

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **HUNGARIAN FUNCTIONALISM AND POLISH CONSTRUCTIVISM – ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING AS SOCIAL ADVANCEMENT 1923-1943**

## CHAPTER 6

### Hungarian Functionalism 1925-1943

As with the experience of the Czech people, the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had seen the Hungarians move away from eclecticism and the excesses of art nouveau. In common with Wagner, Loos and Fabiani there were pre-cursors of the modern: Béla Látja, Béla, Málnai and József Vágó. Their collective works clearly echo in form and construction their Viennese counterparts. However, this certainty in a developing architectural style was severely damaged.

Hungary bled to death during the First World War and the two revolutions that immediately followed. A country that lost a significant portion of its territory in the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, that suffered from economic stagnation after the war and then again during the depression, was not the most fertile soil in which to plant the seed of modern architecture.<sup>1</sup>

For this reason the beginning of modernism in Hungary was removed to other countries following the revolution of 1919, an event that led to mass emigration that anticipated anti-fascists fleeing many parts of Europe due to Nazi oppression some thirteen years later.

Writers, artists and designers moved to Berlin, Vienna and to Moscow where they found a number of expatriate Yugoslavs and Rumanians. Chief among these were Moholy-Nagy, Nemes Lampérth and Lajos Tihanyi, who attended the Weimar Bauhaus, and Lajos Kasak who moved to Vienna where he published and edited the arts review *MA* (Today) that echoed the magazines of the German Expressionists, while a little later turning toward the Berlin Dadaists and their views on anti-art. Béla Kun, Georg Lukács, Béla Uitz and Sándor Ek were all working in Moscow. Uitz and Ek were impressed by the ideas of Aleksandr Rodchenko and Productivism and the dynamics of Agitprop. With the rise of Nazism and Stalinism the very freedom that all of these experiences led to was being extinguished by totalitarian edicts so as a consequence many chose to return to Hungary where rule by Miklós Horthy, as 'so called Regent' was far more tolerable. Despite admiring Hitler's German Nationalism and paying lip service to anti-Semitism, measures designed to restore power to the Germans and Magyars, Horthy presided over the growth of a middle class elite in Budapest and larger Hungarian towns.

Sándor Bortnyik, who had been a spokesman abroad for *MA* from 1917–1922, returned via the Czechoslovak Republic in 1924 to find that *MA* had from late 1922 developed contacts with many major foreign periodicals: *Der Sturm* (The Storm), Berlin; *De Stijl* (The Style), The Hague and Weimar; *Merz*, Berlin; *Het Overzicht* (The Overview) Antwerp; *7 Arts*, Brussels; *L'Esprit Nouveau* (Spirit of the New Age), Paris; *The Little Review*, New York; *Noi*, Rome; *Disk* (Disc), Prague; *Contimporanal* (Contemporary), Bucharest and *Manomètre*, Lyon. Reciprocally, *MA* advertised in many of these journals. Between 1924 and 1925 another magazine *Magyar Irás* (Hungarian Writing) published all of the Constructivist, Dadaist, Futurist, Suprematist and Zenitist manifestos.

Of the returned architects three were extremely influential in creating Modern Movement buildings in Hungary: (Alfred) Fred Forbat, Farkas Molnár and József Fischer were the envoys of a new style. Forbat studied in Walter Gropius' Bauhaus Studio from 1920 to 1922, where Molnár was also a student from 1921 to 1925. These and other Bauhaus students, Marcel Breuer and József Fischer, were all members of the Hungarian CIAM group. As with their Western European counterparts, they wished to publicise and address inhumane living conditions.

Half of the Hungarian population lives in rooms with floors of tamped earth and drinks impure water... 78% of the houses in the country are still constructed of mud and adobe... The population of Budapest is 980,000 and there are only 70,000 bathrooms in the city resulting in 75% of the people living in dwelling units without bathrooms.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these illuminating words from Fischer, the Hungarian CIAM within their philosophy and stated goal of *Tér és Forma* (Space and Form) organized only three exhibitions: *Kolha'* (Collective House) 1931 and 1932; *Dwelling City and Society*, late 1932. As a prelude to these developments Farkas Molnár, under the guidance of Fred Forbat, set up the *KURI* (new town) group who proposed that a new town need not have a definitive centre – in contrast to Le Corbusier's *Ville Contemporaine* (Contemporary City) of 1922. From the first participation of a Hungarian delegate Marcel Breuer, CIAM 1929 in Basel, the conflict between Western and Central European ideas became more polarised.

The CIAM Frankfurt Congress of 1929 addressed *Neues Bauen* (New Building) and the ideological differences presented by living cells in Central Europe contrasted by spacious, middle-class apartments in Western Europe were made abundantly clear.

These differences were being pursued by Farkas Molnár who found voice in the 1933 CIAM Fourth Congress, 'The Functional City', in Athens:

As a result, the fundamental functions of a city—dwelling, work, recreation and traffic – were set out in these plans, two on a scale of 1:10,000 and one on a scale of 1:50,000.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the photographs, cartographies and written reports on thirty three cities including Prague, Budapest and Zagreb, no final report was published.

Le Corbusier published his own analysis as *Charte D'Athenes* (Athens Charter) in 1943. The intervening years had allowed the Western Europeans to virtually ignore the force of Central European arguments when they [the Central Europeans] were promoting the concept of urban and rural landscape in opposition to that of the city/metropolis which was Le Corbusier's metier. This unity of town and country as a garden city model inherited from Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin was anathema to many in the West, especially Le Corbusier.

These clear ideological and sociological differences between the two groups led Molnár to establish CIAM-Ost (CIAM East). Giedion, clearly mislaying his knowledge of geography, referred to these countries as 'Balkan States' – that is, Hungary, Czechoslovakia [Czechoslovak Republic], Poland, Yugoslavia and Greece with Molnár adding Austria and Romania as essential. In 1934 when the Czechoslovak Republic was producing Modern Movement, Functionalist architecture the Czechs were then to have contact severed by CIAM because of 'ideological differences'. This act was also paralleled by the withdrawal of the German delegation. Was it coincidental that the two nations which were clearly instrumental in establishing Modernism and the Modern Movement were not now part of CIAM? An organisation where, since the departure of the Czechs and Germans, the ideas of Le Corbusier, Giedion and their circle were beginning to dominate. Even so, this denial of the Czechoslovak Republic and Germany was countered by the newly arrived Polish group with Szymon Syrkus and Jan Chmielewski presenting *Warszawa Funkcjonalizm* (Functional Warsaw) which offered another view of towns and cities.

Unfortunately the conviction of CIAM-Ost in generating a sense of multi-national identity did not fit with the expansion of the Fatherland, and the annexation of much of Central Europe by the Nazis stopped development. However in the brief life of CIAM-Ost sufficient doubt was created to question the suitability of the urban metropolis as drawn by Sant'Elia and proposed by Le Corbusier. This type of expansive city planning in

Hungary could not gain much purchase, because of a poverty of materials and means. Perhaps this was a blessing in disguise as the Hungarians produced high quality buildings from 1919 to 1943.

None of this development was accidental as the Hungarians defined clearly what modernism was for them, or more importantly, what it was not. Nor does the modernism here incorporate the transitional phases between eclectic and modern or between romantic and modern. This implies no value judgment, since these transitional phases did produce some excellent work that attempted to improve upon the rigidity and dogmatism of the Functional Modern Movement. The buildings from many architects within and without CIAM are all testimony to this fact. From the very start Dénes Györgyi, with what was the first modern apartment house in Budapest, The Electric Company Building, 1926, showed elements of Parisian architecture with projecting bay windows at first floor level teamed with an Art Deco-influenced corner tower (6.1).

Unlike most European countries [except Sweden and other parts of Scandinavia] Hungarians were still able to engage in modern architecture up to 1943, which allowed a further four years of development beyond other national styles in Central Europe. Although Hungary was willing to adopt new and modern ideas, there remained a healthy scepticism and enormous reservation with regard to all [foreign] avant-garde excesses. In looking at CIAM and CIAM-Ost it is apparent that:

A common misbelief is that modern principles were introduced in Hungarian architecture by radicals of the CIAM. The first modern works had actually been built by others long before the group was formed in 1929.<sup>4</sup>

Proof of this misconception is found in the architectural works of Fred Forbat, as in the Szego House, Budapest 1924, which demonstrates very advanced forms and construction methods. Although much that is written about Fred Forbat describes him as the student at the hand of the master Walter Gropius in 1920's Weimar, as with the relationship between Wagner and Fabiani, this is an oversimplification.

