HUNGARIAN RELATIONS WITH BAUHAUS AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN HUNGARY*

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Summary

In Hungary, development of the new architecture was significantly influenced by Bauhaus in Germany, an important artistic-spiritual center at the beginning of this century. This influence was mainly due to several outstanding Hungarian Bauhaus members, either teachers or students. An attempt is made to disclose the secret of the mentality and activity of these universally significant artists understood by us alone, by relating partly known facts that, if aligned, may be of help in precising Hungarian Bauhaus relations, and in pondering the — perhaps indirect — influence still affecting our architecture.

In Hungary, just as in many other countries, the development of modern architecture was much influenced by Bauhaus, the most significant school in Germany, the artistic-spiritual center in the first third of this century, gathering outstanding artists of the time. This marked influence is primarily due to Hungarian professors and students among the eminent personalities of the school [1].

László Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Breuer, Farkas Molnár, Ernő Kállai, Alfréd Forbát, Gyula Pap, Sándor Bortnyik, Tibor Weiner, Andor Weininger, Henrik Neugeboren, Judith Kárász, and many others joined in the work of that school for shorter or longer periods. Thereby Bauhaus became determinant for Hungarian architecture, its history our concern. Recently, works on European cultural history and on Bauhaus are concerned with the role of East-Europeans in the renewal of art in our century, who eventually had a great. sometimes decisive importance in the process [2].

Thus, it is incumbent on us to trace back and disclose anything comprehensible only from Hungary and through us in the concepts and activity of these masters of universal significance. Necessarily some known facts will be quoted, but a recapitulative alignment may assist in precising Hungarian

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relations to Bauhaus, and in pondering its influence on Hungarian architecture in the '30s and — indirectly — at present.

Activities of Marcel Breuer and László Moholy-Nagy are universally known and are not strictly related to the development of modern architecture in Hungary. After years in the Bauhaus, Breuer spent but a few months in this country, and Moholy-Nagy none.

MARCEL BREUER (1902—1981) became involved in Bauhaus in 1920, at the age of 18. At that time, the so-called White Terror ravaged Hungary; from his native town, Pécs, then under Serbian occupation, it was next to impossible to get to the Budapest university — so he went to Weimar.

Initially he designed furniture; his first tubular-steel chairs (1923) and tubular furniture have soon become models for design using prefabricated units. Timelessness and up-to-dateness of Breuerian forms appear from the interest in, and demand for his sitting furniture produced without alterations as late as in the '60s. Although Breuer came back in 1934 for a short time, he could not settle down, as in spite of an established name he could not have his high-school certificate domesticated by the Chamber of Engineers since the Technical University of Budapest (and hence the Chamber) specified a longer time of education and wider structural engineering studies for graduation [3]. Therefore he first went to Switzerland, then to England, and finally, to the USA. Throughout his career, he achieved quite a number of significant architectural creations.

His architectural creed, theoretical fundamentals of his works have developed as a consequence of the Bauhaus years. Although he left his native country, he never denied his adherence [4]. In 1968, he was granted a Honorary Doctor title by the Technical University, Budapest. He was launched on his career by the peculiar building atmosphere of his native town Pécs, this bimillenary submedtiterranean town at the foot of the Mecsek mountains, just as were Forbát, Molnár, or the painter Victor Vasarely.

The other Bauhaus-professor was LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY (1895—1946)[5]. He grew up in the atmosphere of the Hungarian turn of the century. During his law studies, he inevitably became acquainted with the latest, socialist trends of law philosophy and sociology. During World War I he was a soldier. Severely wounded he got in a hospital where he started to draw and to paint. Part of his postal cards sent home from Odessa 1917 to 1919 have been acquired and exhibited by the Museum of Hatvan in the summer of 1974 [6]. After the fall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic he went to Vienna, then settled in Berlin and worked as a painter and a specialist writer, as member of the circle "Ma" (Today) of Lajos Kassák [7], co-worker of that review. In Vienna, they co-authored "Book of New Artists" (1922) [8]. Walter Gropius — calling him a friend and co-worker in his 1934 lecture in Budapest — was sensible enough to invite him to Bauhaus in 1923 [9], committing him to head to Vorkurs (preparatory course) and the metal workshop. His Bauhaus activity may safely be stated to be of fundamental significance. He is a "man of construction". His extremely manifold activities, versatile experiments with glass, photography, film; light and colour tests, typography, poster designing, and stage-craft innovations, rank him with great artists.

