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Four Essays on Modern Architecture

by **Virgil Bierbauer** (1893–1956)

Translated by Barbara Dudás

Abstract

Virgil Bierbauer is known as perhaps the foremost champion of international modernism in architecture writing in Hungary between the wars. He was editor of the journal *Tér és Forma* (Space and Form) in the 1920s and 1930, which he used as a platform for disseminating awareness of debates and practices in contemporary architecture not only in Hungary but elsewhere in Europe and North America. Yet his work is almost entirely unknown, primarily because he wrote only in Hungarian. This group of four essays by Bierbauer from *Tér és Forma* has been translated into English to address this deficit of awareness. The essays are representative of different ideas and positions he took from 1928, the earliest he wrote, to 1946, when the latest of the four was published. The translations are prefaced with an Introduction that puts Bierbauer's work into an historical and intellectual context, as well as outlining some of his key ideas about architecture.

Keywords

Architectural criticism; modernist architecture; Virgil Bierbauer; formalism; Heinrich Wölfflin; Hungary; architectural space

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Four Essays on Modern Architecture¹

by Virgil Bierbauer

Introduction

Matthew Rampley and Nóra Veszprémi

The four essays translated here into English were written by the architect and architectural critic and historian Virgil Bierbauer (1893–1956). They are taken from the architectural journal *Tér és Forma* (Space and Form), which he edited from 1928 to 1942.

In comparison with other Hungarian critics and intellectuals of his time such as Georg Lukács, Karl Mannheim or Károly Polányi, Bierbauer is little known outside of Hungary. There is a small body of commentary on his work, but it cannot compare with the large volume of research articles and monographs that have been published on his Hungarian contemporaries.² This is for a number of reasons. With the exception of his doctoral dissertation, written in German, all of his work was published in Hungarian, and none has been translated until now. Moreover, although his interests were wide and varied, he remained firmly anchored in Hungarian social and cultural life. Following the establishment of the authoritarian regime of Miklós Horthy in 1919, many modernist Hungarian artists and writers left Hungary and spent periods in exile abroad. This was to escape either the ‘white terror,’ the purging and persecution of leftists that accompanied his seizure of power, or the increasingly anti-Semitic stance (and alliance with Hitler) of the government in the 1930s. As a consequence, the thoughts and writings of Lukács, Mannheim and Polányi, to name but a few, were disseminated widely abroad. Some never returned to their homeland. Bierbauer, in contrast, remained in Hungary. In addition, even though he tried to carve out an intellectual position to underpin his support for modern architecture, as is evident from ‘Architecture, the Art of Space,’ the first of the four essays to be translated here, it did not resonate widely. In part this was because it could not be

1) The authors would like to thank Ágnes Anna Sebestyén of the Hungarian Museum of Architecture and Monument Protection in Budapest for her help with sources and valuable information regarding Bierbauer. All attempts have been made to locate the copyright holder of Bierbauer’s texts and the images accompanying them.

2) The key author in this regard is Ágnes Anna Sebestyén, who has written a number of articles on his work, especially in relation to the journal *Tér és Forma*. See Sebestyén, ‘Strategy and Agency in Architectural Photographs: Imaging Strategies that Shaped an Architectural Magazine in Interwar Hungary,’ in Rubén A. Alcolea and Jorge Tárrago Mingo, eds, *Inter Photo Arch, Congreso Internacional, inter-fotografía y arquitectura: interpretaciones / Inter Photo Arch, International Conference, inter-photography and architecture: interpretations*, Pamplona: Universidad de Navarra, 2016, 178–189; ‘Disseminating the Regional within the Global: Representing Regionalist Ideas and the Global Scale of the Modern Movement in the Hungarian Journal *Tér és Forma*,’ in Jorge Cunha Pimentel, Alexandra Trevisan and Alexandra Cardoso, eds, *Regionalism, Nationalism & Modern Architecture. Proceedings*, Porto: Centro de Estudos Arnaldo Araújo / ESAP-CESAP, 2018, 382–398; Sebestyén and Pál Ritoók, ‘Communicating “Space and Form”: The History and Impact of the Journal *Tér és Forma* as the Hungarian Pipeline of Modernism,’ *Docomomo* 59: 2, 2018, 18–25; Sebestyén, ‘Media as Network: The Editor’s Network as Reflected in the Journal *Tér és Forma* in Interwar Hungary,’ in Beata Störckuhl and Rafał Makala, eds, *Nicht nur Bauhaus – Netzwerke der Moderne in Mitteleuropa / Not Just Bauhaus – Networks of Modernity in Central Europe*, Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter / Oldenbourg, 2020, 190–210.

mapped on to other recognisable positions circulating in the 1920s. In this respect, we might compare Bierbauer with the art historian Lajos Fülep (1885–1970), who was a major figure in Hungary, but who was likewise little known internationally and for similar reasons.³

Bierbauer: architect and critic

Before discussing the essays themselves, it is worth considering a few basic biographical details. Bierbauer, who started to use the Hungarianised surname Borbíró during the Second World War and used it exclusively afterwards, was born into a family of architects. His father, István Bierbauer (1861–1939), was architect and Director of Engineering at the Hungarian Royal Mail, while his maternal grandfather, Gyula Seefehlner (1847–1906) had been a bridge architect who had also published a number of books on the subject. Virgil Bierbauer enrolled at Munich Technical University in 1911, where he obtained his architectural diploma in 1915. He served in the army between 1915 and 1918. Besides architecture, he was also interested in art history, and he attended lectures in the subject at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich by Fritz Burger and Heinrich Wölfflin, who had just published his famous book *Principles of Art History*.⁴ In 1918, Bierbauer returned to study and in 1920 received his doctorate at the Technical University in Munich for a dissertation with the title: ‘Bramante and the First Plans for Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome.’ From 1918 to 1922 he worked for the National Ministerial Commission for Housing in Hungary. Subsequently, he launched his own private practice as an architect. In 1925 he partnered with Kálmán Reichl (1879–1926) and the two of them co-designed an extension to the Kelenföld power plant in Budapest. No further collaborations were possible due to Reichl’s premature death the following year, but Bierbauer remained an active architect; he continued to work on the power plant until 1934, but his most significant design, perhaps, was the terminal building of Budaörs Airport (1936–37, together with László Králik), Hungary’s second international airport.

Throughout his career, Bierbauer entertained an equal interest in the practice, theory and history of architecture. While designing his first buildings, he also researched and lectured on neo-classical architecture, an influence that could be easily traced in his designs, too. The fruit of this interest was a book-length study in 1948 *The Architecture of Hungarian Neo-classicism*.⁵ However, even before this he had completed what was perhaps the first synoptic history of Hungarian architecture, from prehistoric times to the present.⁶

Despite his art historical training, his professional calling meant that from the mid-1920s he increasingly turned towards contemporary modernist architecture. This was partly prompted

3) On Fülep in English see Ferenc Gosztonyi, ‘The Early Reception of Cézanne in Hungary, 1906–10: Fülep and Popper,’ in Judit Geskó, ed., *Cézanne and the Past: Tradition and Creativity*, Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts, 2012, 179–90; Paul Stirton, ‘The Vienna School in Hungary: Antal, Wilde and Fülep,’ *Journal of Art Historiography*, 8, 2013 n.p.; Nóra Veszprémi, ‘Lajos Fülep: The task of Hungarian art history (1951),’ *Journal of Art Historiography* 11, 2014, n.p; János Kelemen, ‘Lukács and Fülep: Two Hungarian Critics of Benedetto Croce,’ in Kelemen, *The Rationalism of Georg Lukács*, New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2014, 107–115.

4) Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History; The Problem of the Development of Style in Early Modern Art*, trans. J. Blower, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015. Originally published as *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*, Munich: Bruckmann, 1915.

5) Virgil Bierbauer, *A magyar klasszicizmus építészete*, Budapest: Hungária, 1948.

6) Virgil Bierbauer, *A magyar építészet története*, Budapest: Magyar Szemle Társaság, 1937.

by Reichl, who had introduced him to new trends in northern European brick architecture. Fritz Höger's Chile Haus in Hamburg (1922–24), which was widely discussed when it was built, made a particular impact on him. As Ágnes Anna Sebestyén has suggested, the numerous illustrated reports on it published in magazines also alerted him to the value of the strategic use of photography when writing on architecture, and it would inform his approach as editor of *Tér és Forma*.⁷

In 1927 Bierbauer undertook a study trip to the Netherlands and Germany, and subsequently discussed his experiences at the Monday evening lectures of the Hungarian Association of Engineers and Architects. Taking on a leading role in the latter association, he was also one of the organisers of its survey on constructing small dwellings in 1930. This, in turn, provided the impetus for the Napraforgó Street Experimental Housing Estate (1931) on the outskirts of Budapest, a project in which several Hungarian modernist architects, including Bierbauer himself, designed small-scale villas in a leafy suburb of Budapest to demonstrate that modernist architecture could be both affordable and meet middle-class aspirations.⁸

By the late 1920s Bierbauer was an important and well-respected member of the Hungarian architectural community; he was chosen to be one of the organisers of the XII International Architectural Congress – the congress of the Comité Permanent International des Architectes (CPIA), in Budapest in 1930 – where he was responsible for international relations. From the mid-1930s he was also associated with the Hungarian group of CIAM, Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne. His most important contribution to the promotion of modern architecture was not his work as a designer, however, but the periodical *Tér és Forma*. It was initially launched as a supplement to *Vállalkozók Lapja* (The Contractors' Gazette) in 1926, but in 1928 the publisher decided to set it up as an independent publication, and appointed Bierbauer and the architect János Komor as co-editors. Due to various disagreements with Bierbauer, Komor left the journal in 1931.

Bierbauer envisioned the periodical as a forum for presentation and discussion of a wide spectrum of modernist trends and as a vehicle for integrating Hungarian architecture into international networks. To achieve these goals, he solicited articles on contemporary architecture across Europe, but also in the USA, South America and Japan. He maintained a wide correspondence with colleagues around the world, including figures such as Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto, Marcel Breuer, Giuseppe Terragni and Bohuslav Fuchs, and he used this international network to stay up to date about the newest ideas.⁹ In keeping with the growing cultural and political links between Hungary and Italy from the late 1920s he paid particular attention to modern Italian architecture.¹⁰

Following his experience of the Chile Haus, he placed special emphasis on amply illustrating the articles with professional photographs and conceived of the visual layout of the pages as

7) Ágnes Anna Sebestyén provides a useful biographical overview in 'Media as Network: The Editor's Network as Reflected in the Journal *Tér és Forma* in Interwar Hungary,' 196.

8) The history of the project and details of the individual houses are listed on the Napraforgó Street website: <http://napraforgoutca.hu/?lang=en> (accessed 9 December 2021).

9) The network of *Tér és Forma* is analysed in detail by Ágnes Anna Sebestyén, 'Media as Network: The Editor's Network as Reflected in the Journal *Tér és Forma* in Interwar Hungary.'

10) On the place of Italian architecture in *Tér és Forma* see Zsuzsana Ordasi, 'Architettura e architetti italiani nella stampa ungherese (1890–1945)' in Maria Luisa Neri, ed., *L'altra modernità nella cultura architettonica del XX Secolo: Dibattito internazionale e realtà locale*, Rome: Gangemi, 2011, 56–87.

an equally important means of conveying information.¹¹ Besides ‘professional’ architecture, Bierbauer also thought it important to study vernacular building, which could, in his view, help root modernist architecture in local needs and traditions. He dedicated a special issue of the journal to the subject in 1929.¹² It goes without saying, perhaps, that the main focus of the journal was, nevertheless, new Hungarian architecture, which was discussed as inseparable from international developments.

