

Mary Pepchinski, for example, contributes to our understanding of the Bauhaus phase of Wera Meyer-Waldeck's training (1927–32) and her subsequent efforts to produce affordable living space in the postwar era. Some of the contributions, such as the essay on Françoise Choay by Thierry Paquot, are most interesting for their selection of primary sources. Chen Ting's fascinating closing essay, on contemporary Chinese urbanist Wenyuan Wu (b. 1966) and her fight for sustainable planning in China, is notable for its engagement with existing social and cultural conditions. However, this essay also points to gaps in the larger book, in particular its selective engagement with certain geographies of today's global design world.

Perhaps a third volume in the series could address that issue. Future authors may want to consider whether upcoming books in the series (if any are planned) should continue to focus on individual female figures. Broader discussions concerning gender and urban planning could potentially lead to a different model, one that is not organized around individuals but rather centers on concepts overlooked by the male-dominated history of urban planning. In any case, further installments in what is clearly a larger story will certainly be welcome, as would an English translation of this book.

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Martin Kohlrausch

Brokers of Modernity: East Central Europe and the Rise of Modernist Architects, 1910–1950

Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2019,
400 pp., 16 color and 77 b/w illus. \$65 (paper),
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Helena Syrkus is looking at you. The glossy white, painted-steel wall behind Syrkus and her company—Sigfried Giedion on the left, Le Corbusier on the right—render the setting immediately recognizable to scholars of interwar modernism: she is on the SS *Patris II*, the Mediterranean cruise ship chartered to serve as the mobile site for the fourth meeting of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne in 1933 (Figure 1).¹ Helena and her husband, Szymon Syrkus, were among five architects in

the Polish delegation who presented their collaborative planning for Warsaw in light of the congress's Functional City theme. The Syrkuses, who both held prominent positions in CIAM and on its executive committee, CIRPAC, are likely unknown even to those who recognize the *Patris II* at a glance. Helena Syrkus's steady gaze, and her centrality in the photographic frame, offers a direct challenge to the peripheral position of East Central Europe in modernist architectural historiography.

In his truly interdisciplinary book *Brokers of Modernity* (which features the unflappable Helena on its cover), Martin Kohlrausch seeks to rectify this geographical asymmetry in architectural scholarship by placing the new, or significantly reshaped, post-1918 nation-states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary at the heart of his narrative. Kohlrausch has a larger goal, however: to investigate modernist architecture's group formation. It is worth stressing that Kohlrausch is a political historian who has chosen early twentieth-century architectural groups like CIAM as protagonists because their establishment and rise neatly encapsulate the installation and expansion of modernist technocratic expertise as a whole. After the two world wars, architectural groups shrewdly capitalized on urgent state-building and city-rebuilding needs to expand the profession's role in politics and society at the municipal, national, and international levels. Architects became critical brokers at the interface between the state and society, Kohlrausch argues. They made themselves into experts and seized the right to negotiate on behalf of both constituencies, promising to craft a mutually beneficial modern condition for all.

Because *Brokers of Modernity* crosses disciplinary boundaries to engage politics, economics, architecture, and planning in a region sorely underrepresented in English-language scholarship, it requires a lot of scene setting. The book opens with an overview of East Central European history in the first half of the twentieth century and highlights why historians of modernism should be interested in this region: for the extraordinarily fertile architectural ground that repeated acts of wartime destruction wrought. Herbert Hoover noted as much when he lamented, in 1919, that “as a result of seven invasions by different armies the

country [of Poland] has largely been denuded of buildings” (38).² Tomáš Masaryk, inaugural head of newly founded Czechoslovakia, called post-1918 Europe a “laboratory built over the great graveyard of the World War” (34). The theme of destruction as a precondition for radical innovation is a through line in this book. Later, in the sixth chapter, we learn that during World War II, East Central European cities like Warsaw, L'viv, and Minsk experienced uricide to a much greater extent than did most Western European cities; thus renewal by radical planning was rendered all but inescapable in the region. The second through fourth chapters pull back from a strict geographical focus on East Central Europe to consider, respectively, the rise of social concerns among architects in the wake of World War I; the establishment of international groups such as the League of Nations' Committee of Architectural Experts and CIAM, which sought to address these concerns; and the communication and transfer of architectural ideas across national boundaries during the interwar period, via journals, books, and congresses. These three middle chapters will be illuminating for readers outside the field of architectural history but will likely be skimmed by experts, with the exception of passages situating East Central European architects' activities against this broader story.