Leaving Germany in 1935, he first went to Paris, then to London, then, in 1937 he settled in Chicago, (USA) to found the New Bauhaus (later Institute of Design), headed, after his premature death, by György Kepes, also of Hungarian descent [10].

His theoretical activity sprouted from the soil of practice. Among his works, "From Material to Architecture" was published in this country, in Hungarian, after fourty years of delay [11].

The 1975 Moholy-Nagy exhibition in the National Gallery in Buda Castle was the first to present his activity to the Hungarian public [12]. But the lesson of his oeuvre penetrated the activities of our industrial designers and architects much before that. His light mobiles inspired, in addition to Nicolas Schöffer, also of Hungarian descent, other Hungarian artists (e.g. György Z. Gács).

ALFRÉD FORBÁT (1897—1972), also born in Pécs, was another Bauhaus architect. Graduated in München in 1920, he became a co-worker of Gropius in the Weimar workshop. In 1922, in common with Gropius, he made designs for standard family houses with variable floor plans, using various prefabricated units. Since 1925 he was active in Berlin, as co-designer of residential estates in Siemensstadt and Haselhorst [13]. In 1933 he came back to Hungary, settled in his native town and had to be contented with minor architectural commissions — some villas and blocks of flats. His weekend home of simple, neat moulding stil sits on the slope of the Mecsek mountains [14]. He soon joined in the work of the Hungarian CIAM group. In 1938 he left for Sweden to work there as a town planner, until his death [15].

TIBOR WEINER (1906—1965) was the other Hungarian architect cooperating with a director of Bauhaus. After graduation, from 1929 to 1931, he was active in the Bauhaus of Dessau, in Hannes Meyer's workshop. In 1931 he and other Bauhaus pupils, the so-called Red Bauhaus team, went to the USSR, to shoulder several architectural tasks, in strict cooperation with Soviet architects. In 1937 he went to France, in 1939 to Chile. 1946 to 1948 he was appointed professor at the University of Architecture in Santiago. In 1948 he finally came back. He was entrusted with important tasks; town development, public buildings, residential estates. As architect in chief of Dunaújváros (Sztálinváros) he created our first socialist town [16].

Also ANDOR WEININGER (b. 1899) was a Bauhaus member from 1921 to 1928. He was concerned with a great many things but his renownedness is due to his scenery and theatre (Spheric Theatre, 1926). He was the founder of the Bauhaus orchestra. In Berlin he worked as an interior designer. Further stations of his career were: Holland, Canada, and finally, the USA, where he has been active as a painter [17].

SÁNDOR BORTNYIK (1893—1976), a painter, pupil of Hungarian activism, also had relations to Bauhaus. Dwelling in its vicinity, he was on friendly terms with professors and students although officially he was no Bauhaus member. Returning to Hungary in 1925, in 1928 he founded a free school named "Műhely" (Workshop), called also "Hungarian Bauhaus" by making many young Hungarian artists acquainted with the Bauhaus ideas. This outstanding painter and pedagogue was teacher at the School of Applied Arts in 1948, and director of the School of Arts in Budapest, from 1948 to 1956 [18].

Another painter, GYULA PAP (1899—1983) worked in the metal workshop of Bauhaus from 1920 to 1923. The work of this period: lamps, pots, etc. are still in the vernacular of our commodities. After 1923, he worked in Transylvania as a lithographer. Invited by Itten to his painting school in Berlin, he had been working and teaching there for three years after 1927. Home again, after 1934 he had several independent exhibitions. 1949 to 1962 he was professor at the Hungarian School of Arts [19].