In its heyday, the yearly volumes of the journal consisted of 400–500 numbered pages, and it was perhaps the most important publication of its kind in Hungary.¹³ From the mid-1930s, this number started to decrease; financial problems meant the number of articles on international architecture diminished and Bierbauer chose to prioritise coverage of Hungarian architects.¹⁴ In 1942, he was drafted into the army and had to give up his editorship; the architect József Fischer (1901–95) took over from him until 1948, when the final issue of *Tér és Forma* was published. The ensuing Stalinist dictatorship did not favour the functional, simple modernism promoted by Bierbauer. In the short-lived period of democratic rule in Hungary after the war he worked for the Budapest Council of Public Works and even became State Secretary for Building Works in 1947, but after the 1949 Communist takeover he was no longer sought out for such public positions. As professor at the College of Fine Arts in Budapest, he still contributed to debates about architecture and submitted designs for city planning projects, but with little success. He died in 1956.

The range of modernist architectural trends showcased in *Tér és Forma* was rather broad, a feature made possible by Bierbauer’s own moderate, middle-ground position. Rejecting the historicism of the nineteenth century, he argued that the style appropriate for a specific era must develop organically from the contemporary way of life. He articulated this view at greatest length in the latest (and longest) of the texts presented here: ‘On Architectural Form Today,’ which he opened with the unambiguous statement: ‘The truest expression and reflection of the mentality of every age, of every human community, is the architecture it has created.’¹⁵ However, it is a theme that runs through a number of the other articles.

In his own age, that way of life was modern and, consequently, buildings also had to be ‘progressive’ and ‘modern.’ In his usage – and consequently in the journal’s – these terms did not refer to specific formal characteristics, but to a design’s meeting functional needs in the twentieth century. His ideal building was a small-scale, comfortable family home close to modern amenities and the perks of city life, but at the same time also surrounded by trees; in short, the model realised at the Napraforgó Street Experimental Housing Estate. He admired the ingenuity of Le Corbusier but rejected his idea of the house as a ‘machine for living in’ and generally recoiled from modernist ideas that linked new architecture to the radical reorganization of society down to the private sphere.¹⁶

11) Sebestyén, ‘Strategy and Agency in Architectural Photographs: Imaging Strategies that Shaped an Architectural Magazine in Interwar Hungary.’

12) The issue in question was *Tér és Forma*, 2: 1, 1929.

13) On the history of the journal see Sebestyén and Ritoók, ‘Communicating “space and form”: The History and Impact of the Journal *Tér és Forma* as the Hungarian Pipeline of Modernism.’

14) Sebestyén and Ritoók, ‘Communicating “space and form”’, 22.

15) Bierbauer, ‘On Architecture Form Today,’ trans. Barbara Dudás, *Art East Central*, 2, 2022, 101–111

16) Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. F. Etchells, New York: Dover Publications, 1986, 107. Originally

Towards a theory of architecture: the essays in *Tér és Forma*

Bierbauer never lost interest in the history of architecture and often placed his theoretical observations into a historical perspective. This is evident from the first of the essays translated here, his programmatic essay in the launch issue of *Tér és Forma*: ‘Architecture – The Art of Space,’ which he begins with a general account of the history of architecture by expressing admiration for the Pantheon in Rome. While the Greek temples had placed a perfectly proportioned structure *in* space, he argues, the aim of the Pantheon was to compose space itself, and this subsequently became the guiding principle of European architecture.

This starting point informs Bierbauer’s judgements about a range of architectural approaches. He not only rejects ornamental and decorative architecture, he also criticises Le Corbusier’s approach to modern design which, instead of being based on the construction of space, he suggests, starts out from a standardised concept of the modern individual that has nothing to do with real life. Bierbauer’s objection to this approach also betrays his deep humanistic concerns. Hence, he held, those historical periods that succeeded in developing their own style did so by developing space according to the needs and worldview of their time. It was this, a coherent worldview, that was necessary for the emergence of an architecture that can be considered as art. His concern with the values of coherence and the aesthetic value of architecture indicates that for all his advocacy of modernist architecture, Bierbauer’s was not one of the more radical voices of the architectural establishment.

The emphasis on space makes clear the intellectual genealogy of Bierbauer’s thinking: his teacher Heinrich Wölfflin. More than any other art historian, perhaps, Wölfflin was associated with formalist art history, in which the evolving depiction of space in painting or drawing, or manipulation of spatial experience in sculpture and architecture, provided the matrix by which their history could be mapped out. In the 1880s Wölfflin had tried to develop a psychology of architectural perception based on empathy theory, but by the time he published *Principles of Art History* this theoretical grounding had all but disappeared.¹⁷ However, he retained the general idea that visual and spatial experience were not constants. He wrote of a ‘history of vision,’ and this can be clearly seen in Bierbauer’s first essay, which mentions the different ways that Greek, Roman, medieval, Baroque and Rococo architecture worked with space. Wölfflin was notoriously antagonistic to the modern era. Fred Schwartz has suggested that his focus on ‘style’ as a formal principle governing a period or a culture emerged out of dismay at the accelerating pace of change of modern fashion and its tendency towards cultural fragmentation.¹⁸ It is ironic, therefore, that Bierbauer uses a Wölfflinian notion of the history of space and its fashioning as the basis for his advocacy of modern architecture. The architectural idioms of the past, he suggests, shaped space in a manner that corresponded to the spatial experience of the time. The pertinence of modern architecture is that it does so for the present, and he adhered to this notion for the entirety of his career. ‘On Architectural Form Today’ tries to describe the

published as *Vers une architecture*, Paris: Crès et Cie, 1923.

17) Heinrich Wölfflin, ‘Prolegomena to a Psychology of Architecture,’ trans. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikononou, in Mallgrave and Ikononou, eds, *Empathy, Form and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics 1873–1893*, Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1993, 149–87.

18) Frederic Schwartz, ‘Cathedrals and Shoes: Concepts of Style in Wölfflin and Adorno,’ *New German Critique*, 76, 1999, 3–48.

specifically modern character of space, which consists of an erosion of clear boundaries, and a preference for asymmetrical, trapezoidal and curvilinear forms.

Again, it is not difficult to identify the Wölfflinian underpinning of this formulation. *Principles of Art History* had drawn the distinction between Renaissance and Baroque art and architecture on the basis of the formal oppositions between linear / painterly, closed / open, and clear / unclear formal configurations. As Wölfflin noted in the Introduction:

in place of the perfect, the completed, [the Baroque] gives the restless, the becoming, in place of the limited, the conceivable, gives the limitless, the colossal. The idea of beautiful proportion vanishes, interest concentrates not on being, but on happening. The masses, heavy and thickset, come into movement.¹⁹

Bierbauer's discussion of the nature of space in modern architecture, emphasising its open-ended, irregular and asymmetrical character, replicates much of Wölfflin's description of Baroque space. The idea of a parallel between the Baroque and the modern was a developing theme in art criticism and history. It is improbable that Bierbauer was familiar with Walter Benjamin's study of German Baroque drama, which saw it as a precursor of various cultural practices in the present.²⁰ However, he may well have been a reader of the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl's lectures on Baroque architecture in Rome, which drew similar comparisons, and which were published in 1908.²¹

Although he was a modernist figurehead, he was driven by an Idealist vision of culture and embraced an entirely different set of values and beliefs from those of better-known contemporaries from Hungary such as László Moholy Nagy, Farkas Molnár or Lajos Kassák. When Bierbauer writes of the need for architecture to be rooted in 'reality' he does not have in mind the Marxist sense of material conditions that was so important for his avant-garde peers. Rather, it was the reality of a certain type of spatial orientation and experience.

Given that his programmatic article 'Architecture, the Art of Space' was in a periodical that aimed to connect Hungarian architecture to the international discourse, it was also necessary to reflect on the role of Hungarian culture in the development of modern architecture. This undoubtedly lies behind his comments on the terms for 'space' in different languages and his attempt to define the specifically Hungarian sense of space, which, he implies, derives from the embedded cultural memory of life on the plains – both in the Danube basin that the Magyars occupied in the ninth century CE and also during their presumptive extended period of inhabiting the steppes of southern Russia and central Asia. Bierbauer did not expand on this point here, although his history of Hungarian architecture commences with these distant origins. But then his interests lay elsewhere, in using the issue of space to advance his broader argument about remaining open to modernist architecture.

In the second text in our selection, Bierbauer refutes the arguments of opponents of modern architecture. His starting point is a review of an exhibition in the German language

19) Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History*, 91–92.

20) Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, translated by John Osborne, London: Verso, 1998.

21) Riegl, *Die Entstehung der Barockkunst in Rom: Vorlesungen aus 1901–1902*, ed. A. Burda and M. Dvořák, Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1908.

newspaper *Pester Lloyd* by the art critic Ödön Gerő (1863–1939), whom he characterises as a man of the nineteenth century.²² Gerő (in German-language publications such as the *Pester Lloyd* newspaper his Hungarian first name was Germanized as Edmund) had been active as a journalist since the 1880s. Although Bierbauer was correct, to the extent that he had first come to prominence under the Habsburg Empire, Gerő was in fact a modernist in his own way: he wrote appreciatively about plein air, symbolist and art nouveau artists such as Pál Szinyei Merse, Károly Ferenczy and József Rippl Rónai, as well as about older artists of academic historicism, and he had even had some positive words about the avant-garde group *The Eight* (A Nyolcak), at a time when their reception in the mainstream press was mainly hostile. Originally an engineer by training, he did not, however, warm to the modernist architecture of the 1920s and 1930s and bemoaned the lack of beauty in its products. Bierbauer countered by stating that ‘beautiful’ styles had only emerged in the past because progress was not held back by naysayers who thought everything new was ugly. It was necessary to move on from the nineteenth century, which employed ideals of beautiful style from the past without considering whether these were appropriate for their function.

Yet Gerő was not some anachronistic old-school figure; the object of praise in the review that Bierbauer took exception to was an exhibition of drawings and photographs by the important interwar architect in Hungary, Gyula Wälder (1884–1944). Wälder was the foremost exponent of Hungarian interwar neo-Baroque. Although some of his designs were unapologetic forays into Baroque revivalism, by the 1930s, when Bierbauer was writing, he had developed a distinctive modernist neo-Baroque idiom.²³ His work from this period bears comparison with that of Lajos Kozma, one of the most successful interwar designers, who has already been discussed in this journal by Paul Stirton.²⁴

What we therefore see in Bierbauer’s critique is a dispute between two different visions of the future for architecture. Undoubtedly, Gerő’s rhapsodic praise for Wälder is conservative and has very little in common with the ideas of Bierbauer. But then, Bierbauer’s Idealist theory of architecture had little to do with the more progressive ideas about architecture of avant-garde figures in Hungary or in neighbouring Czechoslovakia, such as those of Karel Teige. In comparison with more radical voices, Bierbauer himself might have appeared to be rather too liberal and bourgeois. It is tempting to interpret the strength of his criticism of Gerő as motivated by fear of being seen as too much like him, and by a desire to mark out clear territory. Yet with his somewhat vague emphasis on space as the principal determinant of design, Bierbauer’s essay was only half successful.