Recent research has shown that Forbat played an important role in the design of the 'Building blocks of large-scale' house systems previously attributed to Gropius in the 1923 Bauhaus 'am Horn Strasse' exhibition layout, and in projects for standard houses.<sup>5</sup>

In some ways this set up a dialogue between Forbat and Molnár. Molnár's 'invention', the 'Red Cube', within the Bauhaus exhibition of 1923 was a visual representation of left-wing socialism against right-wing capitalism. In his sketches Molnár shows the handing

6.1 Dénes Györgyi, Apartment Building Honvéd St. Budapest 1926



Rizzoli/Lésnikowski 1996

over of 'Red Cubes' as a metaphor for standardized building units to a union of consumer users, contrasted by the productive chain of capital, ownership and private wealth generation. Molnár himself stressed the radical difference of his project from possible precedents; according to Fred Forbat, his colleague at the Bauhaus, Molnár was very proud of this project because he thought that the pure cube as architecture was his invention.

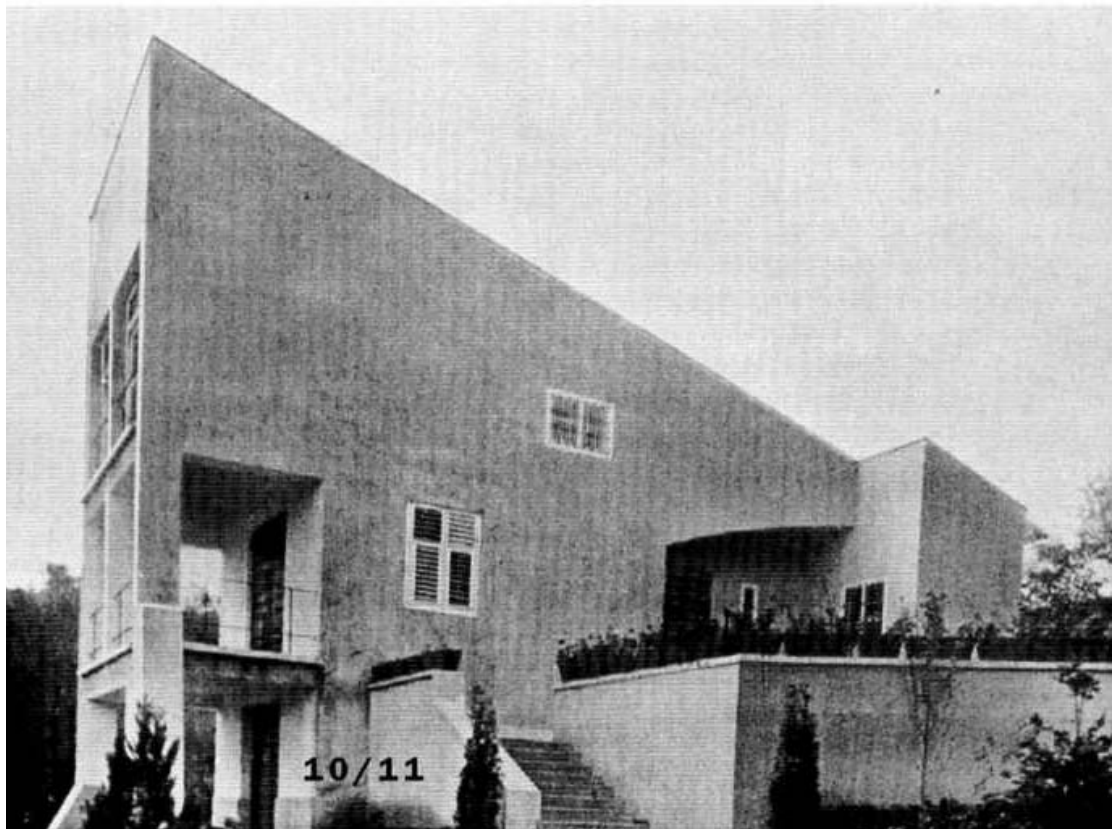
This of course, like all definitive statements, was subject to all manner of question. For example, it is known that Johannes Itten produced a lithograph, 'The House of the White Man' which pre-empted the intention of Molnár's 'Red Cube'; although once having returned to Hungary Molnár was able to put his view of social housing into practice in the *Napra forgó utca* housing estate, Budapest 1931, as part of a development for the Hungarian branch of CIAM. Unfortunately there was a contradiction in the idea of these homes representing CIAM alone. The twenty-four single family houses built on the Buda Hills represented many strands of architectural expression from the conservative to the functional, but in no way embracing avant-garde excess, while clearly remaining modern in every respect.

Molnár's overestimation of his own importance has eclipsed the work of Mano Lessner, 1884–1944, the architect of the first cubic house on the Buda hillside in 1928. Although it might be considered that the shutters, picket fence and classical arrangement of the side porch are detractions from modernism proper, they are merely an acceptance of how far one might push the boundaries without causing an over reaction. By contrast if we doubt how far Lessner would go in his pursuit of modernism we need only look at *Tiskárna, Egerszeghegy*, 1934 (6.2). This building is a tour-de-force from its three-storey wedge shape with terraces and its stepped approach, to the double height 'transparency' of the classically-inspired entrance porch and the arced recess over the side door. In truth, nothing like this had been seen before. In contrasting the house with the machine, Lessner, like others who would come later, saw that:

The machine is a standard product, the house hardly is. The same task needs to be done in another way when one builds on the plain or on a hill, in the shadow or in the sunshine. We have sympathies for spaces, volumes and proportions. The interrelation and sequence of spaces depends on thousands of accidental causes and finally is the result of individual consideration.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly Lessner was not enamoured of the supposed 'new architecture' of reinforced concrete skeleton, strip windows and glass block. As with all canonical vocabularies, Lessner thought this way laid stagnation, especially when dealing with architecture. The sense of adult playfulness Lessner uses in *Tiskárna* from the niches, projections,

6.2 Mano Lessner, Tiskárna, Press House, Egerszeghegy 1934



©Zlatý rez 18 1998



cantilevers and porches give voice to his use of calculated 'happy accident' to imbue his buildings with personality.

As Molnár was to discover later, rather than following the ideas of CIAM and Le Corbusier, far more was gained from looking at Dudok, Mendelsohn, Asplund and Salvisberg. In rejecting the idea of architecture as a scientific exploration of the future within a holistic straight jacket, Lessner and others created a catalogue of flat roofed, cubic villas with an emotional, colourful context that was life enhancing. This life enhancement is often best seen in places of leisure and relaxation. Lajos Kozma's Villa, Budapest 1931, and the recently restored villa by Kozma of the same date with its round windows, terraces and roof overhangs with unusual internal reveals and transparent spaces, have few contemporaries. Similarly the Summer Bungalow, Batsányi Street, Mecsek Mountain, Pécs 1936, perched on the hill and cantilevered out in imitation of '*çikma* construction' was Fred Forbat's foray into a less formal view of architecture as it was resolved in face brick and local stone as a 'holiday home'.

However one of the most relaxed and relaxing examples of this architecture was the House on the Danube, 1935, by Kozma. The situation on Lupa Island meant the land was often submerged by floods; as a consequence the house was raised on piles (pilotis) to combat this, thereby commanding the surrounding land (6.3). This form of construction would allow all to stay dry as enormous concrete cantilevered supports allowed the main terrace to over-fly the water. The interior space of 19 feet by 16 feet was entirely open plan with a kitchen and shower room to one end. When the sun was too high everyone could retire to a sun terrace formed in the shade under the concrete supports and screened by the open concrete stairs to first floor level. The architect who most identified with Lessner's brand of enjoyable ethnographic modernism was Pál Virágh. In his Villa Szendy, Budapest 1934 we see that from the pitched roof and round window down through the balconies, niches and arches all is modern yet firmly rooted in its own history and that of the land on which it is built.