Another Hungarian, HENRIK NEUGEBOREN (1901-1959), born in Braşov, was a musician and a painter. Pupil of the Music Conservatory in Berlin, he was a Bauhaus member from 1928 to 1930, a pupil of Klee. He was interested in the music-arts relations: as a monument plan, he elaborated four times the Fugue in es-minor of Bach in space and graphically (1929). His interest in fine arts drew him to Paris where he acted as a painter under the name of *Henri Nouveau* [20].

ERNŐ KÁLLAI (1890—1954), one of the two returned Hungarians, had an important role in propagating "Modern Art" in Hungary. From 1920 to 1935 he worked in Germany as a writer on arts, contributor to several German and Hungarian periodicals. He was editor of the Bauhaus review from 1928 to 1929 where he also published several of his papers. Returning to Budapest in 1935, he actively joined artistic life at home: he wrote, informed, organized exhibitions, had a lively correspondence with famous artists. From 1946 to 1948 he was a teacher at the School of Applied Arts in Budapest. His activity was restricted during the period of dogmatism. His writings are a valuable spiritual heritage for us, in part still awaiting to be processed and evaluated [21].

Maybe the most significant personality of Hungarian architecture in the 20th century, a zealous propagator of new architectural concepts and of the Bauhaus idea, is FARKAS MOLNÁR (1897—1945), also born in Pécs [22]. Originally a painter, he spent four years at Bauhaus during its period of development, 1921 to 1925. His first works were pictures, lithographs, etchings. Gropius became aware of his outstanding talent, architectural sense, and took him into his workshop as a co-worker. This period ripened the architect in him. (Organization of the Section for Architecture, and architectural education in Bauhaus started only in spring 1924.) The young architect produced new, phantastic, even "astonishing" designs such as the "Red cube house" (referring to Malevich) in 1922, design of the skeleton living house, example of extreme formal simplification (1923), ideas of collective house, collective town, designs of efficiency apartments, terrace houses. Finally came a grandiose theatre design, the so-called "U-theatre" (1924) featured, in addition to up-to-date stage equipment, primarily by variability, a wide range of separating-uniting possibilities. Returning 1925 from the Bauhaus full of ambitions, great plans, in March, he already exhibits part of his architectural designs made in Germany in the Mentor bookshop, on Andrássy (now Népköztársaság) Street [24]. But his master's certificate from Weimar does not entitle him to independent architectural activity at home, so he decides to complete his studies at the Technical University, to graduate as an architect [25]. His activity as a Hungarian architect begins in the design office of Pál Ligeti, as co-designer. This office and the home of Ligeti were meeting places for young intellectuals with new, progressive ideas. His social mentality, progressivity, interest and perceptiveness to new ideas direct Molnár to this group. The leftist, or rather, communist review "100%", published for hardly two years, (edited by the Central Committee active in Vienna, via Aladár Tamás) publishes his writings, designs, even a 1927 frontispiece [26].

In 1928, the international organization of modern architecture, CIAM, is formed in La Sarraz, Switzerland. At the IInd Congress in Frankfurt, 1929, concerned with theoretical and practical problems of efficiency apartments, Gropius was elected vice-chairman, Farkas Molnár was the Hungarian delegate [27], joined soon by József Fischer (1901—) as second delegate. The Hungarian CIAM group concentrates around Molnár and Fischer, his codesigner. This is why the Hungarian CIAM endeavours to reflect Bauhaus conceptions and goals [28]. Let us mention here some CIAM members who produced works in the spirit of modern architecture, such as: Alfréd Forbát, József Körner, Máté Major [29], Gábor Preisich [30], Zoltán Révész [31].

The first works of Molnár at home were in cooperation with Ligeti in whose design office he was employed for over five years. He learned much in this time, at the same time he had an opportunity to freely realize his ideas, their common work reflects mainly his concepts. This period includes the Angyal-villa in Bimbó Street (1929) [32], a living house after the efficiency apartment model, a housing estate in Napraforgó Street (1931), with a typical Bauhaus balcony [33], and the "Delej" villa in Mihály Street, on the west slope of Mount Gellért (1929) [34]. Its special significance is that Molnár here had his own 52 sq.m of dwelling, a flatlet for intellectuals, exemplifying his approach combining practicalness and economy, classic functionalism [35]. Built-up, furniture, fittings of the apartment were aimed at illustrativeness,

