward urbanism was international in character, creating its own international organisations and various networks of exchange.

An important pre-condition for the CIAM’s success in bringing architects from very diverse backgrounds together around problems were new techniques in communicating architecture. The writer-architects Behne and van Eesteren had already made remarkable attempts to condense the essence of new architecture and urbanism by the mid-1920s. Van Eesteren made use of slides and apparently planned a film. There were also plans to publish van Eesteren’s ideas under the title Eine Stunde Städtebau in a series alongside Behne’s Eine Stunde Architektur. Van Eesteren’s approach was game-changing in that he perceived the city in a holistic way and combined this with his notion of urbanism as a science with clear-cut methods. Based on his earlier experiences in Paris he used diagrams and maps as visualisations to communicate his complex results much more consistently and in a manner that was easier to comprehend than others had done before. Van Eesteren succeeded in, on the one hand, taking a much richer set of information into account while, on the other hand, keeping this information abstract and thus communicable.

Within the CIAM van Eesteren strove to unify categories and modes of representation of architecture and urbanism in order to facilitate a systematic comparison of cities and to give more clout to the demands of CIAM. This aim brought van Eesteren and the CIAM into the orbit of the Austrian political economist and sociologist Otto Neurath. The progressive climate of the 1920s resulted in Neurath becoming director of the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum (Museum of Society and Economy). The wide scope of this institution provided Neurath with the means to develop the ISOTYPE project, a visual dictionary with some two thousand symbols.

While this was not, in itself, a new approach, the embracement of modern storage and communication media certainly was. Neurath believed that the new media would enable him to forge a new standardised language and thus disseminate knowledge in ways previously unheard of. Under modern conditions, Neurath saw new urgency for such an undertaking, but also new hope of achieving this through new
technology and new visual media. Neurath directly linked the development of his pictorial language to technological progress. What technology had achieved for industry and hygiene for health pedagogy, visualisation was now to achieve for social progress.¹⁷⁰

Through strict standardisation, information could not only be communicated but also easily compared, which was particularly important to Neurath. More important was his activist stance. Adopting general trends like urban reform with its intention of teaching tenants how to live, Neurath stressed the social edge of his new communication method.

Tellingly, as Charles van de Heuvel has argued, modernist architecture and new visual architectures of knowledge overlapped in manifold ways. Paul Otlet, the mastermind behind the Mundaneum and universal ways of organising knowledge, who had worked with Neurath, used modernist architecture to visualise his systems of knowledge organisation. Moreover, Otlet used similar categories for describing the knowledge revolution he saw at play and wanted to promote as Le Corbusier had done in his Vers une architecture. Both men used terms like plan, standardisation or classification not only in their ordering function, but as instruments “to create a better society.”¹⁷¹ Urbanism offered a framework for comparisons but also another dynamic term pointing to a better future. When Norwerth discussed the transformative potential of Le Corbusier’s 1925 book Urbanism in AiB, it was the dynamic of the concept which he stressed.¹⁷²

Exhibitions may also be seen as a medium which transformed the way architects communicated. Of course, exhibitions were not a new phenomenon in the 20th century, but they changed in character at this point for a number of reasons. Building on the framework established by the World’s Fairs since the mid-19th century, the new nation states used exhibitions to put themselves on the map as modern entities.¹⁷³ This was true both for exhibitions in these countries themselves and for exhibitions abroad, most efficiently the said World Fairs. At the same time the most prominent international exhibitions gave reason to debate the relationship between official state representation and the role modernist architects could play here along the lines described in chapter 1. This was true for the 1937 World’s Fair in Paris – where Lachert and Szanacja and Brukalski built the Polish pavilion – and for the 1939 New York World’s Fair.¹⁷⁴
Ever since proto-urbanist Werner Hegemann had organised the first exhibition on urbanism in 1910, these events served to both define the phenomenon and to provide a framework for the politics of comparison. While urbanism remained a matter for specialists, architecture exhibitions by their very nature attracted a far
broader public. Though modernist architects’ claim to represent their countries was certainly not uncontested, modernist architecture was well-suited to the genre. This was true for temporary buildings, which were still able to capture the revolutionary aesthetics of glass and concrete, such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s famous Barcelona Pavilion of 1929 as well as exhibitions capturing the visual impact of new architecture in photographic form. The most striking and well-known example was the Weissenhof estate built for a *Werkbund* exhibition in Stuttgart of 1927.

Exhibitions were not only urban events because they were organised within the spatial domain of a city, but also because their main theme of technical modernisation was attuned to urban space in many ways. Exhibitions greatly contributed to a more scientific discourse on cities and to linking urbanism and architecture to a wider social cause – or even the nation as such. One particularly revealing and effective example is the Stockholm exhibition of 1930, of which iconic photographs were widely published. “This exhibition attempted, more or less in direct reaction to the Paris World Exhibition of 1925, to merge what was perceived as European, or even global, modernism with the essence of “Swedishness.”