Despite Molnár being more aligned with CIAM in his style of architecture than his colleagues, he demonstrated a new freedom of approach from 1931 in Villas on Cserje Street and Letjő Street in Budapest; the Weekend House, Febögd 1933; Mano Schwartz House, Szeged 1932; House on Hankóczy Jenő Street, Budapest 1933 (as singular works) and with József Fischer, the Hoffman villa, Budapest, 1933 (6.4). These buildings all demonstrate variations of architecture created not as dogmatic or formulaic resolutions but by free will. Fischer worked in the same manner in the Hoffmann Villa, Budapest, 1933, with this creatively free architecture of the private villa reaching a peak

### 6.3 Lajos Kozma House on the Danube, Lupa Island, Budapest 1935



Architectural Press/Yorke 1934



6.4 József Fischer, Hoffman Villa, Budapest 1933



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with Fischer's Jaritz Villa, Budapest 1941-42. Other architects of these private villas were Károly David, Villa on Solinoi Avenue, Budapest 1933; Matte Major, Villa on Sasfók Street, Budapest 1934; and Gyula Rimanóczy, House on Pasaréti Avenue, Budapest 1934.

Although there was very clear evidence of a prosperous middle class investing in the latest works of modernism, this was not the case for all. The reconstruction of the Hungarian world in between the wars had to accommodate 220,000 citizens who had been displaced from all parts of the former kingdom, especially Transylvania. It was not unusual for the poor to construct shelters of wood and fabric or for families to become cave dwellers, as in Budafok. These poor were not the historical poor of centuries of neglect. These were the 'new poor' as identified in *Budapest Története* Vol. 5 by H. Miklós. Included in their number were high court judges, army officers, government officials and even a high-born land steward.<sup>7</sup>

As the terms of the Treaty of Versailles impacted on Hungarian society their close trading nation and ethnic partners, the Germans, were trying to deal with a complete collapse of the German mark. At the point of no return the Hungarians were bailed out by the Americans (in the guise of the League of Nations) with a \$20 million loan over 35 years. The Jewish Magyars, who had always controlled the capital investment and financial institutions in Budapest, added from Rothschild and Son, merchant bankers, a further 250 million gold crowns to improve health care from 1923 onwards.

Unlike most other countries the Hungarian Jews,  
were not treated as an ethnic minority but rather as a religious group and they were to contribute to the development of Hungarian capitalism and through their dominance in key professions, to the modernization of the country.<sup>8</sup>

With this background many of the middle class poor who had taken to living in freight cars in the railway stations and sidings now began to develop a co-operative plan for a model garden city. Through supreme pressure and persistence this articulate and highly numerate group were able to secure a plot of 170 acres on which to build 300 to 400 dwellings as the St Imre Garden Suburb, Pestorline, Budapest between 1930 and 1936. Although the historical poor were not included in this development there was an impetus created to stabilize the currency which allowed a large public housing programme to take place from 1920 to 1944,

96,000 new flats were built which increased the whole building substance of the city by one-third.<sup>9</sup>

One of the largest housing developments of 1934 was for *Országos Társadalombiztosító Intézet* (National Health Insurance Company) (6.5). In the apartment complex at *Köztársaságtér*, (Tizman Kálmán Square 14-16), Budapest, Bertalan Árkay, Sándor Faragó, József Fischer, Károly Heysa, Pál Ligeti, Farkas Molnár, Moric Pogány, Gábor Preisich and Mihály Vadász built three seven-storey blocks with interconnected courtyards of open spaces and greenery. This development was one of many of a particular type seen throughout Hungary. The luxury apartment block with residential and business premises containing the Unapark Café, Pozsonyi Avenue, Budapest 1936, was another facet of a rich tapestry of building. Béla Hofstätter and Ferenc Domány in their apartment building on Margit Boulevard, Budapest 1937, illustrate how 'dumb' block architecture was being replaced by something far more sculptural (6.6). The rhythm of the floors and balconies are anchored by the undulation of the windows downwards to a central stairway spine that connects two parallel blocks. All is resolved on a steeply sloping site and meets the demands of modern living in a spacious well resolved environment.

This understanding of people's needs are also ably demonstrated in the work of Virgil Birbauer's and László Králik's Airport Terminal, Köerbereki ut 36, Budaörs 1935 (6.7). The stepped cylinder of the passenger hall is flanked by two administration wings. Light pours in from an enormous roof light above the central hall. Protruding above the top circuit of the building is an observation platform with control room employing signalling apparatus and high powered lights. The ingenious design divides the passengers in arrivals from those in departures on two separate floors. This configuration allows progress without confusion while providing a safe viewing gallery through the multiple French-doors, so that every one might witness air transport – the 'marvel of the new age'.

One can only speculate as to how far Hungarian modernism would have progressed but for the German army who destroyed one third of the city in their retreat of 1944. During the war the Magdolna Hospital, Budapest 1939, by Geden Gerlőczy and Nándor Körmendy is one of the last examples of Hungarian modernism. A simple block constructed from an internal steel skeleton and green-coloured, pre-cast stone panel infills were utilised to reduce costs through pre-fabrication. Five medical floors (6.8) are identified by continuous balconies with a glazed rail forming a perfect place for patients to sit out.

This embracing of advanced technologies at a time when most of Europe was fighting

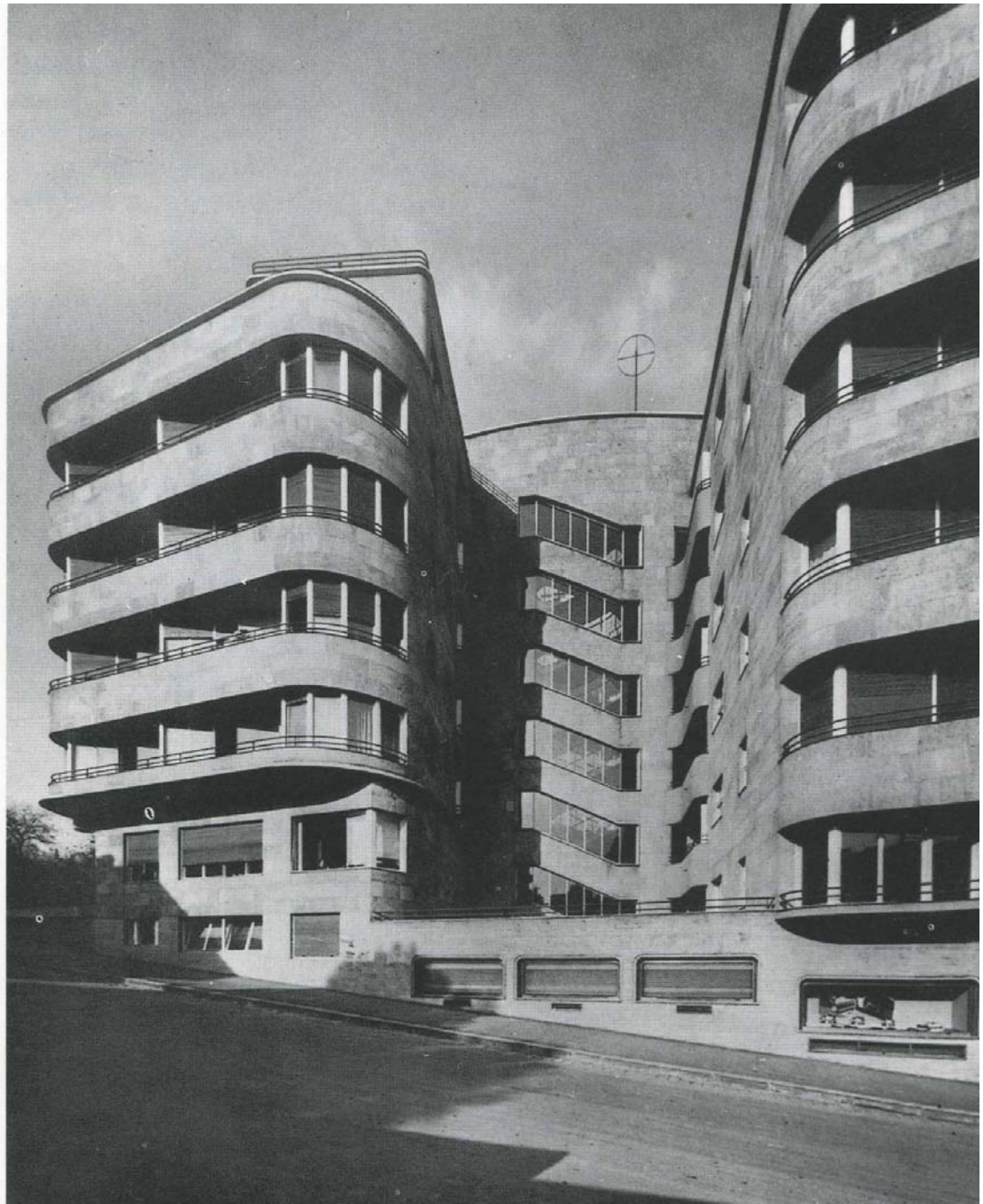
### 6.5 National Health Insurance Company, Budapest 1934