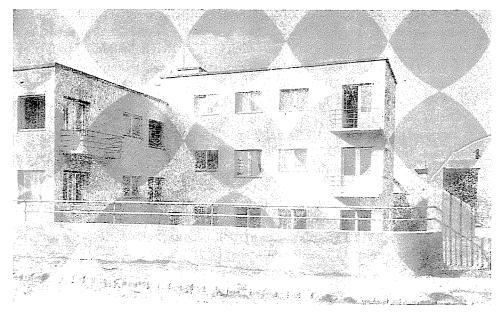


Fig. 1. Pál Ligeti-Farkas Molnár: "Delej" villa, Budapest, 1929

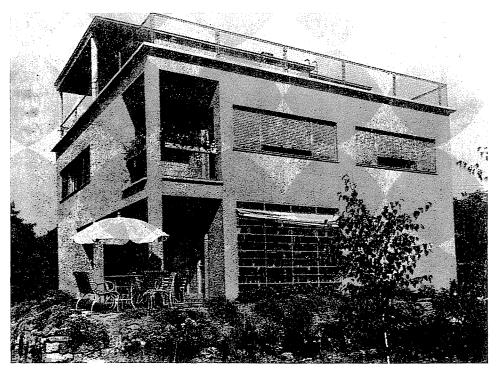


Fig. 2. Farkas Molnár: The "Bibliophile's House", Budapest, 1932

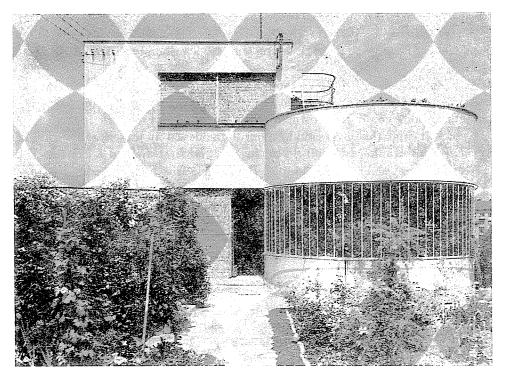


Fig. 3. Farkas Molnár: Villa in Lejtő Street, Budapest, 1932

practical demonstration of the validity of principles of "modern architecture". On Sundays, the Molnárs had many visitors eager to see the apartment [36].

In 1931 he parts with Ligeti's design office to enter the most productive era of his architectural activity. Villas, family houses came into being, one after the other. The first to be mentioned is the house 8/f Kavics Street built for the interior designer József Gróf. A fine example of the development of early-type single-mass cube houses is this two-storey small villa, supported on slender reinforced concrete columns on one side, of a mass animated by a broken-line external stair [37]. It is followed by houses in Cserje Street, the Hevesy house (1931) [38] and the "House of Three Brothers" (1932) [39] on the same plot, then the "Doctor's villa" [40]. Also the "Bibliophile's House" (1932) in Vérhalom Street reflects perfectly Molnár's ideas on layoutspace connections corresponding to individual and communal spheres within a family [41].

One of the finest examples of the new Hungarian architecture is a small villa in Lejtő Street by Molnár, designed in 1932 for the director of the National Industrial Union [42]. It was granted the first prize in its category at the Triennale of Milano in 1933 [43]. It features reasonable layout, perfect interlacing, unity between outer and inner spaces. "A good building is a translucent object permitting to perceive the inner layout from the outside, the outer form from the inside . . ." [44] wrote Molnár, a principle reflected by most of his works.

Easy, ingenious of form, though harmonic buildings that still act as up-to-date, are due to Farkas Molnár. Not even lesser or greater damages, transformations could reduce their value, their beauty to a degree where it was not felt that this level could be hardly achieved at present. In a villa in Darányi (now Hankóczy Jenő) Street in 1932, he first applied a cantilevered projecting storey over a solid ground floor [45]. This building and his house in Lotz Károly Street (1933) have been presented in a book on Bauhaus published in 1955 [46].

