



## **The Influence of Interpersonal Relationships on the Functioning of the Constructivist Network. A Case Study of Poland and the Low Countries**

De invloed van intermenselijke relaties op het functioneren van het constructivistische netwerk. Een case study van Polen en de Lage Landen

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**Abstract:** This case study explores the entangled history of the constructivist network in the course of the 1920s and 1930s in light of the interpersonal relationships between some of its representatives. In order to analyse the evolution and influence of such relationships on the functioning of the network, I present data and details of two seemingly distant areas, namely Poland and the Low Countries, and of the dynamics between chosen members of Polish, Dutch and Belgian avant-garde formations such as *Zwrotnica*, *Blok*, *Praesens*, *De Stijl*, *Het Overzicht* and *Cercle et Carré*. Based on tangible traces of direct and indirect relationships left in avant-garde magazines and private correspondence between the artists, I describe how particular ties were formed, maintained and terminated, and how they influenced the exchange between the analysed nodes. This analysis is partially based on Granovetter's renown theory of 'strong and weak ties', which examined the nature of interpersonal connections within and between given circles of individuals, with specific focus on the so-called 'marginal' individuals, particularly relevant for the description of avant-garde artists and their formations.

**Keywords:**

Avant-Garde, Constructivism, Little Magazines, Polish-Dutch Relationships, Strong and Weak Ties / Avant-Garde, Constructivisme, Tijdschriften, Pools-Nederlandse verhoudingen, sterke en zwakke banden

## Introduction: The Supranational Constructivist Network

Constructivism is one of the major movements of the historical avant-garde, which developed under the influence of individuals and formations<sup>1</sup> operating simultaneously in different areas within a multithreaded network of artists, writers and architects. From ca. 1922 one can speak of International Constructivism – as coined by Bann in 1974<sup>2</sup> – influenced and shaped by varied stimuli from different countries, be it Germany, Hungary, Poland or the Low Countries. The network's transnational character was emphasized in many writings of constructivist provenance, published in a wide range of avant-garde 'little magazines'. The magazines were established by particular formations and created a 'world-wide network of periodicals',<sup>3</sup> with ideas and works being constantly exchanged and circulated between different nodes of the network.<sup>4</sup>

However, the functioning of the supranational avant-garde network was influenced to a great extent by various human interpersonal constraints and animosities amongst its members, creating numerous divisions and fractions which competed with each other, seeking a more renown and a broader audience. Such antagonisms were reflected in the choice of texts and artworks that were published or discussed in other periodicals belonging to the constructivist network both on a national and international level. Based on such tangible traces, as well as the private correspondence between the artists, I will explore how interpersonal relationships and animosities between particular nodes of the avant-garde network influenced and determined its functioning. In order to do so I have chosen two seemingly distant areas, namely Poland and the Low Countries, as a case study exemplifying the impact of relationships between particular artists and their formations on the cultural cross-border mobility within the avant-garde

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I will use the term 'formation' in relation to such initiatives as *De Stijl*, *Blok* etc. in order to underline the fact that such circles of artists, architects and writers did not form seamless homogenous groups or movements. The

<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Bann, *The Tradition of Constructivism* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), p. xxxii.

<sup>3</sup> This often quoted extract comes from the English translation of Henryk Berlewi's article 'Międzynarodowa wystawa w Düsseldorfie', originally published in *Nasz Kurier* 209 (2 August 1922), p. 2, which appeared in *Between Two Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910-1930*, ed. by T. Benson and E. Forgács (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), pp. 397-99. However, the very appealing phrase 'A worldwide network of periodicals has appeared, propagating and arguing for new ideas and new forms...' does not truly convey the original phrasing 'Olbrzymia siła pism rozrzucona po całym świecie uzasadniająca i propagująca nowe idee i nowe formy...' (literally: 'A great power of the periodicals spread around the whole world, arguing for and propagating new ideas and new forms...'). All translations from Polish in this article are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>4</sup> The importance of the so-called 'little magazines' on the functioning of the avant-garde network has been explored by among others H.F. van den Berg, "A Worldwide Network of Periodicals Has Appeared..." - Some Notes on the Inter- and Supranationality of European Constructivism between the Two Wars', in *Nation Style Modernism*, ed. by J. Purchla and W. Tegethoff (Kraków-München: MCK-ZI, 2006), pp. 143-56; *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines. Volume III, Europe 1880-1940*, ed. by P. Brooker et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); *Breaking the Rules: The Printed Face of the European Avant Garde 1900-1937*, ed. by S. Bury (London: The British Library, 2007); C.-A. van de Geer et al., 'L'internationalisme des revues modernistes', in *Modernisme. L'art abstrait belge et l'Europe*, ed. by J. De Smet (Gent: Fonds Mercator, 2013), pp. 165-86; M. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception 1905-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

