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How Socialist Realism Rocked Modernism. On Purists, Reformers and Radicals at the CIAM Bergamo Congress in 1949

In 1949 at seventh CIAM (*Congrès internationaux d'architecture modern*) congress in Bergamo, Italy, the Polish communist architect Helena Syrkus, a proponent of the modernist viewpoint who had recently been elected the CIAM's vice president, engaged in an act of self-criticism and rejected her former support of modernism in favour of socialist realism. In her speech, she accused modern art and architecture of being formalist, hardly understandable by people and without a respect to local history and culture. At the very same time she declared that this is not true about socialist realism, which was surprisingly introduced as non-eclectic and having many possibilities of formal expression depending on the progress of social revolution in each single country. Studies and analysis of archival material showed that Syrkus's talk provoked a highly controversial debate on the character of post-war modernism that won her numerous opponents, but also many supporters.

Confronted with Syrkus's views her opponents represented, for instance, by Sigfried Giedion, Max Bill or Le Corbusier, got into panic and, having an image of Soviet classicizing socialist realism in front of their eyes, started to be worried about "the purity of modern art coming from Eastern Europe". In reaction, they proposed a manifest to be accepted by the whole organization and hoped to ensure an artistic form cleared up from *reactionary influences* and expressing the *Zeitgeist* of that time instead of producing forms serving to common man.

The supporters were of two kinds: full and partial. The former, among whom was for instance the Swiss communist architect Hans Schmidt or the Italian painter and architect Gabriele Mucchi, backed up Syrkus in her radical socialist realist stance. The latter, whose ideological leader was the British architecture critic James M. Richards, surprisingly did not indisputably condemn socialist realist stance, since they also criticized the purist modernism, but in their reforming effort showed in some aspects interesting overlapping with the socialist realist ideas including the concept of architecture for common man, involvement of traditional and vernacular elements etc. On the other hand, they also stressed, as did the Giedion's branch, that they were fighting for architecture "in the spirit of CIAM" which was obviously to say that they were possibly feared by the socialist realism of the Soviet eclectic style.

The goal of the presentation is to introduce the three named streams within the CIAM (the socialist realist=the radicals, the opponents=the purists, and the supporters=the reformers) in their intersections and clashes and to demonstrate that even at the outbreak of the Cold War, the art and architecture was not Eastern and Western, socialist realist and modernists, but was rather representing artists' personal socio-political beliefs and their own views on the role of art and artists in the post-war society. This talk will also argue that the three paths within the CIAM and the ideological closeness of reforming modernist and socialist realist brought post-war modernism to crisis.

Marcela Hanáčková is an art historian specialized on modern European architecture as formed by CIAM and *Team 10*. Her interests focus on Eastern European influences on the movement. At the moment she is completing her PhD thesis: *CIAM and the Cold War. Helena Syrkus between Architecture and Politics* at gta/ETH Zurich. Prior to that she worked as an Assistant at Czech Technical University and as a Teaching Assistant at Charles University in Prague.