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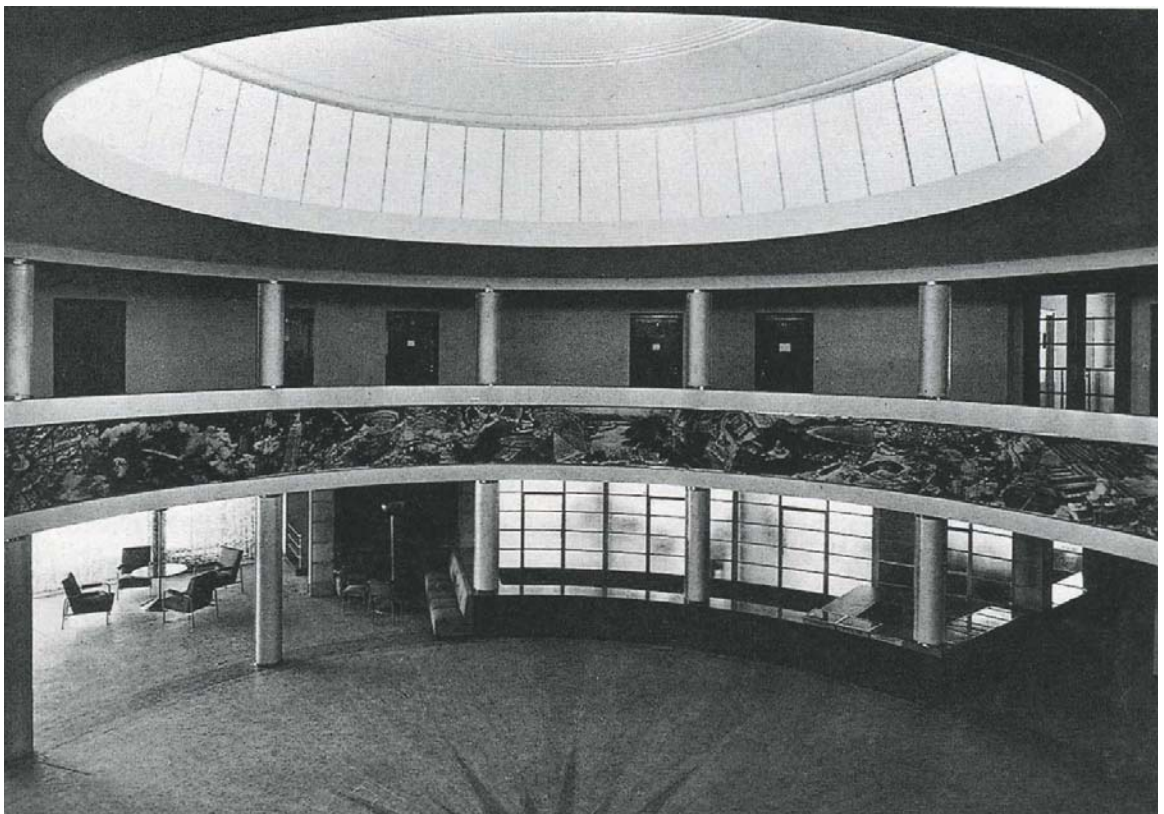


6.6 Béla Hofstätter and Ferenc Domány, Margit Boulevard 1937



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6.7 Virgil Birbauer and László Králik, Airport Terminal, Budaörs 1935



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6.8 Gedeon Gerlőczy and Nándor Körmendy, Magdolna Hospital, Budapest 1939



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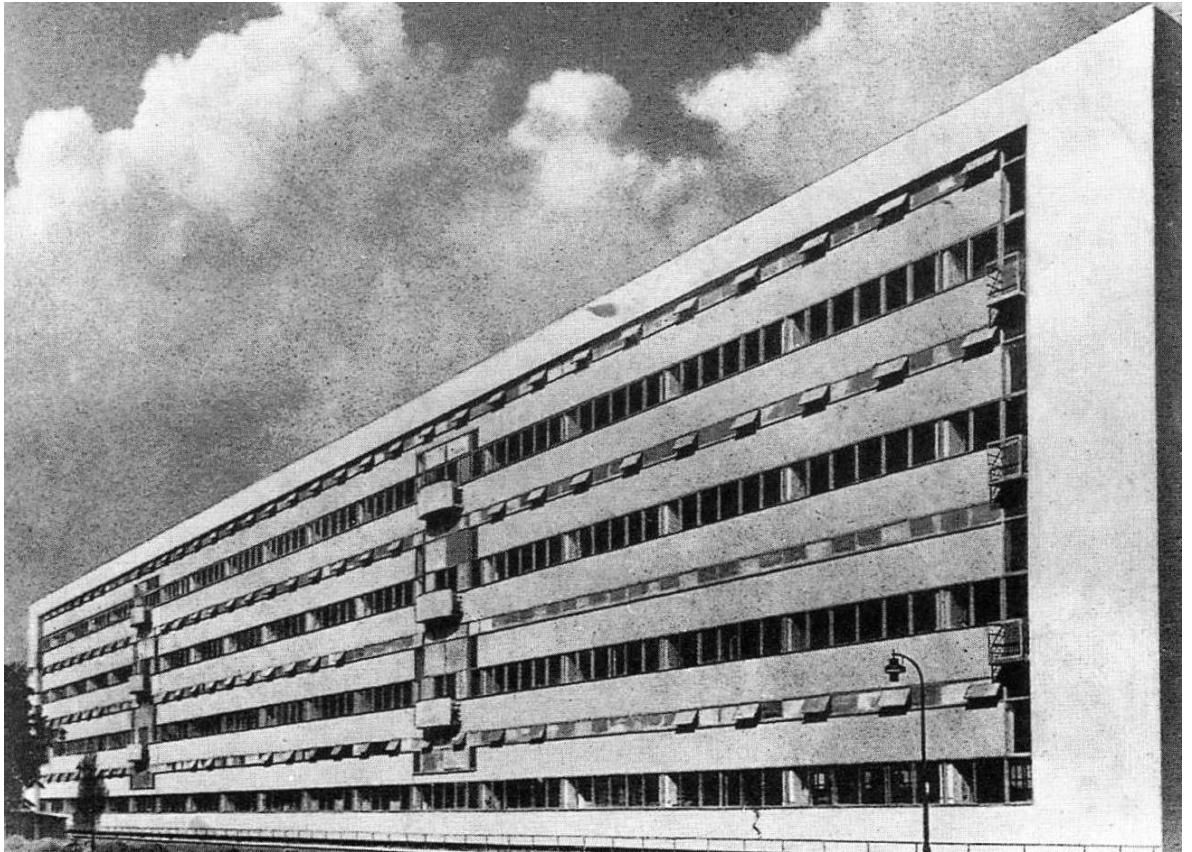
for survival allowed the Hungarians to catch up to the developments in all other Central European countries. Moreover, a rather uncertain peace allowed Hungary to stage International Trade Exhibitions, which although poorly attended resulted in revolutionary pavilion designs in glass and steel. At the National Fair, Budapest 1938, Virgil Birbauer designed a space for steel companies, railroad cars and a machine factory to display the re-emerging capacity of Hungarian industry.

This confidence in the future is seen in the Stühmer Chocolate Factory, Budapest 1941 by Aladár and Viktor Olgyay (6.9). The elegance of the surrounding exterior box is punctuated by an endless ribbon of windows. Two sets of vertical balconies are employed to interrupt the linearity avoiding any appearance of a machine-like structure. This de-humanizing effect, which is found in many Western European works of this period, is avoided by the tri-partite banding of uniform windows above and below, which creates a 'breathing space' interspersed by bands of smooth rendered cement.