network.<sup>5</sup> The choice of these two areas is not only a result of my linguistic skills, but is also intended to show how relationships can be established between distant areas. This case study shows that there were not only relationships between remote areas with one or more centres, which in turn could have an effect on other eccentric places, but that actually the distant areas were in contact with each other without any interference from a centre.

In my analysis I will apply Granovetter's theory of 'strong and weak ties'.<sup>6</sup> Granovetter argues that through interpersonal networks small-scale interactions become translated into large-scale patterns, and he relates the interpersonal interactions and their strength to such phenomena as diffusion, social mobility and cohesion – undoubtedly crucial features of the avant-garde network where theoretic deliberations and works of art constantly circulated between its worldwide nodes. Granovetter uses the concept of a 'bridge' as a line in the network, providing a unique path between two individuals, hence creating an indirect connection between two formations represented by those individuals. Such 'bridges' would play an essential role in the study of diffusion and cultural mobility within the network, as they indirectly linked artists and writers from (linguistically, culturally or geographically) distant circles and enabled them to disseminate and reciprocally get acquainted with each other's activities. In addition, Granovetter argues that not 'strong', but 'weak' interpersonal ties (in other words acquaintances, not friends) form the 'bridges' between various circles, as they link members of different small groups, contrary to 'strong ties', which characterise the internal relationships within the groups themselves. Therefore, 'weak ties' would be the channels through which ideas, influences and information from distant circles can be reached and consequently, by boosting the exchange between various avant-garde formations, 'weak ties' form a fundamental element of the network.

Granovetter based his theory on the assumption that two 'strong ties' between three particular individuals will always be completed by another 'tie', either 'weak' or 'strong' (i.e. if A and B, and A and C are friends, B and C will at least know each other). As a consequence, particular groups of individuals will be internally linked to each other either by 'strong' or 'weak' ties, but the connection (bridge) between the groups themselves will most probably be formed by a 'weak tie'. Gradually particular circles will create more and more 'weak ties' to other formations, which are conducive to new indirect connections to a larger number of recipients in order to disseminate one's ideas, works etc. Another very interesting point made by Granovetter – especially with reference to the avant-garde network – is the assumption that 'marginal' individuals (Granovetter's term for people whose activities and viewpoints tend to be perceived as controversial or even deviant – a recurring feature in the reception of the avant-

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<sup>5</sup> For existing studies on the relationships between Poland and the Low Countries see for instance A. Turowski, 'De Stijl i polska awangarda', in *De Stijl* (Warszawa: WAiF, 1979), pp. 140-63; J.M. Kleiverda-Kajetanowicz, 'Elementen van de Nieuwe Beelding in het werk en de theorie van Henryk Stazewski 1923-1936', unpublished thesis, University of Utrecht (1985); K. Passuth, *Les Avant-Gardes de l'Europe centrale : 1907-1927* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), pp. 125-28, and 'De Stijl and the East-West Avant-Garde: Magazines & the Formation of International Networks', in *Van Doesburg & the International Avant-Garde*, ed. by G. Fabre and D. Wintgens Hötte (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), pp. 20-7; S. Ex, 'De blik naar het oosten: De Stijl in Duitsland en Oost-Europa', in *De vervolggaren van De Stijl 1922-1932*, ed. by C. Blotkamp (Amsterdam-Antwerpen: Uitgeverij L.J.Veen, 1996), pp. 67-112, and *Theo van Doesburg en het Bauhaus: de invloed van De Stijl in Duitsland en Midden-Europa* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> See M. Granovetter, 'The Strength of Weak Ties', *American Journal of Sociology* 6, vol. 78 (May 1973), 1360-80. and M. Granovetter, 'The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited', *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983), 201-33.