The third, short article is an interesting example of the reception of Soviet Communist architecture in Hungary before Communism became the state ideology. Here, the ever-polemical Bierbauer countered those who call modernist architecture ‘Communist’ or ‘Bolshevik.’ This was a common criticism, and not limited to Hungary. It is worth remembering that 14 years later in the United States, Alfred Barr had to deal with the same criticism.²⁵

22) Edmund (Ödön) Gerő, ‘Ungarisches Barock,’ *Pester Lloyd*, 25 December 1934, 19–20.

23) Szilvia Eszter Paár, ‘Új stílus az 1930-as években—a modernizmus’ in *Gyula Wälder*, Budapest: Holnap, 2020, 224–38.

24) Paul Stirton, ‘Faces of Modernism after Trianon: Károly Kós, Lajos Kozma and Neo-Baroque Design in Interwar Design in Hungary,’ *Art East Central*, 1, 2021, 11–49.

25) Alfred H. Barr Jr., ‘Is Modern Art Communistic?’ *New York Times*, 14 December 1952, 22.

Bierbauer's defence of modern architecture against its critics was couched in general terms, but there was also a specific case he may have had in mind. Some four years earlier exactly this accusation was levelled at one of the most notable buildings constructed in Hungary between the wars: the church of St. Anthony of Padua designed by the young architect Gyula Rimanóczy (1903–1958). Its functionalist design, presenting church goers as well as passers-by with a simple geometric structure of bare concrete, was a remarkable departure from church building traditions, but it was also an innovative design within architecture more generally. The church received a positive review in the pages of *Tér és Forma*, but it had also been highly controversial.²⁶ The design had initially been rejected by the city council, and even once approval was gained, voices were raised at the Catholic General Assembly that it constituted an intrusion of 'Soviet-style' architecture into church building, and Rimanóczy had had to undertake several revisions.²⁷ As a result, there were considerable delays before the project could even be started.

For progressive architects and critics, the affair was a reminder that there were still powerful voices ranged against the embrace of modern design. Given that the Catholic church was intimately intertwined with the government of Admiral Horthy, which had defined Hungary as a 'Christian' state, this was not merely a matter of the resistance of one conservative institution. Bierbauer did not share the leftist political ideals of many of his avant-garde peers, and so it must have seemed even more important for him to counter the charge that modern architecture was 'Communistic.'

Architecture and politics

The fourth article to be translated, 'On Architectural Form Today,' is the longest and perhaps most intriguing. Although it is divided into three sections, thematically, Bierbauer's essay consists of two halves: (1) modern architecture; (2) urbanism. His discussion of the first explores themes that reach back to his very first essay in the journal: the specifically modern use and deployment of space. Although he does not discuss specific building designs, he fleshes out his broad claims as to the specifically modern use of space, discussing generic issues, such as the arrangement of furniture in the modern interior (everything is aligned with the walls, he argues, to maximise the available space), the configuration of space (in place of uniform room dimensions, he argues, modern designers prefer irregular spaces). However, it is in his discussion of urbanism that he introduces new elements and where he is most at odds with his contemporaries. For the essay criticises the planning of cities into grids and linear street patterns, the effect of which is, he suggests, claustrophobic, enclosing individuals in entirely artificial environments. Instead, modern planners try to create open, expansive spaces, with an emphasis on irregular roads, as if, he argues, they were trying to recreate the rambling character of medieval towns.

It is difficult to determine what examples he had in mind when talking of modern urban planning. Certainly, the values he promoted seemed to have very little in common with what

26) Tibor Brestyánszky, 'A pasaréti új templom,' *Tér és Forma*, 7: 12, 1934, 345–9.

27) Anon, 'Szojvetjstílusú-e az új pasaréti ferences templom terve?' *Az Est*, 14 October 1933, 12.

are commonly regarded as key modernist conceptions of urban planning: Le Corbusier's *ville contemporaine* (1922) and the *ville radieuse* (1930). These, with their emphasis on strict geometries, rational zonal organisation, seemed the very antithesis of Bierbauer's ideal of the city. Indeed, his description of the pleasures of the unexpected and the picturesque, has more in common with the thinking of the Austrian Camillo Sitte, whose *City Planning According to Artistic Principles* (1889) criticised the grand boulevards of the Ringstrasse in Vienna, advocating instead the use of small squares, irregular spaces and streets.²⁸ Sitte's book was enormously popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but many, including Le Corbusier, rejected it, and it could hardly have been seen as 'modern' in 1946, when Bierbauer wrote his essay.

Bierbauer's eccentric comments on what constitutes 'modern' urban planning are of less interest here, however, than his striking political pronouncements. For they go beyond his interventions into the issue of 'Stalinism' in modern architecture to give a hint as to his general political beliefs. It is worth recalling when the essay was written. It was published in the brief period between March 1945, when the fascist Arrow Cross Party government of Ferenc Szálasi was expelled from Hungary, and June 1947, when the Communist Party became the largest political party, paving the way for the creation of the Hungarian People's Republic in 1949. It is in this context that Bierbauer mounts a fierce attack on the way in which architecture in the past had served as an instrument of domination and power, such as the masses being forced to parade along the grand avenues to show their support for dictatorial rule. The memory of the enforced mass parades of fascist rule was still fresh, and Bierbauer was clearly hoping that modern urban planning might devise forms of space that could resist such forms of oppression. We can detect a personal disavowal here, too, for on several occasions Bierbauer had himself been the author of essays that showed gushing praise for the architectural ambitions of Mussolini, projects that had precisely that function of enabling the orchestration of the masses in furtherance of fascist rule.²⁹ This was part of a wider policy on the part of the Hungarian government from the late 1920s; seeking an ally in its quest to revise the national borders determined in the peace negotiations after the First World War, it developed political and cultural ties with Italy. It was a cruel and tragic irony, therefore, that only four years after Bierbauer articulated his sentiments here about the use of architecture in the service of dictatorship, another form of mass politics came to Hungary, involving the orchestration of coerced masses of populations in the streets of the cities.

28) Camillo Sitte, *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen*, Vienna: Carl Graeser, 1889.

29) Virgil Bierbauer, 'Az új olasz építészetről,' *Esztetikai Szemle*, 1, 1935, 27–40. See, too, his appreciative essays in *Tér és Forma*: '“La Esposizione italiana di architettura razionale”,' *Tér és Forma*, 1: 1, 1928, 32–36; Carlo Enrico Rava, 'A “Gruppo 7” hetek csoportja,' *Tér és Forma* 2.6, 1929, 242–49; Alberto Sartoris, 'Az új építészet kezdetei Olaszországban,' *Tér és Forma*, 3: 3, 1930, 188–91; Virgil Bierbauer, 'A milánói V. nemzetközi iparművészeti kiállítás,' *Tér és Forma*, 6: 7–8, 1933, 197–219.

Conclusion

Taken together, Bierbauer's articles showcase the work of a critic trying to follow a path that avoided the various pitfalls that could beset debates about modernism and trying to establish an independent voice. The political climate in interwar Hungary was, admittedly, more conservative in its attitudes than other states in this period. Moreover, as the 1930s progressed and Hungary was drawn more and more into the orbit of Nazi Germany, the cultural environment became increasingly difficult for individuals such as Bierbauer to work in. Nevertheless, contrary to commonplace assumptions about the reactionary regime of Horthy, modernist culture was not entirely shut out. Bierbauer's essays, as well as *Tér és Forma* more generally, are a sign of that. At the same time, while Bierbauer was himself not a radical, the tone of his essays, as well as his Idealist and formalist claims indicate, too, what may have been the limits of modernist architectural discourse at the time.

Virgil Bierbauer

Architecture – the Art of Space

Originally published as ‘Építőművészet – térművészet,’ *Tér és Forma*, 1: 1, 1928, 1–4.

Translated by Barbara Dudás. Editorial notes by Matthew Rampley.

When I crossed the threshold of the Pantheon again a few weeks ago, after returning from the great Greek temples of Sicily, I quite clearly felt the significance of this space for European architecture: the Pantheon stands at one of the great turning points in the development of European architecture. While the Greek temple is the perfect embodiment of plastic building-form in space, so perfect that we almost feel nothing can come after this, the Pantheon is the perfect creation of space, a spatial composition formed by man that is the starting point of the last nearly two thousand years of European architecture, its very first perfected stage. The Pantheon is the first ever embodiment of the typically European, and Middle Eastern, idea that *architecture is the art of forming, shaping space*.

In the Hungarian language, the word *tér* [space] has a peculiar but characteristic double meaning. On the one hand, it means, in a philosophical and mathematical sense, three-dimensional space (*spatium* in Latin, *espace* in French, *spazio* in Italian, *Raum* in German) and, on the other hand, it means a large, open-spaced area or place surrounded by houses (*place* in French, *piazza* in Italian, *Platz* in German).

This seems to be a very characteristic symptom of the Hungarians: the Hungarian, who has been wandering on the plains and living on the steppe for thousands of years, uses the same word to name an area surrounded by houses, tents and carriages (*Platz*) and a completely enclosed and usually smaller interior, formed by man (*Raum*). For a Hungarian, accustomed to the endlessness of the plains, an area girdled with human constructions already leads to the feeling of being surrounded, the concrete opposed to the infinite, from which interior space, the space inside a room, only differs in quantity and magnitude, but not in quality.

And that is why the word *tér* primarily means three-dimensional space. Only in a figurative, secondary sense does it mean the more specific concept of a space surrounded by houses. Principally, it means the truest substance and material of our art!

The domed space of the Pantheon has reassured me repeatedly in the fundamentals of my architectural thinking, namely that *architecture is the art of shaping space*. And I feel that this thesis is much deeper than the theorem I have often heard, like something learnt at school, that ‘music and poetry are *temporal* forms of art, as opposed to the fine arts, which are *spatial*.’ Painting and sculpture are spatial, because their creations are situated *in space*, and can only be realized *in space* – while architecture *shapes space*. For the former, space is a *formal condition*, while for architecture space is the *material*. Painting depicts spatial relations and correlations, while architecture *shapes and creates* spatial relationships.

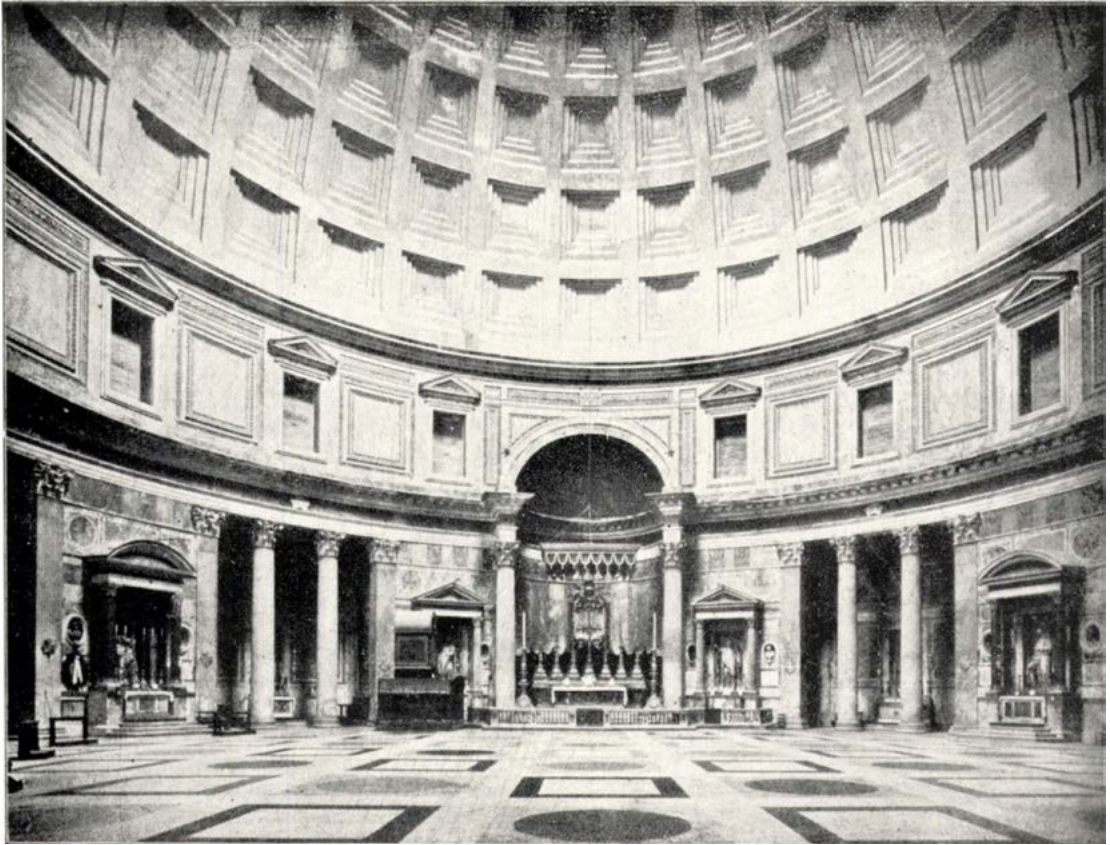


Figure 1: Pantheon, Rome (1st century CE).

