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The history of architectural modernism has been canonized with a strong focus on the Western hemisphere. Martin Kohlrausch’s Brokers of Modernity puts forth a solid revision of this narrative and succeeds in shifting it significantly eastward. By inserting the manifold contributions by architects from East Central Europe into the larger history of European modernism, he provides an overdue account of what had been shattered when the trans-European professional networks dissolved in the wake of the Second World War.

Focusing on the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM) as the most prominent network of modernist architects and on the „formation of a movement beyond borders“ (p. 23), Kohlrausch presents an immensely informed study, which is based on his research of the past decade. The book is all the more insightful because he is a historian at work in a field generally covered by art and architectural historians. Kohlrausch’s approach thus oscillates between solid explanatory subchapters on Polish (and East Central European) history for the reader unfamiliar with this specific regional and political context, and concrete case studies of how the negotiators of the modernist cause operated in and beyond East Central Europe. Kohlrausch describes the modernists as „a group at the interface of state and society“ (p. 25), hence their label in the book’s title: brokers of modernity. Kohlrausch’s book sheds light on architects in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, with a strong emphasis on the latter. Architects that feature in the book are, among others, Helena and Szymon Syrkus, Barbara and Stanisław Brukalski, Roman Piotrowski, Fred Forbát, Farkas Molnár, Karel Tegge, and František Kalivoda. Although Kohlrausch acknowledges the prominence given to Poland at the start of his study, his view remains thus biased and does not fully justify the title’s promise of equal scrutiny given to the entire region.

The first two chapters of the book outline the general phenomenon of modernism and the new role architects acquired through a cause more social than stylistic. The following four chapters cover CIAM-Ost as an interest group of East and Southeast European architects within the CIAM network, with a general emphasis on how instrumental groups became for the modernist cause (esp. p. 146f.) and underscoring the „culture of closeness“ (p. 162) as well as international friendship between CIAM members and beyond. Based on recent scholarship on modernism’s propaganda through new media such as photography, the illustrated press, and film, Kohlrausch highlights „the public dimension of architects“ (p. 59) – and how vital the exchange was not only through personal contacts and meetings, but also through architectural journals and books.

While the members of CIAM-Ost appeared to be more socially-minded, even radical, than the majority of members in the West, Kohlrausch notes how „the CIAM looked eastwards with high expectations“ (p. 114). He consequently presents Warsaw as „an internationally relevant case“ (p. 212) in the final two chapters covering the time before and during the Second World War as well as the early postwar period. With Warsaw’s protagonists (above them all Szymon Syrkus) departing from and going beyond classical urban planning in their elaboration of plans for a Functional Warsaw, they demonstrated that the need for more radical urban planning had become a political necessity, especially with regard to the nation-building process Poland experienced after its independence in 1918. As much as Kohlrausch asserts the ‘gaze eastwards’ before and after the war, one might, however, doubt whether Warsaw re-

ally received the international attention the author claims. While *Functional Warsaw* certainly attracted considerable attention within the CIAM network before 1939, it remains nonetheless questionable whether the rebuilding efforts after the war really did in the West acquire the status Kohlrausch insists on (p. 271).

Sometimes historical anachronisms can be immensely insightful. Kohlrausch’s study of a “dual-speed Europe” mirrored in the CIAM is a case in point (p. 116). Applying the more recent concept of a ‘multi-speed Europe’ to his period of analysis, the historian masterfully balances institutional history, a history of networks, and a history of modern architecture embedded in its social-historical context. Kohlrausch’s study stresses the representation of women in the modernist networks, notably higher in Poland than in the West (e.g. p. 75f.); it also reflects upon the generational aspect of Polish modernism with protagonists all born around 1900, thus much younger than the luminaries Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius or Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Kohlrausch finally also highlights the historiographic consequences of modernism’s canonization ex post facto, for example when he reports on researcher Martin Steinnmann’s correspondence with Helena Syrkus in the 1970s, undertaken to establish a first account of ‘what CIAM really was’. A word or two more on the self-hagiography of CIAM’s members though, also in the East, would have rounded off the picture.

The book leaves open for discussion the analytical usefulness of Kohlrausch’s initially proposed concept of an “Eastern modernism” (p. 49). After introducing the notion, he himself does not elaborate on it any further. Moreover, despite valid criticism of the mechanisms of modernism’s canonization (an omnipresent overemphasis on the Bauhaus, e.g.), the Bauhaus and Le Corbusier remain the comparative entity in the study (e.g. p. 80) – a pitfall any history of modernism, even revisionist, can hardly avoid. Factual mistakes, however, could have been avoided. Kohlrausch claims, for example, that the Łódź Art Museum (est. 1930) was the “first museum of modern art in Europe” (p. 137). The Kestner-Gesellschaft in Hanover was established in 1916, the Museum Folkwang in Hagen as early as in 1902. The Van Nelle factory in Rotterdam turns into a work of Mart Stam (p. 141), perpetuating a myth Stam allegedly created himself. A more thorough proof-reading finally would have eliminated a number of unnecessary mistakes and typos.

While *Brokers of Modernity* solidly references and evaluates the existing literature on the region’s (architectural) history, it presents a large scope of original research. Not included in the volume are the contributions on Hungarian Virgil Bierbauer by Ágnes Anna Sebestyén, for example, who has recently stressed Bierbauer’s position in the network of modernists. Kohlrausch’s publication also coincided with the most recent exhibitions on the Polish avantgarde and its role in the process of the country’s nation building: „Awangarda i Państwo” in Łódź as well as the critically received exhibition „Krzyzacz: Polska! Niepodległa 1918” in Warsaw. The exhibitions only underscore the topicality of Kohlrausch’s study. Finally, Małgorzata Popiołek has elaborated her expert analysis on Warsaw („A Reconstruction that Began Before the War”), about to be published, but just too late to allow for cross-pollination with Kohlrausch’s book, something that would certainly have been fruitful.

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3 Three varieties of the city of Lviv appear in the book (Lviv, Lvov, and L’viv); architects’ names are misspelled, affecting also their representation in the publication’s excellent index (El Lessitzky (p. 137); Virgil Bir-bauer (p. 150); Bogdan Lachert (p. 261); Paul Valery (p. 198)).


6 Małgorzata Popiołek-Roßkamp, Warschau: Ein Wiederaufbau, der vor dem Krieg begann, Paderborn [expected 2020].
These reservations and coincidences do not, however, detract from Kohlrausch’s nuanced analysis. Not only does he provide welcome access to a large range of Polish sources (and historiography) for an English-speaking readership. He also succeeds in doing what his Brokers set out to accomplish: not writing a separate history of Eastern Modernism, but rather inscribing his subjects in existing history. East Central Europe appears as a region by definition between East and West; this is also where Kohlrausch’s appropriate and continuous references to the Soviet Union fit into his story.