Brokers of Modernity breaks ground in its final two chapters, which focus on the Polish case in the 1930s and 1940s. The fifth chapter provides close analysis of the planning effort called Warszawa Funkcjonalna (Functional Warsaw), completed and published in 1934. Helena and Szymon Syrkus, two of the plan's main authors, were active participants in the Functional City-themed CIAM IV the year before, when two clear categories of modernist urban practice—analysis and synthesis—emerged. The analytical group advocated close reading of existing urban conditions before projective work was undertaken. The synthetic group, to which the Polish delegates belonged, advocated visionary planning aimed explicitly at the future. Warszawa Funkcjonalna was thus a synthetic plan that presented future Warsaw as an urban, national, and continental center—the European crossroads of transportation, communication, and cultural infrastructures. Kohlrausch paints this plan as “an attempt to overcome the process



Figure 1 Sigfried Giedion (left), Helena Syrkus (center), and Le Corbusier (right, foreground) on the *SS Patris II*, site of CIAM IV, 1933 (photo by Karl Hubacher; GTA Archives/ETH Zurich).

of catching up with Western examples and reversing the situation with a radical vision not conceivable in the already ‘crystallized’ cities of the West” (233). While Western European CIAM colleagues like Walter Gropius and Cornelis van Eesteren criticized *Warszawa Funkcjonalna* as overly visionary, pie-in-the sky planning, the fact was that in postimperial Poland, and especially in the new capital of Warsaw, big plans were necessary to establish political legitimacy. In the East Central European states, politics and pressing material need combined to give innovative planning strategies the greatest potential for success.

The book’s final chapter follows the struggles and ultimate fates of Polish, Czechoslovak, and Hungarian architects through World War II and stands out as an example of extraordinary historical scholarship. Kohlrausch combed through institutional and private archives to unearth personal correspondence between architects who remain at arm’s length for the first five chapters. Groups make for difficult protagonists, and the desire among members of this particular group to be viewed as cool-headed technocrats only exacerbates the empathetic distance.³ The emergence of conservative political extremism in the mid-1930s, however, shifts the narrative to the personal realm. By 1937, Szymon Syrkus’s Jewish background precipitated his loss of all professional positions; by 1942, he was sent to Auschwitz. The imperturbable Helena Syrkus—who, stunningly, continued to design innovative

social housing throughout this period—moves to the center of the story. Her letters and telegrams to CIAM colleagues worldwide (Gropius, Hannes Meyer, Hans Schmidt, and others), asking for assistance, first to leave Poland and then to find Szymon, form a paper trail of desperation that also reveals true friendship on both sides. Kohlrausch finds that CIAM was not merely a professional group for regular participants—it constituted a close social network that proved invaluable to many members during the war. Despite significant efforts to get the Syrkuses out of Poland and into teaching positions in Britain, Sweden, the United States, or Mexico, their CIAM colleagues were unable to overcome the obstacle of meager immigration quotas for Eastern Europeans. Szymon did survive the war, thanks to his expertise: he served as a draftsman in the central building division of the *Waffen-SS* at Auschwitz. The chapter ends with a discussion of post-war rebuilding efforts in the region and the exciting period from 1945 to 1948, when it seemed that the visionary modernist plans for Warsaw might come to fruition in the devastated city. Kohlrausch’s book concludes in 1948, when the East Central European states became fully integrated into the Soviet sphere and the cultural tide turned toward socialist realism. The Syrkuses, who by then had ample practice surfing the ideological waves, survived that shift, too.⁴

Brokers of Modernity first came to my attention as an open-access title. Socialist architecture social media groups promoted

the book as soon as it was released, and interested readers were able to download the text from embedded links and engage the material immediately. Unfortunately, the images in the printed book render as gray boxes in the digital version, which makes the open-access version a poor cousin to its print counterpart. If we are to advocate for our scholarship to be released via open access as a means to reach audiences with limited access to print books—and we should—we must take the quality, and the commensurability, of open-access publications seriously. How do we do that? For starters, we can push for rights grantors to allow for open digital use of images, and brainstorm concrete ways to acknowledge and salute those grantors who support this system. Open access is the future of scholarship, as coronavirus closure of libraries and archives has made all too clear. As architectural historians committed to the intellectual performance of visual analysis, we have the responsibility to ensure our field’s success as that future comes to pass.

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Notes

1. On CIAM IV, see Eric Paul Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 73–91. The use of the *Patris II* for CIAM IV was hastily organized after plans to hold the congress in Moscow were scrapped.

2. The new states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary were beset by extreme economic and

political turbulence in their first years of existence, yet they had to provide responses to material shortages in housing and basic infrastructure—or fail as states.

3. Mumford runs into this same issue in his book on CIAM—namely, that such a large, heterogeneous, dispersed, and long-lived group makes for distant protagonists and limited empathetic connection between reader and historical actors. See Mumford, *CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*.

4. In her recent doctoral dissertation, Marcela Hanáčková focuses on Helena Syrkus and examines this ideological shift through Syrkus's famous speech at CIAM VII in Bergamo, Italy, in 1949. Marcela Hanáčková, "CIAM and the Cold War: Helena Syrkus between Modernism and Socialist Realism" (PhD diss, GTA/ETH Zurich, 2019).