The house in Lotz Károly Street [47] was the dwelling place of Farkas Molnár with his family, and here was his design office, too. It was here that he was host to Gropius, his master in Weimar, invited by the Association of Hungarian Engineers and Architects to deliver a lecture [48]. In his home, Molnár designed almost everything himself: built-in furniture variable according to function, big sliding doors for separating or uniting rooms; an endeavour to inner variability, simplicity featured his home.

Beside villas with one or two flats, he designed also a block of freehold flats (1932). On the Castle Hill slope facing the Danube - 1/a, Toldy Ferenc

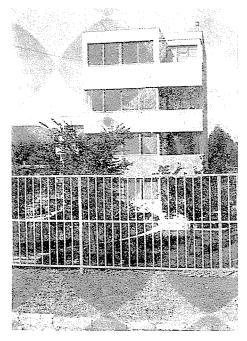


Fig. 4. Farkas Molnár: House in Lotz Károly Street, Budapest, 1933

Street — a fine, white four-storey block with strip windows attracts attention as an irregular landscape feature [49]. (To obtain the building permit for the unusual project lasted one and a half year, and to build it took four months !)

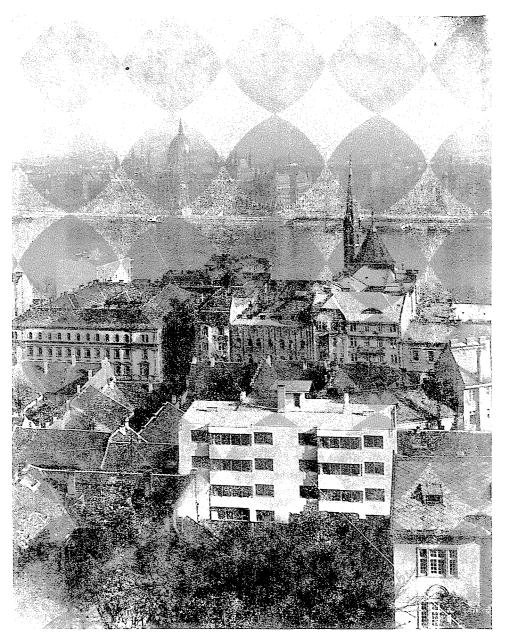


Fig. 5. Farkas Molnár: Block of flats in Toldy Ferenc Street, Budapest, 1932



Fig. 6. Farkas Molnár—József Fischer and others: Three blocks of flats in Tisza Kálmán (now Köztársaság) Square, Budapest, 1933

Since his years at Bauhaus, Molnár was a resolute adherent of social housing. He hoped to start mass housing also in Hungary. Earlier he composed design sets, developed alternatives for flatlets, family houses, medium rise houses, permitted his designs to be published, but his significant effort was frustrated.

Finally the design of an important complex helped Molnár to meet housing needs of common people rather than luxury demands of the wealthy. By way of competition, as member of a team of nine architects he designed blocks of flats for the National Institute of Social Insurance (OTI) in Tisza Kálmán (now Köztársaság) Square [50], but it is his and Fischer's personalities that make an imprint on the building complex. The three nine-storey high-rise buildings are united by a shopping wing. Also the development layout is a pioneering one. Big prisms normal to the street line — instead of the usual closed streetscape — were for more freedom, air, made better use of orientation [51].

From Bauhaus he brought with him the ideas of "Kolhouse" and "Koltown". This experiment, so modern at that time, was exhibited at the CIAM exhibitions in Budapest, at the Autumn Fair of the Ideal Home and

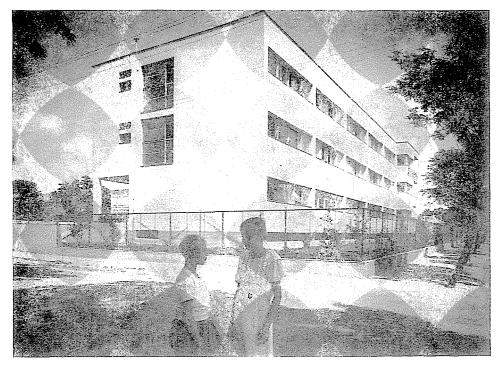


Fig. 7. Farkas Molnár—József Fischer: Personnel Building of the Worker's Hospital in Pestújhely, 1936

Household 1931, and in the Tamás Gallery, in March 1932, raising general sensation, enthusiasm or uproar in professional or lay circles [52].