Source: *Tér és Forma* 1: 1 (1928).

And this is the most fundamental fact of architecture, the creation of spaces! This view is supported by one of the definitions of Leibniz: ‘*Spatium est ordo rerum:*’ *Space is the order of things.*³⁰ What else would an architect be, if not an artist working tirelessly on arranging things in space?

Ever since the Pantheon, space has been at the heart of all monumental European spatial creation, despite the fact that the idea of space has undergone multiple changes over this period of time. Here in Rome, in the immediate vicinity of the Pantheon, a few street corners away, one can come across with the great variety of unforgettably beautiful architectural masterpieces: the Sant’Agnese, the Sant’Ignazio, the Il Gesù, which are descendants of a completely different conception of space. The space of the Pantheon is the most perfect, unattainable realization of an absolutely enclosed, finished space. Sant’Ignazio, on the other hand, is a creation of space that combines the wonderful coexistence of man-made space with an infinite, sunlit, universal space in an almost mystical setting.³¹ Architecture can be the

30) Editor’s note: This is a slight mistranslation of Leibniz’s assertion that ‘*spatio est ordo coexistendi*’ (space is the order of co-existing things) from his ‘*Initia rerum mathematicarum metaphysica.*’ Translated as ‘*The Metaphysical Foundations of Mathematics*’ in Gottfried Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed., Leroy Loemker, London and New York: Springer, 1989, 666–74.

31) Editor’s note: the Sant’ Ignazio referred to here is the church of St. Ignatius in Rome (1722) designed by Orazio Grassi.

most wonderful means of expressing one's worldview, perception of the world. But, however different the basic perception of expression might be, the medium of expression is the same in every period of time: space, the space formed by humans. And that is why architecture is first and foremost the art of space.

Naturally, the creative work of an architect, as with all artistic work, is immensely complex and therefore not only the messages are varied, but also the means of expression, although they always depend on the content to be expressed. The simplicity and monumentality of early Romanesque basilicas are closely related to the simplicity and determination of the world view of their creators, just as the richness of Baroque churches flows from the differentiation in colors and shades of the world view of the period. The faith of the architect of the Romanesque period, which is so perfectly expressed through his church, was his simple but strong castle, while the faith of the master living during the Counter-Reformation was polyphonic richness surrounding the world. Such variety of spiritual image, such diverse types of space to be created, required modulation and constant development of the means of expression, from one age to the next, from one artwork to another: constant change, enrichment or suppression in the orchestration of forms of space. This process manifests itself in changes in the means and methods of creating space. For the masters of the Romanesque period, even the most modest decoration was sufficient, the essential thing was to make the imagined, large and simple form of space appear as impressive as possible. It is also not uncommon to see architects break with rich decorative forms that have been used and developed before, as they could interfere with the clarity of expression. On the other hand, Baroque architects had to abandon the pure forms of Bramante and look for spatial forms that could blur the points of contact between man-made spatial forms and real space, as much as possible. From its beginning, the Renaissance was pushing forward to the ideal, pure form of the dome of the Pantheon. The architect of Sant'Ignazio made Pater [Andrea] Pozzo paint a fresco on the dome of the sanctuary that seeks to negate, as far as possible, the spherical form, the delimitation of the finite sphere, in order to replace it with a – deceptive – image of the infinite. These however only make the inner meaning of the space more colorful and richer – the essence of creation remains the same. The architect has considerable trouble shaping the design motifs, but all this is only a secondary effort, as in European architecture the creation of space always comes first. The Roman baths have been stripped of their stucco and marble coating by barbaric robbers over the centuries, the vaulted ceilings of monumental size and proportions are left bare, the Pantheon has been stripped of its former glory. Still, their grandiose architectural spatiality lives on today, even after the destruction of the decorative elements.

It is undeniable that the attention to detail, the decorative aspect of creating space, is very important. It would be difficult to dispense with the fluted lines of the pillars of a Gothic cathedral, the picturesque richness of the capitals of the columns, the graphic beauty and the unique originality of the elements that make up the space – without the fabulously complex richness of the exterior surface, the cathedrals would be poorer. But despite all this, the great, unforgettable impression we get when entering the dim space of a cathedral is not created by the inexhaustible multitude of these details, but by the elevation of believers to the grandiose deity they could express through space. They made space out of stone, just as God the Creator created a forest, wove space out of the sun's rays, out of soil, out of water...

There is hardly anything more characteristic of human life than its relation to space, than its place on the stage of life: in space. Here are some quickly projected, contrasting images: ... Pompeii... on the southeastern corner of the city, on a hillside, stood a temple in the Greek period of the city, looking at the great blue of the Gulf of Naples... the Romans built their temples in the narrow streets of the city, they withdrew from the radiance of this wonderfully beautiful part of the world, from under the blue sky the Gods were brought to the market: they were made guardians of law and trade, and on the site of the Greek temple they established a landfill...; in the Middle Ages the homes of the highest and most wealthy social class, the tiny, narrow rooms of the castles, the chambers shaded by dark, vaulted ceilings, with tiny iron-barred windows, upon which huge wooden panels are closed for most of the year... the great halls of the castle, high, vaulted halls, in which open fire burned, so it could remain bearable... And then slowly comes liberation, becoming more sophisticated, the search for the sun's rays and light: in the North the magnificent castle of the German order of the knights, the Ordensburg, the Marienburg..., the Gothic loggias of Venice, looking over the sparkling life of the Canal Grande..., the dreamlike castles of the Loire Valley..., the columned courtyards of Urbino and Florence..., then come the loggias of the palaces of Rome and the endless halls, staircases and terraces of the Baroque palaces..., the splendour of Versailles and the hundreds that follow..., *every individual lives differently, seeks something else in the world*, expects and demands something different from earthly life, has a different world view and *view of space*, *the architect creates different spaces for different moments in life*. But these changes take place not only in connection with profane life; the transformation of the Christian church starts from the early Christian Basilica, from Latin brightness to the mysticism of the Gothic cathedrals, to the ideal forms of the central-plan church of the Renaissance, and from there on to the picturesque mysticism of the late Rococo church – this is the story of the deepest changes in the Christian church ... And architecture has recorded and expressed all these fundamental, metaphysical changes with such acuity that from its masterpieces we can read more clearly, we can have a more unbiased picture, than from philosophical, historical scriptures and records. The architect could not draw a picture other than one based in reality, for if he had not done so, his work would not have been needed by the period, the world whose real and transcendental needs he expressed and fulfilled.

But from this, something else can be deduced. Namely, that an age without a mature, steady, true and unified world view, a position in the cosmos, cannot create real architecture. In such cases, architecture can only satisfy raw material needs, this is the most it can achieve, but it cannot become art, it cannot be an instrument of the human soul.

And here we can trace an extremely interesting phenomenon. Suddenly the fact comes to light that architecture is taking revenge on those who commit violence against it... From the mendacious situation in which construction stands in the midst of society it follows that in such cases, not even the true and correct satisfaction of needs is possible, as the architect, in order to achieve the appearance of being artistic, hides his works under the veil of the art of foreign, distant ages. But for this stylistic endeavor to be crowned with some success, for the sake of the foreign, external forms, he is forced to step on the wrong paths. This is the tragicomedy of the nineteenth century, bedsits hidden behind palazzo façades.

And today's architecture? The art of space of our time? This is the most exciting question. What will it be like? Where do we need to go, what are the basic ideas that need to be realized in our own architecture?

It seems that the question should not be phrased this way, although it is precisely this phrasing that is extremely characteristic of our time. It is a question of the age of self-consciousness – we are trying to do everything consciously – which is a deeply unproductive position when it comes to art. History has shown that none of the great ages embarked on a conscious program of work in the field of art, and that the conscious intention to express something is perhaps only possible in the performing arts. (I wonder whether [Eleonora] Duse had this quality).³²

Many volumes are currently being published that are intended to be programmatic dissertations on the architecture of our time. Even though these are mostly excellent, clear writings, it is surprising that their authors cannot stand their ground when it comes to design and implementation. Le Corbusier was the biggest disappointment at the Stuttgart exhibition.³³ After Taut's volume *Moderne Wohnung* [Modern Living] his own house was a surprise.³⁴ Because what really happened when he came up with the concept of the *Wohnmaschine* [machine for living]? These architects have, with excellent logic, constructed a type of person for themselves, for whom they could build a house (this is a typical symptom of wartime: when an architect cannot build, he thinks about what he *might* build...). They constructed the image of the modern individual. Their starting point seems to be that the modern individual works with machines, but essentially, in their worldview, the modern individual is a slave to machines. Fortunately, they are not correct, this is not the case yet, because we still have a life to live after serving the machines... (What matters on the radio is not the fact that the music is transmitted by a machine, but the piece of music we can hear.)

But, if the forerunners, the thinkers of the faculty of architecture were so mistaken, how can we, simple practicing architects, seek our own path, what should we aspire to? Is it not possible for us to walk the paths of the recent past, since we no longer believe in it and do not want to lie?

It seems to me that the great masters of European architecture, Greek architecture, the truly great Roman monuments: the Pantheon, the Thermae, can still provide answers for today's architect. They do not teach us to continue to copy their forms over and over again, but to learn how their creators arrived at their style. *Let us create an architecture that realizes our own needs, and spaces that meet our own requirements, with the truly great tools that are available to us today.*

It is the duty of the architect to get to know the requirements and possibilities of implementation in the most thorough way possible. The craft of the architect is in some way similar to that of a doctor. Just as a truly good and conscientious doctor determines the diagnosis first and foremost, so should the architect get to know, in the most humble way, the wishes and needs of the client and see them in space; the latter is what the client is not capable

32) Editor's note: Eleonora Duse (1858–1924) was an Italian actress famed for her naturalism and immersion in whatever character she was playing.

33) Editor's note: Bierbauer here means the exhibition in 1927 of the Weissenhof Estate in Stuttgart by the Deutscher Werkbund.

34) Editor's note: this is a reference to Bruno Taut's text *Die Neue Wohnung: Die Frau als Schöpferin*, Leipzig: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1924.

of. But, again, just as the doctor needs to know the right treatment, so the architect needs to know the methods of implementation too. He needs to reconcile them perfectly and he should find the right method for the problem: this is the plan.