garde) would have the urge to form a relatively large number of ‘weak ties’ (links to other formations) in order to be able to diffuse their ostracised innovations. Therefore, since avant-garde formations functioned aside contemporary mainstream cultural and artistic conventions,<sup>7</sup> they constantly sought to broaden their international reception by spreading their magazines and works among other parts of the network, regardless of their language or location, in order to find people who would support their ideas.

Based on Granovetter’s theory I will demonstrate that the constructivist nodes (exemplified here by Leiden, Groningen, Antwerp, Warsaw, Cracow, etc.) might be regarded as groups of persons ‘strongly tied’ to each other – at least at a given moment in time – which are connected by ‘local bridges’ formed by ‘weak ties’ between a given member of one node and a given member from another node. On the one hand, such ‘bridges’ played a crucial role in the diffusion of innovations and viewpoints within the whole avant-garde network, on the other hand, antagonisms within one or between two nodes forced their members to find another ‘bridge’ as the existing one was, so to speak, ‘blocked’ or unreachable due to interpersonal matters. Such connections as well as positive and negative relationships between the artists marked the exchange of articles and reproductions, which was then clearly reflected in the constructivist magazines and in the artists’ letters. I aim to demonstrate that Granovetter’s notion of ‘weak and strong ties’ may be useful to understand how the interrelations within constructivist formations and between these formations worked and how the contacts of pivotal figures influenced their dynamics.

## Constructivist Formations in The Netherlands, Flanders and Poland

The Dutch-speaking avant-garde network had a few important nodes such as *De Stijl*, *The Next Call* and *Het Overzicht*. The most famous magazine, *De Stijl* (The Style), appeared quite regularly between 1917 and 1928 and its last issue was published in 1932 (in commemoration of its late editor, Theo van Doesburg<sup>8</sup>). *De Stijl* was far from being a coherent or homogenous artistic collective<sup>9</sup> and over the years the journal had numerous contributors who usually did not manage to work with Van Doesburg for long and ended leaving the group. Internal conflicts between *De Stijl* members come to the fore in a 1950 letter from Vantongerloo to Seuphor:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> H.F. van den Berg, ‘A Worldwide Network of Periodicals Has Appeared...’, p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> Theo van Doesburg (actually Christian Emil Marie Küppers, other pseudonyms: I.K. Bonset, Aldo Camini; 1883-1931) – Dutch artist and theoretician involved in avant-garde initiatives such as *De Stijl*, *Mécano* and *Art Concret*, architectural projects of ‘Aubette’ in Strasbourg (1927-28) and his own house in Meudon (1929).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. note 1.

<sup>10</sup> Georges Vantongerloo (1886-1965) – Belgian sculptor and theoretician; involved in *De Stijl*, *Cercle et Carré* and *Abstraction-Création*, signatory of *De Stijl* first manifesto; author of the pamphlet ‘L’Art et son avenir’. Michel Seuphor (actually Fernand Louis Berckelaers; 1901-1999) – Belgian artist, art critic and writer, co-editor of *Het Overzicht*, *Documents Internationaux de l’Esprit Nouveau*, *Cercle et Carré*, and author of among others *L’Art abstrait, ses origines, ses premiers maîtres*; *Piet Mondrian, sa vie, son œuvre* and *Dictionnaire de la peinture abstraite*.