In Molnár's career, the only public building was the building for the personnel of the Workers' Hospital in Pestújhely (1936) also designed in cooperation with Fischer, where at least partly the Kolhouse principle prevails [53].

The fruitful cooperation between these two architects is shown by several common works such as the villa 7/a, Csévi Lane (1935) [54], Tyroler house in Harangvirág Street (1935), an outstanding achievement of space connection at dwelling level. The façade and mass formation of the building, making use of all former architectural elements, exhibit formal maturity, harmony [55].

The architectural oeuvre of József Fischer would merit a special study, but his small villa in Szépvölgyi Street has to be mentioned as a masterpiece of Hungarian "new architecture" [56].

Two Molnár creations from 1937 show different features. One is a double block of freehold flats on a plot at the corner of Pasaréti and Trombitás Streets, the first ornamented one after the hitherto puritan, smooth buildings, with a constructive mural of Marbrunite glass on the right-side wall of the doorway (with a 1923 Bauhaus composition as precedent), while the entrance

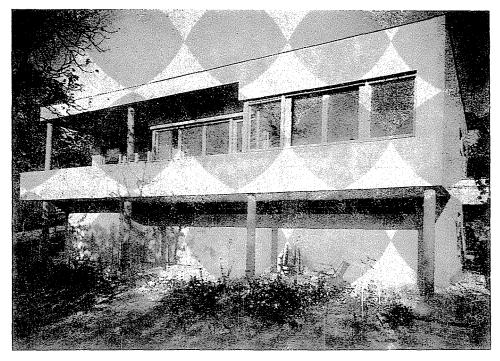


Fig. 8. Farkas Molnár-József Fischer: Villa in Csévi Lane, Budapest, 1935

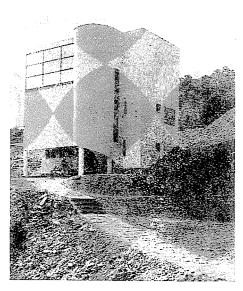


Fig. 9. József Fischer: Villa in Szépvölgyi Street, Budapest, 1934

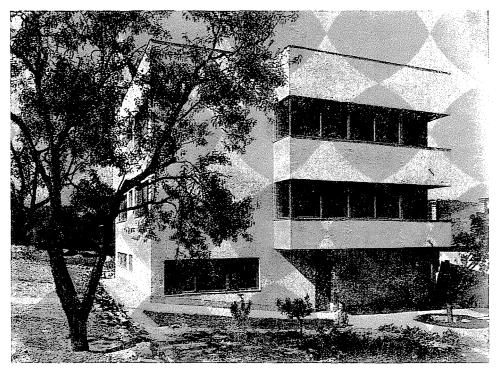


Fig. 10. Máté Major: Villa in Sasfiók Street, Budapest, 1934

door is animated by coloured glass panes. The façade is embellished by light and shadow effects from a checkerboard of open and closed surfaces [57].

In the design of the villa in Mese Street, Molnár parted with the rectangular floor plan layout for a novel, annular sector floor plan. Also the façade is coloured, animated, integrating various materials, elements [58].

These two latter buildings hint to a new period in the architecture of Farkas Molnár, but his new concepts were not realized. In 1938 he was commissioned to make designs for the Hungarian Holy Land church [59]. This design was, however, substantially different from the former ones with its monumentality and symmetrical layout. The reinforced concrete skeleton of the large, oval hall, as well as some of the surrounding chapels were erected, then the construction halted.

Increasing economical, social, political controversies of Hungary drifting into war have led to troubles also within the society of architects. In Summer 1938, the Hungarian CIAM group dissolved [60]. Molnár, harassed by personal and material problems worked for his desk-drawer. He died at the height of his creative power, during the siege of Budapest.

Ideas emitted by Bauhaus have been determinant for the new Hungarian architecture. Bauhaus influenced — among others — LAJOS KOZMA (1884—1948) [61], an architect arriving from the architectural ideals of the turn of the century through peasant-baroque compositions to his most significant period under Bauhaus influence. His villas, and especially, his weekend house on Lupa island are gems of Hungarian architecture in the interwar period [62].