In contrast, and going against this, the correct approach, some of the houses in the Stuttgart exhibition looked as if a doctor, half knowing their patient's illness, was choosing a cure that was, for some reason, particularly interesting and dear to him. It was as if a doctor, having wanted to undertake trepanning for a long time, had chosen this procedure to cure rheumatism. But if this so-called modern architecture is so arbitrary, so formal, why is it better than something from 30 years ago? Because this is what happened then, too, except that other, decorative, motifs were put on the façade of the building...

The road to style does not lead from broad generalizations or from theories, but from reality, via solutions provided a thousand times and ten thousand times for reality and the needs of life. Reconciling needs and methods is the way to work – not pointless literary philosophizing.

The aesthete reads these words bent out of shape. 'After all, architecture is a form of art, more than engineering. And that is why an architect cannot be satisfied with the engineer's way of only looking for practical considerations.' The aesthete is absolutely right! Architecture is art, and therefore burdened with tasks that go beyond expediency. It is not enough to find the necessary form, it is important to find the most expressive form, to get to form that speaks to the life of those who created, ordered the work of art, so we can hear what it has to say, even after they have both long gone. Humans not only live for practical, physical purposes, they have more abstract matters in his life, and the art of space is the most eloquent form of these.

It is these values that are at the heart of architecture today, as in every age. They used to say: 'a house should not only be practical but also beautiful...' We avoid this word these days, our reticence forbids us to use it. Who are those who cannot see the beauty in the most successful works of the great architects of today (it cannot be denied that these do exist)? Are they those who are blind to today's values, or those who can only see beauty if the creator and the client incessantly rhapsodise about beauty in speech and in writing?

There is a certain reticence that holds us back from formulating the concept of beauty and from invoking it constantly, and which hides the ways in which we, today's architects, are nevertheless searching for beauty. This reticence is one of the most welcome, most promising features of today's architecture. We grow serious, we turn to our work, we search for form – instead of extolling forms.

Virgil Bierbauer

The Critic and the New Architecture

Originally published as 'A kritikus és az új építészet,' *Tér és Forma*, 8: 2, 1935, 33–36.

Translated by Barbara Dudás. Editorial notes by Matthew Rampley.

Ödön Gerő is a man of great knowledge, a well-informed critic with a polished style, who has been writing for over a decade for one of the most important Hungarian dailies, *Pester Lloyd*, which is published in German and therefore provides news on Hungarian matters abroad. His world of thought is from the pre-war era, his taste in painting is Impressionism – in architecture his taste was formed at the table of the great Ödön Lechner. He practices a kind, old-fashioned, forgiving irony towards the new tendencies in painting, which is entertaining for an outsider, but for the serious, sincere-minded artist, who suffers the criticism, it is painful. Yet in this irony there is still a little warmth, a little love. This irony never denies that there is pure desire in the work being judged, for the most important thing according to Gerő is: desire, love for the beautiful, and he acknowledges this even if this beauty is, for Gerő, inaccessible and unattainable.

We have had the opportunity to experience Ödön Gerő's aversion to the new architectural aspirations several times already. We never commented on his statements because we knew very well that he could not be persuaded. According to him – as according to the circle of his friends and contemporaries – contemporary Hungarian architects and practitioners of the new architecture make a great mistake in not imitating Ödön Lechner in the most easily accessible aspects of his art, namely his decorations in the so-called Hungarian style. Gerő, and those who think like him, are not able to see that this method of decoration was an artistic feature of Lechner's time, the last manifestation of eclecticism – using national instead of historical ornamentation – when Lechner was the Hungarian manifestation of the world movement of Secession. Moreover, in this understanding, they have forgotten that Lechner's art was even more characterized by its return to materialism with the honest use of new materials – steel! I repeat, we did not consider it necessary to reject Gerő's censure until now, as it has mostly been an insurmountable difference between generations.

In the December 25th issue of *Pester Lloyd*, in his review of a historical architectural exhibition, Gerő launched a covert attack on the architectural direction represented in *Tér és Forma*.³⁵ We cannot leave this issue without saying a word, not because of the nature of the attack, but because of its tone and assumptions, because it is particularly insulting to all of those, who, with self-effacingly and at the cost of constantly renouncing earthly goods and the acknowledgement of the mighty, have been working on solving the architectural tasks of our time, for our time, as did those masters of the past who also struggled with the architectural expression of their own time. Amongst other things, Gerő wrote the following:

35) Editor's note: the article in question was a review of an exhibition of architectural drawings and photographs at the Technical Academy by the architect Gyula (Julius) Wälder. Ödön Gerő, 'Ungarisches Barock,' *Pester Lloyd*, 25 December 1934, 19–20.



Figure 2: Elemer Szöllösy, Apartment house on Pozsonyi Street, Budapest, 1935.
Source: *Tér és Forma* 8: 2, 1935.

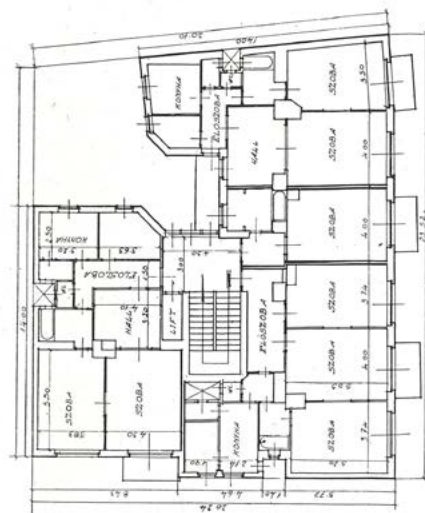


Figure 3: Elemer Szöllösy: Apartment house on Pozsonyi Street, Budapest, 1935.
Source: *Tér és Forma* 8: 2, 1935.

...in the buildings he surveyed, he found something else he did not want to keep silent about in front of his students: he recognized the joy of creating in buildings, the joy of former masters at work. These were men who knew nothing about mechanized work. In an era when everything became automated such documents act as reminders to self-awareness. They encourage us to recognize the artist's profession. How happy these masters were when they managed to create something beautiful! They were not afraid to give themselves up to their sense of beauty, they had a strong intention: to create something beautiful. Always the most beautiful available to them. And was it the feeling that created the intention, or vice versa? This question could be the subject of a doctoral dissertation, and answering it is not the artist's task ...'

Undoubtedly, in these finely polished sentences, Ödön Gerő contrasts the architectural beauties of a bygone era with the architecture of our own age, in which he, as critic, finds no beauty, and only sees mechanization and the age of automation, which he assumes were created by those who are incapable of rejoicing in beauty, who do not even want to create beauty, who are downright afraid of beauty and do not want it... And knowing Ödön Gerő's conception of the new architecture, there can be no doubt that these humiliated architects are in fact the cultivators and warriors of modern architecture. He just does not name them openly, because it is much safer to make a statement like this, and everyone understands very well who the great critic was thinking of anyway!

We do not want to argue with Ödön Gerő, nor do we want to convince him that today's architecture has the same and gradually refining ideal and desire of beauty that every great architecture had before it: the age of magnificent Greek architecture, the era of great puritanism of Romanesque art, the beginnings of Gothic art, the freshness and splendour of the early Renaissance, the representative glory of the Baroque, and the playfulness of the Rococo. The only difference is that the development, evolution and diffusion of these styles were not hindered by the auxiliary obstructors of history, waving red flags to warn against the new style that took the place of the old. Instead, together with the artists of their own decades, they celebrated the new beauties with which they had enriched the world. And the reason for this we would rather just imply than say: the commercialization of the whole world and, sadly, of all of life. Art has also become a commodity, it is sold for money, and certain of its trends are endangered by the emergence of something new, by 'supply and demand,' by wish that it be liked and understood by the general public. This sad phenomenon, the impoverishment, democratization of the present, the proletarianization of art, in the sense of Marxist doctrines, has created opposition to the new, modern, art that originates in our own lives, as we see in Gerő, the critic.

Those who are with us – architects and builders, who want the buildings of today – know very well what Gerő will never understand and will never feel, that today's architecture has its own special, expressive beauty, which is of course different than that of the past, because it originates from another life. But this beauty will never persuade its creators and those who appreciate it to say that the true, great values of the past do not exist. A few years ago, we saw the great temples of Paestum and Segesta, the huge basilicas of Rome and the abbey church of Ják back home, the cathedral of Chartres, the colonnades of Louvre, the baroque of Salzburg and Vienna, the great, most prestigious impressions of European architecture one after another, and they were just as profound an experience to us as the experiments characterizing

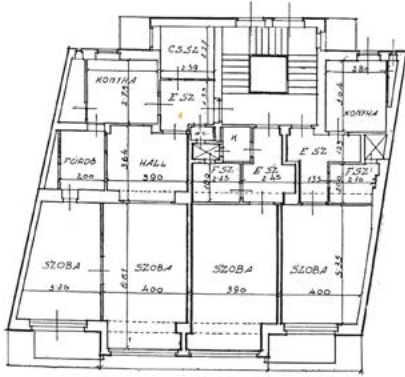


Figure 4: Elemér Szöllösy: Apartment house on Italian Avenue, Budapest, 1935.

Source: *Tér és Forma* 8: 2, 1935.

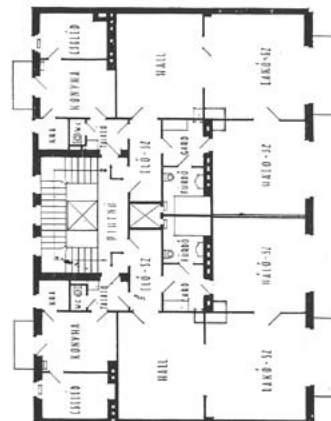


Figure 5: Miksa Politzer: Apartment house on Pozsonyi Street. Contractor: József Krischner, 1935.

Source: *Tér és Forma* 8: 2, 1935.

the architectural forms of our own time. For us, it was inconceivable to disparage and ridicule these great works on a the basis of some world view. Because our eyes and hearts are open to all kinds of manifestation of beauty from different periods of time. And it is this difference that gives us the right perspective on the theoretical starting point of Ödön Gerő's critical opinions. But to fully clarify the issue for ourselves and put it in the right light, we still wish to mention what it is that separates us from the century of Ödön Gerő (meaning the nineteenth century and its slow transition into the twentieth century) and its concept of art. Which is the order and hierarchy of values. In the eyes of nineteenth-century architecture there was only one ideal of beauty; or to be more precise, series of ideals of beauty: the varied forms of architecture from the past. It discovered, in various ways and times, its admiration for Greek, Roman, medieval, Renaissance and Baroque architecture. Whatever could be learned from these styles through sample books and virtuoso travelogues was made into an aesthetic ideal for decade after decade. The practical tasks were simply opportunities to 'realize' these stylistic ideals – regardless of how well the formal language of the fashionable ideal met the practical purpose of the building. The practical purposes, the requirements of those who would use the building were easily disregarded, such as their need for air and light, and the spatial requirements for movement within the building, just so they could satisfy their 'sense of and desire for beauty,' or as Gerő would say, 'they had the courage' to sacrifice the human functions of the building to this 'ideal of beauty'! We won't ask this time how much this ideal of beauty was related to that of the models of the past that are admired, or how much their true nature was understood. We do not, because we do not want to because we do not want to further weigh down the balance of the previous century. But it must be stated that in the hierarchy of things, priority was given to aesthetics, to assumed beauty.