The four bands containing this tri-partite arrangement are further enhanced by the linear flow of smaller window vents, giving the whole an ability to be seen differently along the entire length. This difference is brought about through the actions of seemingly powerless men and women in opening windows for more light and air, in other words the building does not dominate, it enhances productive life. Another inspired part of the design is that as the floors reach the containing edge of the elegant box, a vertical band of windows and balconies anchor the inner space and exterior solid. It is fascinating to study the lamp post, a relic of a bygone era contrasted by this beacon of modernism.

There were also banks, cinemas, retail stores, market halls, trade union offices, hotels and post offices being built in Hungary as modernist works until 1946 when *Új Építészek Köre* (New Architect Circle) and *Új Építészek* (New Architect) joined *Tér És Forma* (Space and Form) in forwarding views on workers' housing, although the political cutting edge of the latter publication had been somewhat blunted. Many modernist architects including Farkas Molnár and Bella Hofstätter had fallen, casualties of the Germans, while the Olgyay brothers, with the advance of the 'liberating' Soviet troops, had fled to the west. This meant that by 1950 Hungarian modernism had stalled and in 1951 the Stalinist Communist Party required that socialist realism be adopted in all the arts. For the Hungarian modernist this act sounded the death knell of freedom. Although the Hungarians tried to re-assert their freedoms again in the 1956 Uprising, after crushing the revolt the Soviets made sure from then onwards the 'wedding cake' architecture of the Communist State was the only tolerated style.

6.9 Aladár and Victor Olgay, Stühmer Chocolate Factory, Budapest 1941



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## Polish Constructivism 1923-1939

Many of the strands of modernism throughout Europe in the 1910s and 1920s became amalgamated in the term 'Constructivism in Poland'. In truth, Poland's artistic and architectural innovators were making flesh the pronouncement of Tadeusz Peiper:

Let us create art [and architecture] on the freshest layers of life. Let us build it on the latest achievements. This may lead to a unique, original Polish art.<sup>10</sup>

As with all of Europe, Poland had progressed through Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Dada and Surrealism. Now that the First World War and most of the deprivations of the people were being addressed a socially determined approach to rebuilding Poland began with the *Wstawynonej Sztuki* (Exhibition of New Art), Vilna, May 1923. The importance of this event was not the works on exhibit; it was the statements contained in the *Katalog* (Catalogue). These were not only revolutionary in their concepts but also very dynamic and challenging in layout and typography in the hands of Władysław Strzemiński and Witold Karjruksztis.

To understand how the Polish perceived the modern era it is useful to look at the views of Teresa Zarnower and others:

Changing the field of vision, technology has changed the means of expression by introducing new material and it has broadened the scope of unexpected possibilities.<sup>11</sup>

Władysław Strzemiński: The application of what has already been won – is the task of applied art [including architecture]. I sincerely wish the art of strict form the greatest possible success in creating the style of our epoch.

Witold Kajruksztis: Construction unfailingly brings about a deformation of the realistic form, and thereby a bankruptcy of the 'classical' principles. A contemporary artist [architect] ought to abandon the way of Compromise (pseudo-neo-classicism) and shift to creating pure form.<sup>12</sup>

Many of the ideas of Polish Modernism had first been seen in the publication *Zwrotnica* (Railway, Points) from 1922. However the founding of a new group, Blok, in 1924 heralded a new, more modern arrival; the Vilna Exhibition 1923 was its first unofficial action, but as can be seen the direction of the group was always in question.

Polish innovators [who] jointly professed absolute construction, but [who] represented distinct and at times even contradictory artistic groupings.<sup>13</sup>

There was to be much debate about direction and purpose. This expression of a common goal was further expressed in the second issue of the Blok magazine in 1924

Blok represents people united into a combat group by the slogan of absolute construction.<sup>14</sup>

Although it was thought and hoped that these 'contradictory groupings' could be bound together the splits within Blok began to reveal themselves in 1925 when Władysław Strzemiński and Mieczysław Szczuka put forward two very different views of how Polish modernism could be achieved. Put simply, Szczuka required art and architecture to be dictated by social needs whereas Strzemiński, under the term Unism, envisaged an art including architecture which was autonomous in arriving at a social order that the populace would embrace. With these diametrically opposed views the unity of Blok would have to dissolve and by February 1926 the International Exhibition of Architecture held in Warsaw had seen all of the fine artists and sculptors depart to leave behind industrial designers, stage designers, film makers and architects.

By 1926 these new ideas had formed themselves in the Praesens group, 1926–39, who because of their radical architectural ideas attracted a number of eloquent professionals who wished for a wider international platform. The spokesman of the group, Szymon Syrkus, recently returned from Paris and the influence of Le Corbusier was able to put the intention of Praesens in a very thoughtfully worded address on 'Budget Estimates of Architecture'.

In the way of experiments, the architectonization [sic] creates not only new artistic possibilities but also new social possibilities. Architecture can change the structure of society just as society can change the structure of architecture.<sup>15</sup>

In 1927 the group were an organizing force in the Machine Age Exposition where as before Syrkus identified a close relationship to the ideas of Le Corbusier.

Modern technique gives the architect the power to put in motion the elements creating amass: it even allows him to remove them partially. In this way the cuboid building cease to exist. The planes of the exterior walls and window openings become modifiable elements and therefore secondary. The only permanent elements will be the construction columns, into which one can build all sorts of conduits.<sup>16</sup>

The ideas of Syrkus echo parts of Le Corbusier's *Les 5 Points* (1926) and prepared the way for social demands leading quickly to the construction of apartment blocks of pre-fabricated construction within which were multiple flats which could be let at minimal

rates. Due to the world-wide emphasis on health and decent living conditions which had occupied many countries since the end of the First World War, these blocks would be built in open space with significant green areas as parks and gardens. Internally and externally the ambience of the buildings would be enhanced by considered use of colour, texture, fixtures and fittings combined with, in some cases, using the large expanse of wall as a canvas and its recesses as niches for sculptural work.

An absolute condition of these apartment blocks was the elimination of internal 'closed in', often unsanitary, yards. One of the first designs of this type was from Teresa Zarnower, Mieczysław Szczuka and Szymon Syrkus, 1926. These ideas were taken further by Mieczysław Szczuka, Piotr Koziński and Antoni Karczewski in their competition project for eight- and ten-storey blocks as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Exhibition of Modern Architecture, Warsaw 1926. In the same year Bohdan Lachert and Józef Szanajca designed a row of houses and new types of wooden houses. This they followed immediately with a twin house project and, in partnership with Lech Niemejboski, they designed four-storey blocks for the Eastern Fair in L'viv. The degree of innovation in the different types of buildings within the exhibition is far sighted, involving and empowering; it is large scale, personal, small scale and individual at one and the same time.

One of the architects of the small scale row houses was Jan Bieńkowski with developments in Makoszowy and Piekary-Szarlei in 1927 (6.10). The houses are arranged on a set-back chevron arrangement along the street; every house having its own individuality confirmed, by the array of small porches which have been added. These are contrasted by the workers row-houses (6.10) in *Jerusalem* by Piekary-Szarkej, 1927, as other than the trees obscuring parts of the building, they are all identical. A unique aspect of Polish modern architecture is the number of husband and wife teams: Barbara and Stanisław Brukowski; Helena and Szymon Syrkus; Jadwiga Dobrzyńska and Zygmunt Łoboda and finally Teresa Zarnower and Mieczysław Szczuka who, although not married, had a very close professional relationship.

This investment in family required that, rather than building soulless blocks, apartment building throughout Poland had to be of the highest order. Equally, the town houses, row houses and villas built between 1924 and 1943 to meet an ever increasing demand for both quality housing and commercial premises required a number of prestigious planning co-operatives as well as regulation and development projects in the towns and cities of Poland: Kazimierz Saski 1924, Radon 1925, Gdynia 1926 (GSM), Warsaw –



6.10 Bogdan Pniewski, Żoliborz Warsaw, Row House (1), 1931 and Jan Bieńkowski, Row Houses, Jerusalem, Makoszowy 1927 (2, 3 & 4).

1.



2.



3



4

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Żoliborz 1927, Warsaw – Bielany 1928, Poznan 1929, National Exhibition Plan, Warsaw – Rakowiec 1930-32, Gdynia – Maly Kack 1930, Poznan 1931, Warsaw – Żoliborz 1930-34, Katowice 1935, Ciechanów 1936, Gdynia 1936, Vilna 1937, Warsaw – Zankowy Square 1937, Kraków – Wawel 1939 and even throughout the war: Nazi Pabst Plan 1942, Warsaw – Kolo 1943, Warsaw – Rakowiec 1942.