This concise recapitulation cannot afford to fully penetrate into the relation between Bauhaus and the development of Hungarian architecture [63]. The activity of the CIAM group is reassumed after the war by the "Circle of New Architects" representing the Bauhaus ideas [64]. Its activity was furthered by the one-time fellow combatant of Molnár and the Hungarian CIAM group, Professor MATÉ MAJOR. His activity, and the slowly accumulating studies on Bauhaus are fundamental in forming our approach to architecture.

After the period of "new architecture" - substantially affected, maybe predominated by Bauhaus mentality and influence — this development was interrupted in the '50s by the second period of architecture. 1957 is the start of the new period of Hungarian architecture dominated by industrialization in the '60s, propagating somewhat the Bauhaus influence but at the same time sharpening contradictions of excessively technicized architecture. The resulting arduous debates beginning in the '70s [65] and new experiments in contradiction to Bauhaus deserve further studies.

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- 27. M. F.: The Second International Congress on New Architecture.* "Tér és Forma" No. 1.
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- 29. While member of the group, Maté Major has built two of his outstanding works, a block of flats No. 127, Attila u. with co-designer Pál Detre (see Tér és Forma, 1935.pp. 14–15.) and a block of freehold flats on Sashegy (see Tér és Forma 1936. pp. 20-22.)
- 30. The enumeration of his literary works on architecture see in Építés-Építészettudomány Vol. XVI. Nos 3—4. pp. 513—528. 31. Tér és Forma. 1932. pp. 410—411, and 1934. pp. 30—31.

- 32. Tér és Forma, 1931. p. 327.
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- 53. Tér és Forma 1937. pp. 15-18.
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- 59. Mezei, O.: Farkas Molnár and the Hungarian Holy Land Church.* Építés-Építészettudomány, Vol. IX. No. 4. pp. 409-437.
 60. Gábor, E.: Op. cit. p. 20. Major, M.: Manhood ... Op. cit. p. 579.
 61. Beke, L.-Varga, Zs.: Lajos Kozma.* Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1968.

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- 63. Bauhaus ideas were propagated in Hungary by artistic reviews and progressive periodicals as important cultural forums for personalities of Hungarian artistic life. In spite of the rather variable times of publication and copy numbers of these reviews, their aims were practically identical: information on the modern international arts (literature, fine arts, music, architecture), to launch debates, exchanges of ideas, to give publicity to manifestations of the new arts and new artists. These reviews include: "Magyar Ipar-művészet" following the path of Bauhaus and the arising "new" Hungarian architecture since 1920, in papers by Pál Bor, Pál Nádai, Károly Rosner, Zsuzsanna Kovács, Farkas Molnár and others; "Magyar Irás" (1921 to 1927, editor: Tivadar Raith) publishing papers on architecture, among others, by Pál Bor, Farkas Molnár, Marcel Breuer, with a critical column rapidly and sensitively reacting to cultural events at home and abroad. This review published, among others, 21 poems by Máté Major from 1923 to 1927; cover designs were made by Bortnyik, Molnár, Kernstok. "Dokumentum", Kassák's review, publishing five issues in all, was successor to "Ma". The review "Korunk" in Kolozsvár (now Clui-Napoca), edited by Gábor Gaál, has also published papers by Moholy-Nagy, etc. For more details see: Major, M.: Manhood . . . Op. cit., pp. 138-153, 453-463, 515-530.
- 64. Major, M.: The New World of Architecture.* Op. cit. p. 32.
 65. The so-called "Debate about the Tulip" started in Sept. 1975 in the review "Élet és Iroda-lom", and continued in "Magyar Építőművészet" Nos 2 and 3, 1976. Part of the papers are to be found in the Book "New Architecture, New Society 1945-1978"* pp. 385-449. (Series "Művészet és Elmélet" (Arts and Theory), Corvina Kiadó, Budapest, 1981. Editors: Máté Major and Judith Osskó).

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[•] In Hungarian.