Czechoslovakia staged a national exhibition in 1928. In line with the new nation’s desire to look towards the future, Brno was deliberately chosen over Prague. The organisers selected the country’s dynamic second city because it “had no tradition and no past” and they felt that this would allow Brno to match the new state in terms of having no sizeable tradition. The workshop and the laboratory were to feature here as the new model of the state.
The PeWuKa of 1929 in Poznań, was attended by more than four million visitors. The exhibition was a revealing example of merging national aspirations with those of technical experts, in particular modernist architects. As the global economic crisis began shortly thereafter, the exhibition marked a shift of emphasis from the question of the nation’s independence to the social implications of modern art – and architecture.\textsuperscript{181} AiB devoted a double-issue solely to the exhibition. With numerous emblematic illustrations in the style of Otto Neurath AiB highlighted the overarching societal relevance of the exhibition.\textsuperscript{182}

The exhibition was presented as a “confirmation of an exam passed with distinction, an exam in which the ability to lead a life of one’s own in the family of nations was tested”.\textsuperscript{183} In excess of 100 pavilions were erected on exhibition grounds covering more than 60 hectares to present the most important economic, political and cultural achievements of the new state of Poland, featuring some spectacular examples of modernist architecture, mostly by \textit{Praesens} architects.\textsuperscript{184} Among the latter was a striking design for a pavilion featuring the place of women in the modern economy by Anatolia Hryniewicka-Piotrowska.\textsuperscript{185} The fact that the \textit{Praesens} group had been invited attests to the official embracement of modernism. This was a defining moment for \textit{Praesens} and the last time that group acted as one entity. The group split into two after the exhibition: those who followed the avant-garde tradition and those who sought concrete solutions in social architecture.

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44. Anatolia Hryniewicka-Piotrowska, the Women’s Labour pavilion, PeWuKa
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The exhibitions mentioned earlier served as a constitutive element of the BLOK group’s formative phase. But on BLOK’s initiative an exhibition of international architecture was also held in Nancy, France, in March 1926. The first issue of the journal Praesens broadly covered the Exhibition of Modern Architecture in Warsaw of 1926 with projects from Czechoslovakia, France, Netherland, Germany and Russia. The same was true for the last issue of the journal BLOK, which functioned as a catalogue of the 1926 Warsaw exhibition. It was through the high-profile of their group that Syrkus and other members of Praesens were able to take part in the 1927 Machine-Age exhibition in New York.

Exhibitions only had a broad impact if they were embedded in a wider media strategy and had a clear-cut message which reached beyond artistic issues in the narrower sense. The 1923 International Bauhaus Exhibition was widely publicised by Gropius and proved decisive for attracting students from other parts of Europe to the new institution. The Bauhaus experience, and the lectures of Bauhaus associates, on the other hand, informed many of the exhibitions in East Central Europe, which tried to merge modernist architecture and social problems on the spot. This was true for the three exhibitions Collective Housing (1931), For a New Architecture (1932) and Build for Our Children (1932) in Hungary, which built on lectures and publications by members of the Hungarian CIAM group and all shared a sharp reformist edge.

More and more exhibitions were being organised around issues of social transformation in the second half of the 1920s. An excellent example is provided by the 1925 exhibition Mieszkanie i Miasto (Housing and Town) in Poland. In the manner of
the ‘crisification’ described above, and in a typical interplay of an exhibition and a journal devoted to the goal of modernist architecture, Zymunt Wóycicki referred to a “catastrophic housing crisis”, calling on the state to act. According to him the housing question was a political problem of the first order. Wóycicki used evocative aerial photography to make his point about a hopelessly dysfunctional urban present and contrasted this with far-ranging plans for the most ambitious Polish urban projects of the mid-1920s. The author argued that it was up to the state to develop the territory in the critical regions, in particular the capital Warsaw and the new ‘Capital of the Sea’ Gdynia. Indeed, the exhibition itself drew on substantial state funding and was heavily influenced by state agencies, in particular the Ministry for Public Works. The exhibition thus provides a good example of the alliance between the modernising state and ambitious modernist architects who, as Wóycicki stressed, recommended rationally built modern houses as the solution to the crisis. Other exhibitions followed this model to awaken the public and tried to pressure the state into taking action. In 1930 Praesens organised an exhibition entitled Mieszkanie Najmniejsze (The Small Inexpensive Dwelling). The exhibition demonstrated the technical and social opportunities for modernists, as explained in Szymon Syrkus’ accompanying article in the first issue of Praesens featuring in particular the Brukaliski couple’s newly erected cooperative housing buildings. Given the more than 25,000 visitors who attended the exhibition it was an enormous success.

Exhibitions and the rise of a new kind of architecture journal were closely intertwined. Exhibition architecture, built for its visual effect, worked particularly well in the new high-quality photographic illustrations. Even smaller exhibitions attracted the attention of specialised journals abroad. It is revealing that the two first AA exhibitions in France featured Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary and particularly emphasized the plight of the new states and their needs – especially Warsaw – to develop new capitals. These dynamics of architecture on display, often still at planning level, media-attention and the combination with the most urgent needs of the state – housing, urbanism, social improvement – all placed in an international framework, made exhibitions a prime example of how the empowerment of architects was enabled, and how these new opportunities were grasped by modernist architects.

**Conclusion**

This chapter showed that the relevance of organising architects in new ways, as described in chapter 3, can only fully be understood when new ways of communi-