Much of this planning and building was undertaken by Warszawskiej Spółdzielni Mieszkaniowej (Warsaw Housing Co-operative, W.S.M.), Strzecha Urzednicza Co-operative, and Zacisze (Quietness/Cul-de-sac) Housing Co-operative. Some of the techniques seen in the construction and planning of the new centres were first displayed at a number of international expositions/exhibitions. The General National Exhibition, Poznan 1929, saw a number of pavilions constructed which would help revolutionize Polish architecture.

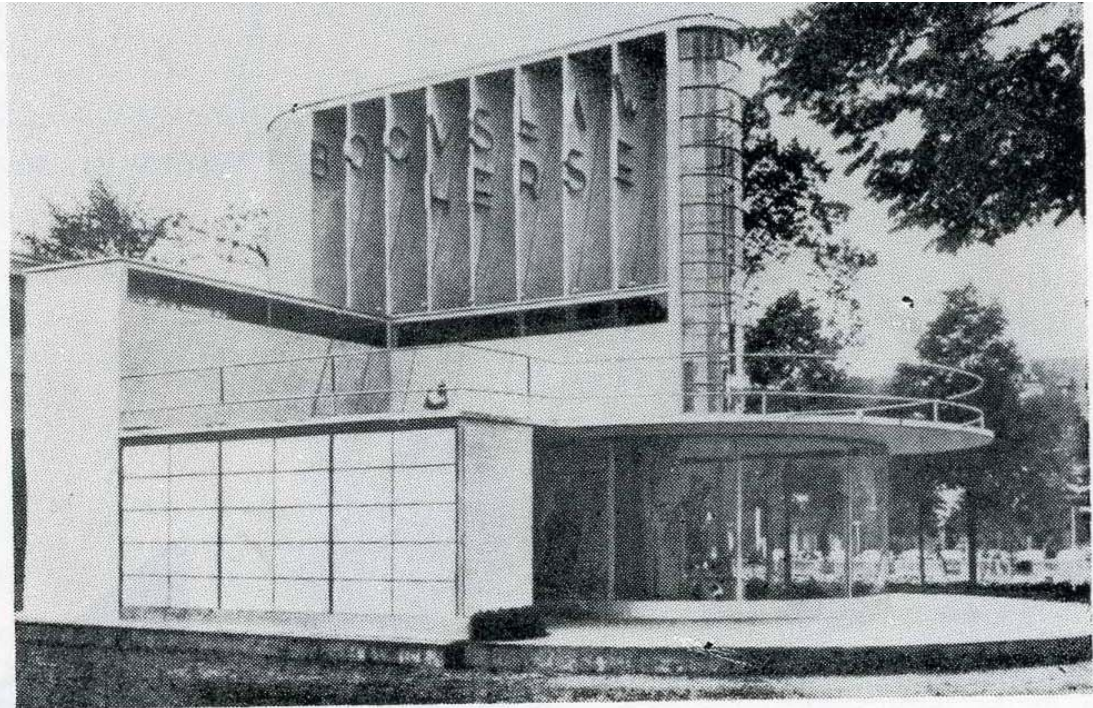
The Centro-Cement Pavilion by Bohdan Lachert and Josef Szanajca (6.11b.) echoes the silo architecture of the USA although greatly reduced in scale, where a cylinder is symmetrically dissected with open niches to give transparency in alleviating heaviness. The cranes in the background speak of a forward-looking industrial country able to compete on a world stage. The Women's Workers Pavilion by Anatolia-Hryniewiecka-Piotrowska (6.12a.) has a far less industrial feel despite the rectangular form. From the dwarf walls with their flowers and shrubs to the obvious front entrance, all is calm and directed – the only note of speed or force is demonstrated by the spiral staircase to one end.

On the other hand, the Fertilizer Pavilion by Szymon Syrkus (6.12b.) demonstrates a masculine form of steel and glass which with clever lighting at night becomes almost transparent. Leaving aside any Freudian references, the dominance of the central tower, particularly as part of a strong vertical L shape, is contrasted by the lightness and simplicity of the adjoining flat-roofed porch through which one progressed to other events and pavilions.

The gold medal-winning Hertze Fashion Pavilion by Bogdan Pwiewski (6.11a.), as the name suggests, represents a less aggressive form. The open glass frontage, which was in fact an enclosed fashion display, welcomed in the visitor. The massing of a top storey with 'prow-head', semi-circular column married to a deck-like structure complete with ships rail are redolent of the liners and first-class travel that was so much a part of the fashion of the 1920s. These pavilions in their respective forms and use of materials with



6.11a. Poznan National Exhibition 1929, Bodan Pniewski, Pavilion of Boguslaw, Herse & Co.



6.11b. Bohdan Lachert and Josef Szanajca, Centro Cement Pavilion

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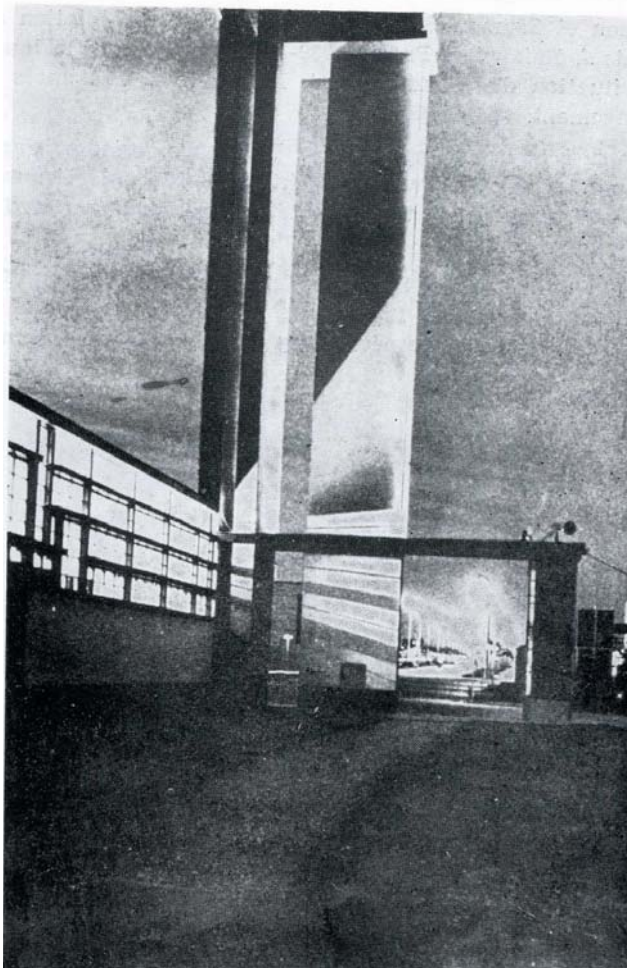


6.12a. Poznan National Exhibition 1929

Anatolia Hryniewcka-Piotrowska, Pavilion of Women's' Work



6.12b. Contrasted with the masculine forms of the Fertiliser Pavilion, Szymon Syrkus.



both masculine and feminine characteristics were indicators of an affluent and emancipated populace.

One pavilion combined both feminine and masculine forms; this was the earlier work by Bohdan Lachert and Jozef Szanajca, the Polish National Pavilion 'Art and Technology', International Exposition, Paris 1937, where the sweeping lines of the glazed façade are held in check by a procession of round, plain rendered columns which are echoed in size and shape by large round roof lights. Although the glazed sweep of panes (6.13) appears to be the dominant feature, the huge adjoining panes of glass, at least seven to eight times the area of the previous expanse, allows light to flood through the pavilion. An entry below this first set of windows emerges through a rectangular block house with minimal lighting and so one was transported from a dimly-lit arena of human scale to a cathedral of light where one felt empowered to grow and prosper.