Today it is different. We do things differently. How we rank and value the things that enliven and inspire us is different. We first take care of people, the goals of real life, we aim to satisfy them within the limits of possibility. And only when this has been done one hundred percent can the final polishing of forms begin, making them beautiful, finding the most expressive forms for their contents and purposes. Even though Gerő cannot see it, the ideal of beauty amongst those who cultivate the new architecture radiates from the inside, on the basis of the correct and appropriate solution. The concept is not some external layer added onto the inner core, it does not commit violence against the reality of the building that serves human needs. Pre-conceived beauty does not appear as some additional layer on top, it does not commit violence against the building that is real and serves human needs. For us the search for beauty is not a starting point, but the ultimate and integral perfection of the work, beauty is the triumph of the creator over difficulties they have overcome. If Gerő the critic sees automatism in this, perhaps he is right, but not in the sense with which he uses the term, but rather in the sense of the greatest creator, Nature, that has created the human organism at a cost that human reason can hardly imagine. The organism is a masterpiece, from a purely mechanical point of view, and the highest, ever-insurmountable point of earthly beauty since the miracle of Greek culture. However, nature did not force the beauty of the human organism onto that of any other organism; rather, by solving its purposes in the most perfect way, it was able to make it beautiful. And if we, the younger generation, not in age, but in spirit, set ourselves such goals, we can rightly reject the unspeakable attacks of Ödön Gerő.

Virgil Bierbauer

Stalinist Architecture

Originally published as 'Sztalini architektura,' *Tér és Forma*, 11: 6, 1938, 208.

Translated by Barbara Dudás. Editorial notes by Matthew Rampley.

Some misconceptions become immortal; once they are cast into the public sphere by someone, somewhere, they live for decades, they greet us from every direction, they are accepted as valid here in Hungary, as in Germany, or in France and down in Italy, in circles that believe in the slogans of daily newspapers, even though they tend to strongly deny it. One such slogan, which has flourished due to the most complete ignorance: 'Bolshevik architecture.' A battle cry, voiced by those who for various reasons oppose the great purification of today's architecture.

They have adhered to this slogan for decades and even the most serious facts cannot convince them that they are mistaken. Ten years ago, upon hearing about the newest direction of Dutch architecture they solemnly declared: 'Soviet architecture,' saying this about the architecture of Europe's most civilized country, oblivious as to the ridiculous nature of their claim. Later it was Le Corbusier's turn; by refraining from the facts, of course, they managed to ignore the fact that the Soviets had quite a poor opinion of Le Corbusier, whom they themselves labelled a bourgeois intellectual! The growing interest towards new architecture amongst the most eminent English architects was viewed with a heavy heart, and there was talk of a salon bolshevism that had even infiltrated England, for they were unaware how close the great objectivity of early nineteenth-century English architecture in pursuit of the standard was to the pursuits of the new puritanism. If they are shown works by the most advanced group of new Italian architects without any attributions of authorship, they easily fall into the entertaining mistake of, for example, declaring the fascist headquarters in Como a terrible example of 'Moscow architecture' ...³⁶

Their opinion really does not have any importance for us; nevertheless, for those who stress the clarity of their concepts, we present two Russian building plans taken from an endless series of images of a similar spirit in a Russian architectural magazine. This is how Stalin's Russia would like to build! With such plans, Russian architects flatter Stalin, who wants to play the role of Napoleon. This is all far from what practitioners of the new architecture call the architecture of our time.

On the other hand, how close this bombastic smugness is to what the old-conservative apostles of beauty amongst Europe's citizens, such as Ojetti in Italy, get enthusiastic about and sing praises to.³⁷ How beyond all human scale this architecture is, its purpose, it seems,

36) Editor's note: the building in question is the Casa del Fascio (also known as the Palazzo Terragni) in Como, designed by Giuseppe Terragni (1904–43) and built between 1932 and 1936.

37) Editor's note: this is a reference to Ugo Ojetti (1871–1946) a conservative journalist and art critic. During the First World War he was given responsibility for overseeing the protection of monuments and artworks in war zones. A signatory to the 1925 Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals, he remained an influential critic throughout the interwar period.

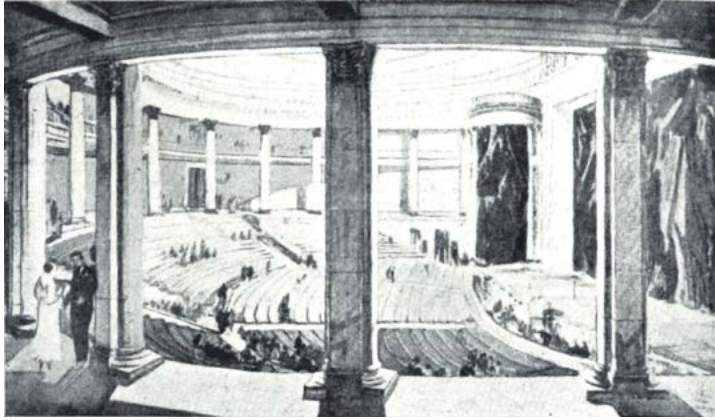


Figure 6: Unknown Soviet architectural design from 1937.

Source: *Tér és Forma* 11: 6, 1938.

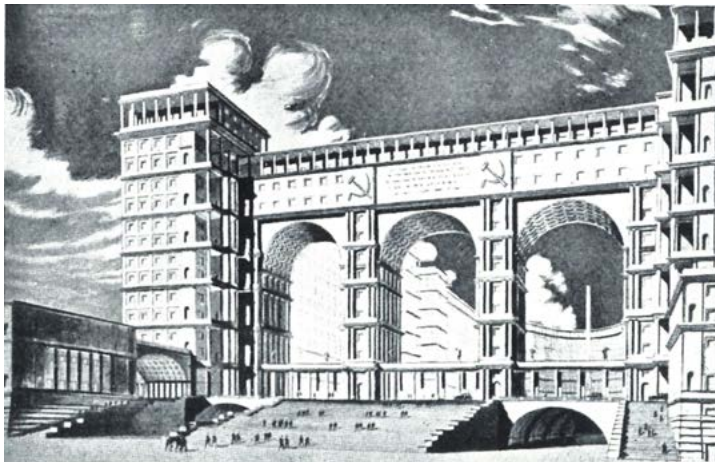


Figure 7: Ivan Fomin, M. A. Minkus and Pavel Abrosimov, project design for the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry, Moscow, 1934.

Source: *Tér és Forma* 11: 6, 1938.

being its immense size and ability to make the human seem as small and insignificant as possible, which is, of course, essentially the ultimate goal of Stalin's politics. On this basis one can clearly feel how different the classicism of the 'New architecture' is, where the measure of all architectural creations should be the human.

This all casts light on the nature of slogans such as 'Bolshevik architecture,' 'Soviet architecture,' 'Communist style'! What they do not like, what they hate without reason, what they hate out of ignorance, incompetence, or helplessness, is brought down to a common denominator. In principle, they are opposed to Communism, but they are also opposed to the new architecture, let's not ask why, so the two are identified with each other, both are considered equally bad and despicable. This is a mental phenomenon that should be researched by social psychology.

Virgil Bierbauer

On Architectural Form Today

Originally published as 'A mai építészeti formáról,' *Tér és Forma*, 19: 10, 1946, 126–134.

Translated by Barbara Dudás. Editorial notes by Matthew Rampley.

The truest expression and reflection of the mentality of every age, of every human community, is the architecture it has created. It gives an unadulterated picture of the behavior and drive of the creators of architectural work – the developer and the architect – because architectural work that is not truly and purely connected to its developer and architect becomes sharply separated from its surroundings, becoming a traitor to its master, and to those who commissioned it, no matter if it is pointing back to the past, or to the future, or in the fact that it has become a reflection of the life of foreign lands.

Since this is how I see the innermost intellectual content of architecture, I ask what the renewed architecture of our time is, how it expresses our own lives. I have tried many times to raise awareness of what makes our architecture come to life, and now I have tried to put my findings in writing.

1.

Above all, it is possible to observe, as a constant and characteristic feature, the modern spatial effect, namely the fact that there is no aspiration to achieve the definite and precise delimitation of space. On the contrary, the boundaries between spaces are often 'blurred.' It is characteristic that one of the common ways to shape space is by creating continuity, I could even say confluence, between the adjacent spaces, in such a way that the dividing line between two spaces can hardly be determined. Think of the Renaissance, with its sharp and neat articulations expressing the separation of spaces, as its antithesis. Similarly, wall decorations were given clear outlines then, while today amoeba-like blobs are in vogue.

It is also characteristic that instead of strict, crystal-like regular spaces, spaces are given an oblique, trapezoidal, or sometimes even curvilinear layout. We almost look for sharp asymmetry that breaks the rectangular rational order of space, dissolving its static calmness. It is also typical that tectonic wall and ceiling surfaces are almost removed, often a grill is used in front of the wall and under the ceiling.

The completely transparent wall surfaces, the surfaces enclosed in transparent mirror glass serve to merge adjacent spaces, through which one can look into additional spaces, so we like to visually connect separate spatial effects positioned behind one another, so that they are perceived simultaneously.

As the influence of an adjacent space is incorporated into another that has been newly created, there is an aspiration for artificial space to embrace the infinity and richness of natural space.



Figure 8: Max Haefeli, House Interior, Neubühl-Zurich Werkbund Estate, 1931.

Figure 9: Marcel Breuer, House Interior, Neubühl-Zurich Werkbund Estate, 1931.

Figure 10: Wells Coates, Apartment interior, Lawn Road Flats (Isokon Building), London, 1934.

Figure 11: Hans Scharoun, Interior of the Schminke Villa, Löbau, 1933.

Figure 12: Ernst Plieschke, House design, Werkbund Estate, Vienna, 1932.

Figure 13: József Fischer and Eszter Pécsi, Villa for Rózsi Walter, Budapest, 1936.

Source: *Tér és Forma* 19: 10, 1946.

That is the reason for the general use of large, very large, windows. It is also characteristic that the height of the window sills is so low so as to make it possible look outside and feast one's eyes on the greenery without interruption, even when sitting down in comfortable, low seating. The [importance of the] outer wall of the space is negated; consequently, the section of the wall that creates the sides of the window is very often left out, the window is stretched from wall to wall and up to the ceiling, which optically eliminates the outer wall as such. The corner pillar is replaced, giving the ceiling a floating effect. On the other hand, however, there is a frame at ceiling height above the parapet of our open terraces, and the supporting beam carries a grate, so a cut-out image of nature can be seen in the frame, and the blue sky appears even sharper when seen through the grate. The aim of this is partly to give this more or less open space an artificial character.

The structural elements are emphasized, but – let us be honest – we are far from doing it consistently, that is, to show all structures completely; we only show what we are willing to show, and with this, structure is made decorative, while elsewhere it remains hidden. We are only constructivists in a playful way, although one could be accused of inconsistency because of that; we playfully reach out to what our technique provides, because we are no longer slaves or addicted to structure, we wish to be, and can be, artistic masters of structural, we are beyond functionalism.

Obviously, it is related to this playfulness that although we do not consciously and consistently avoid symmetry – uniformity, as we might call it – we do not seek it persistently either, as was characteristic in the architecture of the past. At least, we definitely do not force it, as often happened in the past, even at the expense of functionality. It is possible to feel greater vivacity in asymmetry, in comparison with uniformity, which feels cold and rigid, and in most cases unjustifiably ceremonial. Thus, symmetry is avoided when spaces are formed and grouped, walls composed, door and window openings arranged, and furniture is set up.