Beatriz Colomina

X-Ray Architecture

Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2019, 200 pp., 277 illus. \$40/€35 (cloth), ISBN 9783037784433

It is a joy to be in tactile contact with a book as beautifully designed and lushly illustrated as this one. Published by Lars Müller, whom author Beatriz Colomina hails as "the last book maker" (199), this volume features a cleverly designed, double-layered cover that evokes its title, *X-Ray Architecture*. The strong graphic design and the 277 illustrations, many in color, that accompany the text are appropriate for a book written by a preeminent architectural historian and theorist known for her groundbreaking and sophisticated analysis of images.

Like other books by Colomina, this one had a long gestation. The author recounts that her main idea here—the intimate connections between architecture and illness—goes back to 1980, when she first arrived in New York and was inspired by the type of interdisciplinary scholarship characterized by Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor* (1978). Besides noting that she "started seeing modern architecture in terms of all the pathologies related to it, real or imagined" (8), Colomina does not elaborate on how she was inspired by Sontag's work.

If illness is the author's subject, the book's organization and multiple narratives—which provide a panoramic view of the various linkages between architecture and illness through an array of modern architects and buildings—indicate metaphor as her method. Colomina links

various types of illnesses to modern architecture through different forms and workings of metaphor. These range from the ways in which modern architects repeatedly deployed "disease imagery to express concern for social order" (19) to how Colomina interprets major modern architects' works in relation to their own understandings of sick bodies: for example, Charles and Ray Eames's "orthopedic body," Le Corbusier's "tuberculoid body," and Frederick Kiesler's "emaciated body" (54). In fact, one could extend Colomina's metaphors to suggest that her descriptions of Adolf Loos's and Richard Neutra's respective works in chapter 1 hint at a preoccupation with neurological and naked bodies, respectively. These bodily metaphors are, in turn, based on Colomina's comparison of an architect to a doctor "practicing a form of preventive medicine that nurtures and rebuilds the body and the psyche" (30). In other words, Colomina uses metaphors to form chains of open-ended and, at times, loose associations between design, illnesses, and images. This might explain why, despite the book's title and its hypothesis that "modern architecture was shaped by the dominant medical obsession of its time—tuberculosis—and the technology that became associated with it—X-rays" (10), only two of the five chapters are concerned with X-rays or tuberculosis.

Chapter 1, "Health and Architecture: From Vitruvius to Sick Building Syndrome," is an overview of the relationships between ill health and architecture, mostly explored through the lives and works of the aforementioned modern architects. Strangely, however, and despite its subtitle, this chapter does not discuss sick building syndrome. Chapter 2, titled simply "Tuberculosis," examines several modern sanatoriums, both canonical and obscure. Colomina focuses on the treatment of tuberculosis before antibiotics, which relied on the provision of abundant light and air in sanatoriums, revealing how these "sanatoriums modernized architects" (65). In chapter 3, "X-Ray Intimacy," images made from electromagnetic radiation provide a metaphor for what Colomina calls the "disciplinary self-exposure" of the architectural canon (118), showing how X-ray images transformed the visual field and shaped notions of transparency in modern

architecture, most notably in the work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

Extending the metaphors of disciplinary self-exposure and visual transparency, chapter 4, "Blurred Visions," shows how transparency tends to be ambiguous in the writings of György Kepes, Colin Rowe, and Robert Slutzky, and in the design work of figures like Philip Johnson (the Glass House, particularly) and Mies (especially his skyscraper designs and models). Colomina ends the chapter by exploring the spatial ambiguities created through the interplay of transparency and reflectivity in works by SANAA (Sejima and Nishizawa and Associates). Chapter 5, "Hyperpublic: An Afterword," is more a conclusion than a proper chapter. Colomina attempts here to connect recent medical imaging technologies with examples of contemporary architecture from the 1990s onward. Her point is to reiterate the argument she makes in chapter 3—that new medical technologies can change our conception of architecture. The distance of the final two chapters from the topic of illness and architecture is an indication of both the strengths and the weaknesses of metaphor as a method. When done well, such an approach can result in associative interpretations that are refreshingly imaginative, insightful, and far-reaching. When poorly executed, it can lead to predictable and, at times, less than convincing interpretations.

One of the great strengths of Colomina's past scholarship has been her insightful analysis of photographs. In her previous books, photographs have served not merely as illustrations but, as Adrian Forty has noted, as "primary evidence" to be carefully analyzed and dissected.¹ These images have often been printed in ways that have emphasized their autonomy as independent documents. In this book, however, the more than two hundred photographs, most printed in small sizes and intermingled with the text, appear as no more than appending illustrations, almost extraneous to the arguments in the text.

This book's approach to architectural history and theory—focusing on photographs and questions of representation—pioneered by Colomina and others, has its roots in the broader "cultural turn" that occurred in the social sciences and humanities beginning in the 1980s and 1990s. Critics of that approach have pointed out