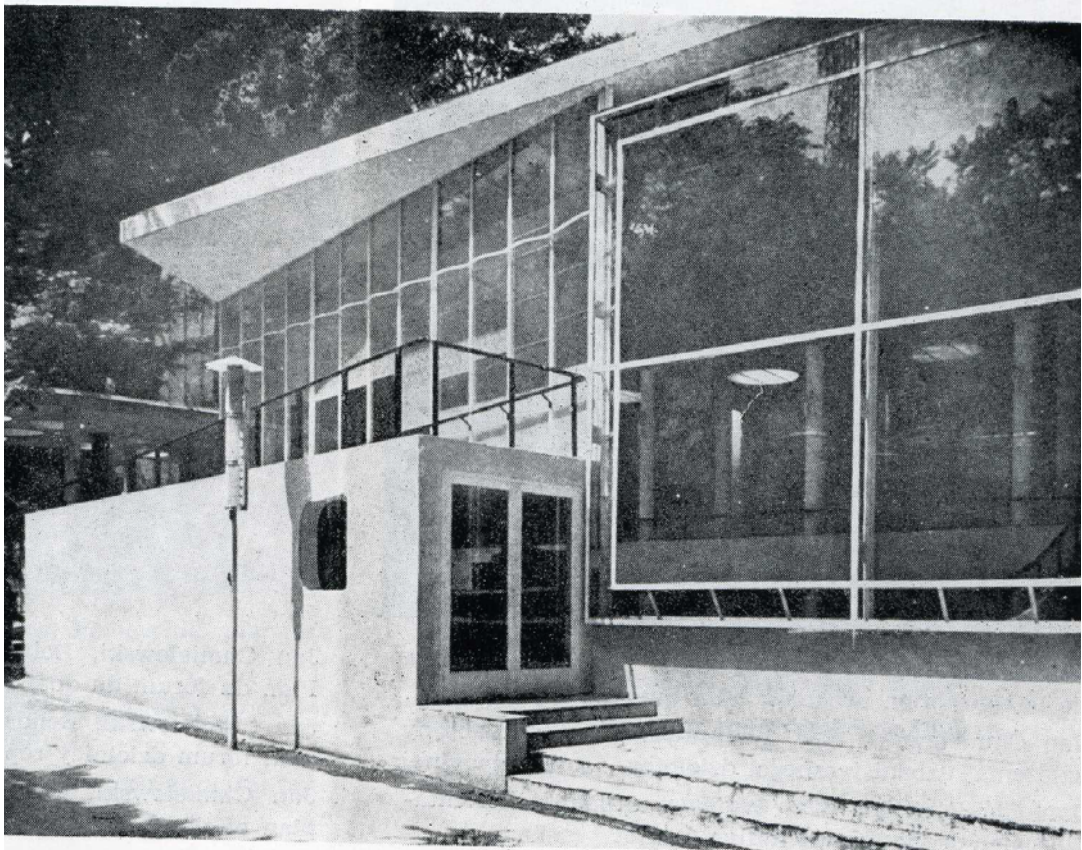
In contrast to this Constructivist Modernism, another official pavilion from Bohdan Pniewski and Stanisław Brukalski was carried out in a modern neo-classical style with a tall rotunda formed as a rolled column of paper set within a terraced landscape (6.14). The patronage of two official pavilions shows to what extent the Polish authorities, even as late as 1937, were able to hold a balanced view on the cosmopolitan nature of Polish architecture and continued development.

Beyond the rarified air of International Pavilions this development was aided by the number of women, especially architects and planners, who were part of a concerted drive to create the new future. From 1925 the long-established *Architekt* (Architect), published in Krakow since 1900, was joined by the publication of *Architektura i Budownictwo* (Architecture and Construction) in Warsaw. This magazine represented a moderate view of architectural development with articles on both national and international imperatives. Much of the balanced view expressed between the covers was due to the editorial style of Lech Niemkowski, an architectural visionary in the view of Sant'Elia, who later became a key figure of Polish architectural education as Professor at the Warsaw School alongside Stanisław Bryła who had studied skyscraper design in America.

He installed an experimental building department in Warsaw that tested both materials and construction methods with all ancillaries, heating, lighting, ventilation and sanitation. The School was also at the cutting edge of applying all of the latest advancements in engineering, construction and city planning. Parallel to this was architectural study at the L'viv Polytechnic, with the third such department established at the Krakow.

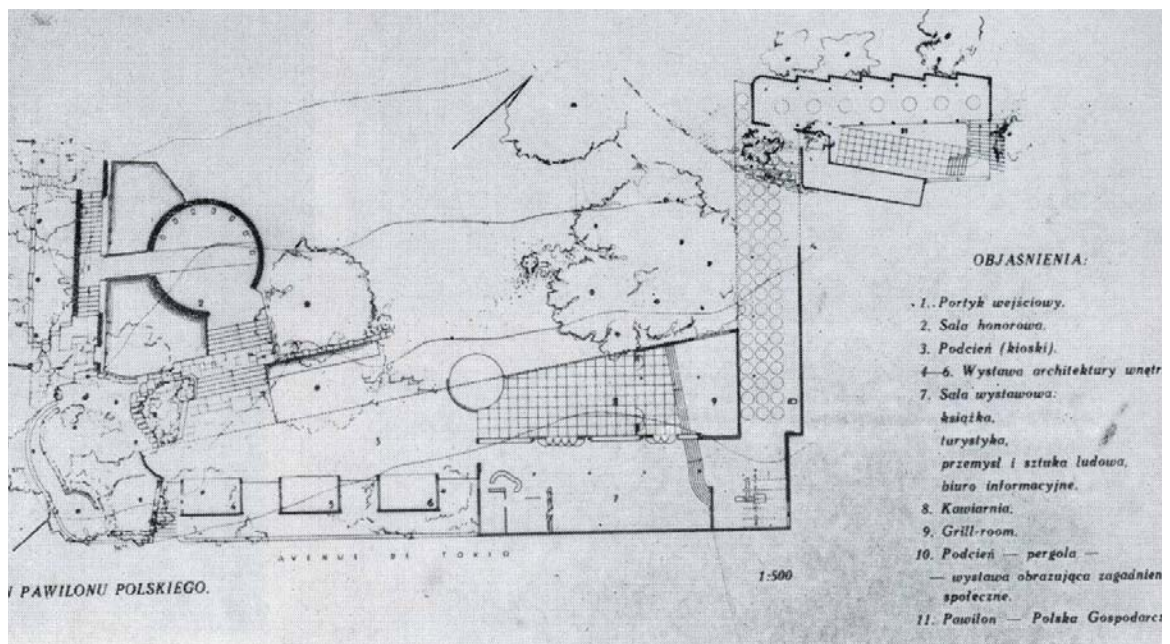
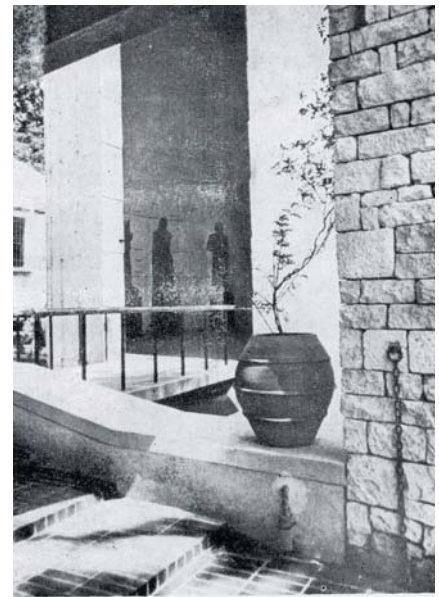
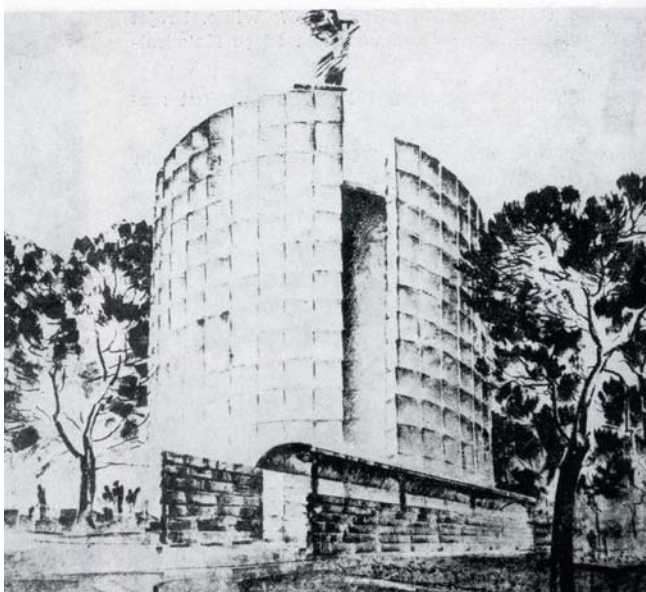


6.13 Bohdan Lachert and Josef Szanajca, Paris, Economic Pavilion, Art and Technology Exposition 1937





# 6.14 Stanisław Brukalski and Bohdan Pniewski, Polish Pavilion at the Art and Technology Exposition, Paris 1937



Entrance to the Rotunda, Project and Site Plan

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Academy of Fine Arts. In both of these establishments a form of Modern Regionalism was practiced. The final architectural training was available in Vilno but this more than anywhere was still embroiled in the search for a national style and as a consequence of this moribund obsession the financing of the Vilno School collapsed in 1929.