In relation to this, a few words should be said about our characteristic endeavors when it comes to furnishing rooms; furniture is usually arranged in accordance with the walls and placed alongside them, not only cabinets, but seating furniture as well. It almost feels painful when furniture protrudes with a sharp angle into the space of the room: obviously the middle of the room should be left free. While in the past it was common for the dining table to be placed in the center of the room, with people needing to walk around the dining table and chairs all day long, today they are put in the corner, leaving the centre of the room open. Arranging a bed like a tongue stuck out in the middle of the room is also out of fashion; the bed placed against the wall is protected from the heat-absorbing effect of the wall by boarding or carpeting. However, this desire for spaciousness applies not only to bodily movement but also to the movements of our eyes. That is why furniture is often low-level so that one can see the top surface and comfortably put a book or a pot on it. Any furniture taller than a metre is placed – if possible – in a niche set into the wall, so that its higher, three-dimensional, body does not reach into the space of room. Lighting fixtures are also often used that hang as high as possible from the ceiling.

One last word about furniture: namely, about tubular furniture. It seems that the time has already passed when this was claimed to be used for its expediency. It is known very well that it is also relatively expensive. However, due to its very slender legs, the seating surface – at

least compared to the old, chunky-legged chairs – seems to float, the lower part of the chair is translucent and thus meets the general taste requirements of today. This transparency is only enhanced by the light from the chrome-plated pipes. Looking at the exterior of our buildings, specific facts can be observed. The new construction has begun by leaving out roofs and even the main cornice protecting the wall, because, it seems, the stereometric purity and crystalline character of the spatial masses of the building would be disrupted by a covered roof and even by the shaded zone under the cornice. When looking at the latest creations of today's architects, works by Swiss, Swedish, and American contemporaries, one can see that the dissolution of crystalline bodies is beginning to become commonplace. Those smaller or larger extensions of the building situated above the upper edge make the enclosed contours of the building as a whole more vivid and less rigid. The old, protruding, pitch-covered high roofs were left behind, as the body of the building should not be put under protection of a roof like some hat, but it should stand roofless with its head under the blue sky in the sun, blending into nature, just as the foliage of trees is not covered either by a spacious protective surface.

The main reason for this change in approach is perhaps that the previous relationship between humans and nature has also changed. Palladio's Villa Rotonda stood as an enclosed body with defined surfaces in the midst of nature, as an alien body not typical of nature: like an ordinary crystal, or a cut diamond, and there was no transition between the two. At that time, the building itself was an enclosed whole, a body distinct from or even standing in opposition to nature. The architect today, on the other hand – like a Japanese architect – aligns his architectural work with natural conditions. He aims to fit in with the smaller or larger, but characteristic shapes and curves of the given terrain, he strives to for a correspondence between them and the building, which often mirrors these elements. It gives space to a tree or a bush, it does not seek to make them disappear or cut them out, on the contrary, it takes their spatial value into account. (In principle, the same applies when the architect creates a natural environment himself, the garden of a house. When a tree or bush is planted it is marked as already existing, almost as if to say that it could have been, it would have been that way, except that the pre-existing bush had already been destroyed while the new one had not been planted yet, but that this is where it should be). The architect turns more and more modestly and humbly to the nature they long for and to which they hope to return, away from the theatricality of civilization. As soon as the architect becomes master of the technique they have created, they no longer wish to rule nature in an autocratic way.

Turning our attention to façade design in our time, we notice the same principles prevailing as mentioned previously. Above all, it is a well-known characteristic of our new houses and façades that they are completely smooth and plain. Three-dimensional articulations of previous architectural styles are avoided as strongly as possible – even at the expense of the durability of the façade! Nothing could be further from us than dividing and articulating our façades with horizontal and vertical elements, or using these to achieve symmetry, as it does not feel obligatory to arrange windows and doors evenly. The abstract, strict order of the old façades is avoided not only because it has been proved that such an axonometric order is detrimental to expediency, but also because this order, which can even be called a principle, contradicts our basic feelings, almost feels unnatural.

This may sound a little surprising since symmetry is one of the peculiarities of our cosmic world order: the cycle of the sun brings the strictest symmetry into our world: the place of sunrise and sunset is, spatially, strictly symmetrical to the direction of South and North. Along with the symmetry of the human and animal body, this is what teaches the architect to apply equivalence. On the other hand, the things of the world among which the house is placed: the forms of the landscape, vegetation, are never essentially symmetrical, they only became so in the French formal garden. As one of the most characteristic desires of our architecture is to integrate the house we have created into the natural environment, and as this was one of the characteristic architectural aspirations of our time, we had to break with symmetry as well.

This is the reason for the free order of the openings on our façades – because that also has an order! – the compositional principle of which is the dynamic balance of the surface instead of the equitable arrangement of the same surfaces. We often look for such layouts in which the rows of different smaller or larger, horizontal or vertical openings provide a compositional balance that, with its dynamic nature, can compete with pure equivalence. (We can notice in many architects today that they like to photograph the façade strictly from a parallel point of view, so that the dynamic façade can prevail without the disturbing effects of foreshortenings.)

Finally, it should be said that although the façades are plain, this does not mean that there is no interest in expressing three-dimensionality with shading. It is just that here we are not satisfied with the smaller, hand-width sculptural details of classical façades and their effects of light and shade. It is when playing with the surface of the façade that greater differences in depth are used, more practical protrusions, terraces reaching inwards more deeply, closed or open balconies projecting sharply from the wall, which take on life. It is also characteristic that the terraces signaling the less protruding levels are usually framed in the plane of the façade with a hanging board, so that the planes behind one another are emphasized more strongly.

2.

And now, let us see how this all manifests itself in the art of urban planning, especially in planning ideas and plans. We are looking at these because the realization of such plans requires the construction of a whole series of houses, and it's an opportunity that only arises in peaceful, healthy periods that consistently hold to their ideas. We can thus usually talk only about the plans for cities, the plans for integrating certain buildings and blocks of buildings into the cityscape, and most of all about the relationship of buildings to the body of the city. Despite all this, we can still see the emergence of a definite idea and will to form.

When looking at modern urban plans, the first thing to notice is how large-scale their spatial vision is. These plans are mainly characterized by the spaciousness and width of the roads, because the lines of houses along the road – if we can even talk about lines of houses – are at an unprecedented distance from each other. This is usually justified by reasons of expediency, namely, they are desirable because of today's mechanized, fast traffic that requires high-security and transparency, and because of the amount of sunlight provided to the houses this way. This is undoubtedly true, but the road widths that can be observed in modern urban plans

are very often many times wider than is practically necessary for these reasons. Spaciousness is required, it becomes an emotional need. In Anglo-Saxon urban plans, where the houses are barely 6–7 meters high, the roads are 20 meters wide, or even wider – much of this width is, of course, an area of grass-covered ground shaded by rows of trees. It is also very common to widen roads into spacious areas, squares that are completely separated from traffic. Observing the relationship between houses and roads in today's urban plans, one can also notice other novel phenomena, ones that were unknown in the cities of the past and which stand in contrast with the habits and methods of urban planning in the past. First, one can notice that the houses are no longer standing 'tightly-closed' on any of the more prominent roads, avenues, i.e. they do not line up closely to the 'construction line' of the street, but are usually built at right angles to it, 'crosswise' – even if their siting is not the best this way; they form an angle of 30–60° with the street. The closed row of houses can in principle be considered eliminated, and only when there is a need for a row of small shops, workshops and offices can a one-and-a-half storey high section connect the houses located 'crosswise.' This means that urban planning has finally gone beyond the 'rue corridor,' the cleft-like street form, in which one walked between vertiginously high, closed walls, and could see nothing of the surrounding landscape, only through a narrow rift between the two rows of houses. In this new type of street one walks at the foot of the line of houses, the façades of which rhythmically follow one another, while in between the houses, green gardens and trees welcome the pedestrian. It is also very common that the perpendicular or angled lanes of the houses do not even reach the 'street line,' but that a green zone separates the edge of the sidewalk from the end of the houses: the street becomes a park-road with houses standing in spacious gardens on either side. So, while the streets were once narrow gorges, clefts with closed-walled houses on each side, in the new system, the city becomes transparent.

The next major finding is that street and route planning has given up the system of rigid, straight lines: the axis lines of the streets bend in very soft, very large radii. By no means does this mean that today's urban planning aims to mimic the 'picturesquely' winding streets of medieval towns. After all, their traffic-killer desultoriness is in stark contrast to today's traffic needs as well as taste, an architectural conception that seeks the possibility to see into the distance and strives for transparency. On today's curved roads, the large radius of curvature provides the overview necessary for traffic safety and speed, while roads lose the stern rigidity of long straight lines. This feature can be observed in our houses today too, but it is also a consequence of not leading the roads on a rigid axis towards a distant, large, artistically accentuated structure, as the Egyptians and Romans, or the Princesses of the Far East, the French Louis and Napoleons, or the political and economic dictators of various nations did. We refrain from this also because in the case of large public buildings mass symmetry is fading away and therefore adjustment of the road axis is also unnecessary. Large-scale monuments are no longer adjusted to the axis of the road, as those heading towards the monuments could potentially disturb the traffic.³⁸

38) In relation to this, it should be mentioned that in *De Architectura Libri X*. 4. Chapter 6, one of the classic writers on architecture, L. B. Alberti of the fifteenth century, wrote the following about the main streets of the city: 'It is a proper thing for the city's main roads to twist like rivers, for that way they will seem longer and the city will seem more prestigious. But it will enhance the beauty and comfort of the city, in addition, those walking along the street will see different houses each step of the way.'

All this not only benefits road traffic, making it smoother, but also gives the cityscape a special charm, namely, when it is perceived in relation to time: moving along the wide-curved, spacious route, buildings are seen from new angles at every moment, just as in nature when looking at hills and mountains from a moving train and enjoying the flow of varied views.

Just like the interiors of buildings, multi-layered images play an increasingly important role in composing cityscapes and make us simultaneously see and discern buildings, making the cityscape transparent. Such implications are artistically far more powerful than the theatricality of rigid symmetry.

3.

This analysis of today's architectural features may seem a bit long-winded to an outsider – but it is not impossible, indeed, even very likely, that those who are directly concerned, i.e. architects, will still miss many details that have not been listed or mentioned. In the light of what has been said so far, one should answer to the question: how does the architectural form so described express the intellectual behavior of the architecture of our time and its patrons? Or, if you like, it still necessary to prove that those formal features really correspond to the life, intellectual contents, and desires of the present day.

It seems expedient to start from the fact that in our spatial works we strive primarily for spaciousness. It is characteristic that previously, in the most common types of flats, there were several, medium-sized square rooms, approximately the same size of 20–25 m², whereas today the type of floor plan considered appropriate consists of a larger room, which is more spacious in its form – and therefore usually not square – and several smaller ones, each suitable for withdrawing from company, rest or work for one person. If conditions allow for several larger rooms, then they are usually connected and interwoven, creating a space bigger than is required for basic physical movement. The space is also opened up by optical means: by transparent connections, or by the arrangement of furniture and above all, by large windows opening to the outside, to natural space, while trying to eliminate the side walls, in order to create a more spacious environment, as opposed to the enclosed character of older houses. The narrow, multi-storey, fully enclosed courtyards have completely been discarded, as they are claimed to be unhealthy, devoid of sunlight, and air. And also, I believe, because they make people feel anxious, mostly because those living together in these houses are overwhelmingly and uncomfortably close to one another. Therefore, the main aim is to separate individual apartments well enough – the apartments above and next to each other with sound-proofing; reducing the possibilities of peering inside houses, but at the same time, still allowing sunlight to enter.