Much of what was built from that time forward was the result of architectural competitions – over a hundred during the years of Polish independence. These competitions were part of a progressive agenda to revitalise Poland. A consequence of this was that more and more women took leading roles in reshaping the future. Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski designed a fairly low-rise block in 1938-39 at Warsaw Żoliborz (6.15). Row houses by Helena and Szymon Syrkus at Lodz-Marysin, where contemporary photographs reveal the unresolved space of the frontages which over years have become a mishmash of picket fence, wire mesh, garden gate in situ, gate removed, etc., all evidence of the fact that in 1935-36 the idea of Space and Form were not fully resolved.

In two plans for *Towarzystwa Osiedli Robotniczych* (TOR – Workers Estates Society) the rather brutal linear conception for a competition of 1936 by Barbara Brukalska contrasts with the first prize winner from the drawing board of Janina Rumłowna for the Warsaw-Okecie *Paluch*, where a well modelled, integrated neighbourhood is shown.

A number of Polish housing blocks have echoes of the Narkomfin flats, Moscow 1929, the Osiedle WSM Estate, Colony VII 1934, which reveals an endless arc of gray, regimented low-rise flats. One could argue that even these crescents of boredom and uniformity were preferable to Housing Colony IV, Warsaw, Żoliborz 1929-31, where a brutal male approach to the same solution in the office workers' housing 1930-31 had an architecturally poor stair tower which cut out much needed daylight. The windows were not arranged as a functional ribbon, they were poorly resolved, punched-through apertures which dominate the façade. (6.16).

By way of contrast, the solution for the Warsaw Housing Co-operative by Helena and Szymon Syrkus, Rakowiec 1930-32, where staggered link, medium-rise blocks were set within a tree-screened plot allowing the ribbon windows to let in a good deal of light and give the residents the chance to enjoy the views front and back. Where there was a blank end wall a large single window provided both light and outlook. A further example is again by Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski in Warsaw Żoliborz, IV Colony, WSM 1927. Even where the project had two- and three-room flats this architectural partnership produced a living environment of windows and balconies which empowered the

6.15 Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, Warsaw Żoliborz, Housing Colony 1938-39



Front and rear elevations

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6.16 Stanisław and Josef Szanajca, Office Workers Housing, Warsaw 1930-31



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residents in enjoying their situation. This enjoyment can be seen in the Brukalskis' own villa, 1927-28 (6.17). Here a relatively small space is cleverly tailored to individual needs, from the spacing of the fenestration to the balconies, overhangs and step-backs. The house was situated in Warsaw Żoliborz which meant that the architects of thousands of apartments in Żoliborz had their sternest potential critics on their own doorsteps.

One final group of architectural works that must be considered are in Katowice, Janów, Ruda, Rybrik, Cieszyn, Siemianowice and Bielsko-Biała, all in Silesia. Much of this work was carried out by Tadeusz Michejda who had perfected an industrial form of steel-framed construction, within his whole cannon of fifty projects including town halls, schools, Protestant churches, old folks' home, office buildings, airport, mines, bathhouse, reservoir and a mountain shelter along with many houses and villas. There were a number of variations in the steel-framed houses: one-family, row and free standing houses and a villa.

With the Town Hall in Janów 1930, Michejda's solution is reminiscent of Dudok's Hilversum Town Hall; nevertheless if one looks deeper the building reveals itself. Far from being a large brick 'shed', however elegant, Janów Town Hall (6.18) has many more layers, heights and interconnections. A central, stepped tower has a clock and a belfry-type tower, complete with harmonic aperture. The repeat of tiles provides a unifying harmony, apparently laid edge-on-edge descending through the tower to the lower, less elaborate wing where the tile ornamentation is used between the large, white-framed windows. The other wing is far more complex with entry by a staircase from the lower terrace over which sits a double-height, roofed, square-columned colonnade. Above this level are a band of rectangular windows and, still higher up the wall, round windows which are split vertically complete the scheme. The building is L-shaped; the individual heights of the wings and blocks have a counterbalancing weight providing harmony.

This harmonic approach is taken further a year later by Michejda in the Apartment House, Katowice 1931, where a flowing dynamic treatment of the frontage has glass-fronted, curving balconies on six floors, the ground being removed to accommodate the entrance steps. The fully-glazed balconied floors curve into a flat-fronted central portion flanked by side wings that step forward to establish the front line of the building. Equally the top storey is plain with only small windows to relieve the flat render. The degree of comfort and ventilation this design afforded provided good quality living conditions for the tenants.

6.17 Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, Own Villa, Warsaw 1927-28



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6.18 Tadeusz Michejda, Janów Town Hall, Janów Silesia 1930



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The House for Dr. Kazimierczak, Katowice 1930 (6.19), by Michejda was a similarly advanced building. Although Lésnikowski describes this house as being in a mature Bauhaus style.<sup>17</sup>

Quite which Bauhaus architecture, as a built work, influenced this house is not indicated. Perhaps this observation is in regard to the Single House, Dessau or the Double Houses, Dessau of 1926, but in these designs there is little similarity. It seems reasonable to suggest that intellectually and stylistically, (as with the Czechs embracing Mart Stam in the Baba Werkbund of 1932), Polish Modernism of 1930-31 was looking at Czech models and Dutch models such as Rietveld and his Schroder House, while also being influenced by the ideas of Syrkus and Le Corbusier. One visible indicator of this fact is that the window arrangements in neither of the Bauhaus houses turn through 45 degrees – this type of corner window being a staple of the Modern Movement but not of the German Bauhaus vocabulary at this time. In looking for matters of reference, influence and cross-pollination the longitudinal nature of the Bauhaus houses could be said to be represented in a number of later houses: the Weissenhofsiedlung 1927, J. J. P. Oud; Kiefhoek Housing Estate, Rotterdam 1928; Theo Van Doesburg; Studio House, Meudon-val-Fleury, Paris 1929 and L. H. de Koninck Canneel Cottage, Andergehm. As has already been demonstrated, tying a building into a particular context exclusively can be a futile exercise which raises more questions than it answers.



6.19 Tadeusz Michejda, The House of Dr. Kazimierz, Katowice 1930



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## Notes to Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup> Op.cit., Lésnikowski W. (ed.), Bonta J., p.155

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Bonta, q., József Fischer, *Internationalis új Építészek*, (International New Architecture), *Munka*, (Labor), 1930

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit., Blau and Platzer (ed.), Platzer M., p.229

<sup>4</sup> Ferkai A., *Zlaty rez (Golden Section)*, No.18, Winter, 1988, 'Away From Extremes, Remarks on Hungarian Modernism', p.14

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.15, see also, Isaacs R., 1991, p.76-79

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.15, q. Mano Lessner,

<sup>7</sup> Op.cit., Meller H., 2001, p.106-111

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.107

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.109

<sup>10</sup> Gresty H., (ed.), *Constructivism in Poland 1923-1936*, Kettles Yard Gallery, Cambridge, 1984, J. Zadgroski, 'The Origin of the Avant Garde in Poland', p.7

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.27, 'Documents Catalogue of the New Art Exhibition'

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.26

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.17, 'Groups of the Constructivist Avant Garde'

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.17

<sup>15</sup> Czermer O. and Litowski H. (eds.), *The Polish Avant Garde Architecture and Town Planning 1918-1939*, In Search of a New Content and Form, p.79. The information within this work, a 306-page catalogue about avant-garde movements in Poland published in 1981 under Soviet control, is richly illustrated; with *exact* translations of what was said and intended.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.82

<sup>17</sup> Op.cit., Lésnikowski, 1996, p.259