It would be a fundamental mistake to believe that all this is an expression of hatred of humanity, of alienation from one another. On the contrary! It is rather about recognizing and at the same time compensating for the fact that the congestion caused by the rapid development of big cities – with a shortage of ground plots and profiteering – has fundamentally worsened the relationship between individuals. Today it is known, or at least felt, that within the family,

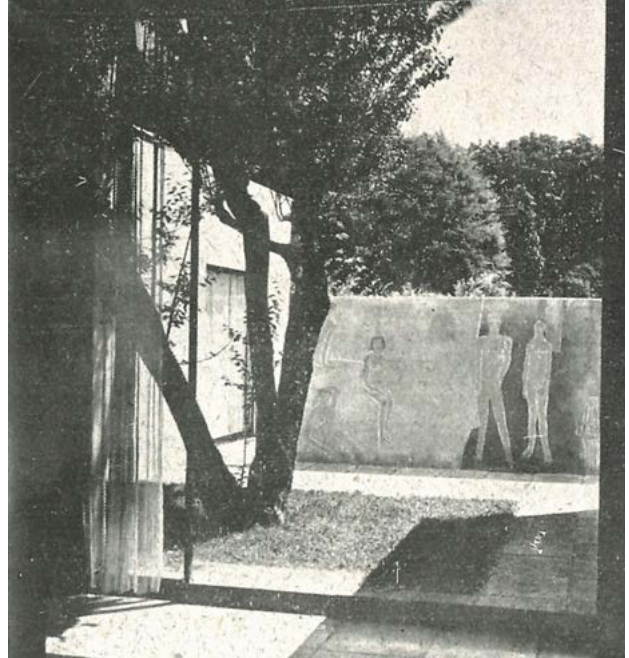


Figure 14: Albert Frey and A. Lawrence Kocher, Kocher-Samson Building, Palm Springs, 1935.

Figure 15: Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini, House of an Artist, Milan Architectural Triennale, 1933, erroneously credited by Bierbauer to Giuseppe Pagano.

Source: *Tér és Forma* 19: 10, 1946.

and especially in the wider social context, people need the ability to separate themselves from time to time should they decide and wish to, so that they can relax, or become sociable and join smaller or larger communities. Le Bon's famous work, the *Psychology of the Masses* sheds clear light on the mental afflictions of the mind of crowds.³⁹ But the sad experience of the last decade also makes us realize, that in addition to the crowdedness of barracks, marches, wagon, mental institutions, shelters, and the haunting memories of these, the inevitable crowdedness of today's life – such as queueing, waiting, crowded travel – can create spasmodic nerve reactions, evoking bad memories, resulting in constant conflict. But looking deep into human history, one would find the same phenomena everywhere: in the tens of thousands crowded in Roman circuses the joy of cruelty flared up, and in the narrow cities of the Middle Ages there was a shocking feeling of crowdedness almost indecipherable for us today. (At the same time, the cramped, dark, damp houses in the old parts of Florence clearly makes one understand the human horrors described in Dante's *Inferno*.) One of the explanations for the thirst for blood at the Place de Grève in Paris was again the thick crowd of people coming from old towns with narrow streets, when dictatorships caused mass hysteria of people rounded up for 'general assemblies,' evoking great conflagrations by the orgies of demagogic rhetoric, so the bloody steam of hatred soared from the crowded people.⁴⁰

39) Editor's note: This is a reference to Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des Foules*, Paris: Alcan, 1895.

40) Editor's note: the Place de Grève, now the Place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville, was the traditional site of public executions in both royal and revolutionary France.

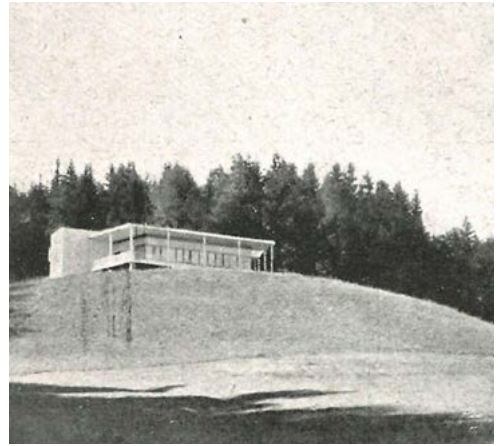


Figure 16: Richard Neutra, VDL Research House, Los Angeles, 1932.

Figure 17: Ernst Plischke, The Walter Gamerith House, Attersee, 1933–1934.

Source: *Tér és Forma* 19: 10, 1946.

These basic facts cannot be changed by the miracle of human kindness that often manifests itself in the midst of a crowd; moreover, this is exactly what proves the destructive nature of crowdedness. The point of such miracles is that those who have been able to preserve their humanity, with the power of their great compassion, strive to lift their neighbor out of the mud of hatred. This cannot be changed by the fact either that the simpler man – who lives in the worst districts, in the most densely populated houses – does not realize how cursed his life is, and the fact that it is very often difficult to pull him out of it. Such a person cannot know anything about the human happiness of a free, more spacious frame of life, yet, these individuals, the inhabitants of these houses still feel, subconsciously, the inhumanity of their destiny. This is expressed in those large groups who arduously go out of the city on Sunday for an excursion into nature – or, on a different level, in those simple city people wanting to have for themselves a house with a garden at all costs.

Basically, it can be argued, that only whoever is free, free from the agony of being in crowds, who can retire from the world or join others at will, who is able to freely move in their own home, can truly be human. An increasingly clear insight into this is reflected in the crowded features of our architecture. **The architecture of our time in general, and in its details, is a true protest against restrictions on human freedom.** And as such, it is one of the most characteristic manifestations of the will of mankind today, perhaps a more fundamental one than that for freedom of religion, freedom of opinion, and a free press; in any case, our desire, aspiration and will is at the same level as them.

Expressions of this unbound desire for freedom are also expressed in the aspirations of design at the level of urban planning. We widen the streets that are narrow like a cleft: so that our gaze is not limited by the walls rising high, so that we can see more from one perspective, our eyes can wander in between houses, into the gardens.

The road axis running straight to the infinity of the city feels constrained, as if we forced unnecessarily into the hardness of a line while, when following a curved line, and when the image of the environment changes every step of the way, such streets are filled with

surprises and visual adventure. We would not want to be forcibly led to a building classified as significant: we would rather come across it as a coincidence, meet with it as a sudden encounter.⁴¹

But the essential meaning of the great avenues, boulevards, the so-called ‘axes,’ have also been recognized, especially during the political tragedies of recent decades. We know very well that these roads were not only built to please the aesthetic, optical demands of the various great powers of the world. Liberal capitalism built such roads to flaunt its wealth. The emperors, kings and smaller princes of ancient times to express their power – while political ‘party leaders’ preferred them, because they could organize marches of ‘unified’ masses on them for their causes, where their power could be expressed and felt. These parades gave a promising picture of the masses of loyal servants of the power, who belonged to the lower ranks of the hierarchy, capable of all sorts of atrocities. It is understandable then, how one would keep distance from these types of axes expressing political power. But, one might ask: what do we need such roads for, why do we build them when we no longer wish to ‘march two abreast,’ when there is no one to march in front of, when we do not want to become those obligatory elements in marches, and we object that the true expression of the sense of human community would be to ‘parade’ under any kind of slogan.

Looking back from here, the dislike of strict symmetry, of literal equivalence on the façades of houses, and of the grouping of rooms, etc., which manifests itself everywhere, is understandable. Symmetry also feels against the desire for freedom, as the façade and the space that is formed in the spirit of strict, literal symmetry discomforts the optical experience, and the body or space thus formed seems unnaturally rigid and deprived of inner dynamics. We find that in this way there is a form of solemnity, even sacral expression, which in no way fits into our daily lives and therefore limits them. The applicability of symmetry thus becomes an exceptional possibility, and not the form of objects made for everyday life. But looking carefully at the often very solemn works of recent architecture, such as churches, one can see that in Switzerland, Sweden and Finland, not even churches are built with symmetrical façades facing the congregation; they are rather built to fit into the cityscape and the natural landscape, even dissolving symmetry in the interior, placing the strong, natural light effect on one side of the nave.

It is as if this is a very telling phenomenon, as if we were to see a behavioral symptom in it as well, and a strong expression of our worldview. Symmetry, as an art form – as many things point to this – was an ancient, magical form: symmetry in natural phenomena, in natural landscape is unknown, non-existent, it was created by man, in opposition to the unpredictable, the ever-changing phenomena of nature as the unchangeable, the manifestation of the human spirit and will.⁴²

41) One of the great ideas for the reorganization of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam was that visitors could get an unexpected glimpse at Rembrandt’s *Night Watch* from a distance of ten metres, while previously it faced the entrance though the long axis of the great building. We have realized that the artistic impact of a building is far greater when it is in front of us at once, compared to when we are walking towards it for 15 minutes or longer.

42) For those who are surprised by this, think of the technique of mass domination today, the celebrations of political powers that dazzle the masses and subordinate them, or think of the ‘architectural scenery’ of such events. In the political stages of Berlin and Nuremberg – but not only theirs – axial arrangement and symmetry was dominant. Here the goal was clear: the gazes of those standing in the crowd had to be focused almost hypnotically on the leader and the surroundings had to be aesthetically pleasing to those who were present.

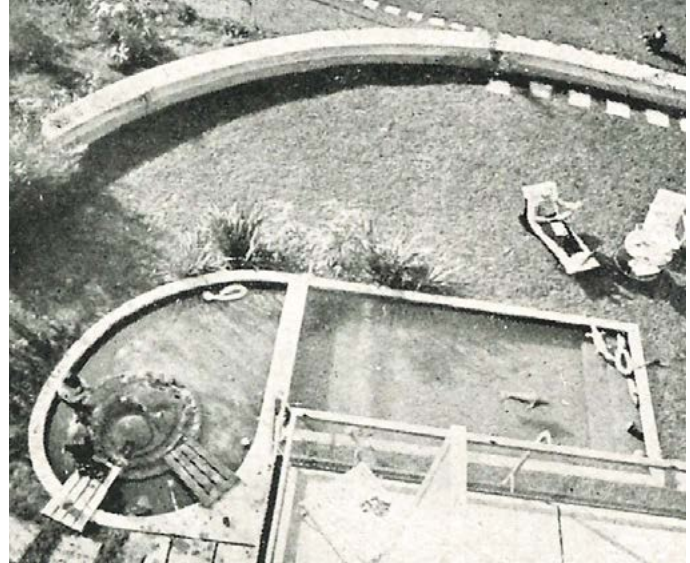


Figure 18: Max Haefeli, Housing block, Neubühl-Zurich Werkbund Estate, 1931.

Figure 19: Max Haefeli, House block garden, Neubühl-Zurich Werkbund Estate, 1931.

Source: *Tér és Forma* 19: 10, 1946.

All of this – we believe – stands far from the liberated individual, or the individual hoping to become liberated, who believes that they must fit into the framework of nature and therefore looks for this behavior in their works of art as well. This liberated individual seeks to fit into nature, as their technical and biological knowledge can make the most of the forces of nature for his survival. The individual today no longer dominates nature, but perhaps, in contrast to the somewhat arrogant conception of previous times, wishes to become one with nature, to connect with it in great harmony.

Thus, our architecture becomes an expression of the deepest essence of intellectual life forms. Thus, the effect of the power given by human technology is already beginning to be reflected in our architecture today.



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