... n'oublie jamais que; V; d. Leck, Mondrian et Vantongerloo sont trois individus bien distinctes qui n'ont rien de commun avec le titre De Stijl ni avec De Stijl. Leurs travaux sont trop individuels. V. Doesburg s'est servi de ces trois individus pour lancer et pour sa propagande personnelle.<sup>11</sup>

Alongside *De Stijl*, the Dutch constructivist scene was influenced and reflected also by other periodicals, including *The Next Call*, *io*, *Het Woord* and *Mécano*. *The Next Call* was published in Groningen between 1923 and 1926 by Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman.<sup>12</sup> Nine issues were published, which included daring typographical and printmaking novelties as well as poems and texts. Despite numerous attempts to engage more artists and to broaden the magazine's international reception,<sup>13</sup> Werkman ran *The Next Call* – one of the most creative, colourful and cohesive avant-garde journals – practically alone, and remained rather alienated from other avant-garde circles. Arthur Müller-Lehning led the Amsterdam-based revue *io* (1927-29) and took on some former *De Stijl* contributors, such as Oud, Vantongerloo, Rietveld or Huszár.<sup>14</sup> It published internationally oriented texts in Dutch, German and French. The short-lived magazine *Het Woord* (The Word) was published in 1925-26 in The Hague by Jan Demets in cooperation with Herwarth Walden, Ljubomir Micić and Edgar du Perron<sup>15</sup> while *Mécano* was a Dadaist magazine created and edited by I.K. Bonset (one of Van Doesburg's pseudonyms).

The Belgian avant-garde produced a very wide spectrum of little magazines with *Het Overzicht*, *De Driehoek*, *7 Arts* and *Anthologie du Groupe Moderne d'Art de Liège* being the most prominent as far as constructivism is concerned. In June 1921 Fernand Louis Berckelaers

<sup>11</sup> The original spelling and punctuation have been kept in all the quotations. See Vantongerloo's letter to Seuphor of 3 November 1950; Archief Michel Seuphor (AMS), Letterenhuis Antwerpen (inv. nr. 186967/11).

<sup>12</sup> Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman (1882-1945) – Dutch expressionist artist, writer, printer; editor of *The Next Call*, related to Groningen-based group of painters *De Ploeg* and *Blad voor Kunst*.

<sup>13</sup> Werkman's list of addresses, for the mailing of *The Next Call*, to 23 magazines and 21 artists has survived until now. It includes a wide range of magazines, e.g. *Blok*, *Zwrotnica*, *De Stijl*, *Mécano*, *Het Overzicht*, *7 Arts*, and *De Driehoek*. This list, as well as Werkman's correspondence with other journals revealing his efforts to broaden his journal's outreach, can be found in Werkman Archief (WA) in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. See also J. Martinet, *The Next Call* (Utrecht: André Swertz, 1995), pp. 19-21. It is worth noting that when listing its congenial magazines, *The Next Call* also mentioned *Blok*, and one issue of Szczuka's leftist magazine *Dźwignia* was found among Werkman's belongings.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Müller-Lehning (1899-2000) – Dutch anarchist writer, born of German parents, editor of *Revue Internationale io*, involved in the creation of *Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis* in Amsterdam; Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud (1890-1963) – Dutch architect and theoretician, until 1921 member of *De Stijl*, later involved in other initiatives, e.g. CIAM, since 1918 the city architect of Rotterdam and author of numerous architectural projects including *Hoek van Holland*, *Kieffhoek*, *Café de Unie*; Gerrit Rietveld (1888-1964) – Dutch architect and designer, briefly involved with *De Stijl*. Author of the famous Schröder House in Utrecht and *Rood-blauwe stoel* (Red-blue chair); Vilmos Huszár (1884-1960) – Hungarian artist living in the Netherlands since 1905, member of *De Stijl* until 1923, author of *De Stijl* logo and signatory of its first manifesto.

<sup>15</sup> Jan Demets (1895-1982) – Dutch journalist and writer, founder of *Het Woord*; Herwarth Walden (1879-1941) – German artist, founder of *Der Sturm*; Ljubomir Micić (1895-1971) – Serbian artist, founder of *Zenit*; Edgar du Perron (pseudonym of Duco Perkens; 1899-1940) – Dutch poet, writer, critic, co-founder of the most influential pre-world war II Dutch literary magazine *Forum*, linked to *De Driehoek*, *Het Woord* and others, and author of *Het Land van Herkomst* (1935).

(who later adopted the pseudonym Michel Seuphor) and Geert Pijnenburg set up *Het Overzicht* (The Overview).<sup>16</sup> Its initial nationalist Flemish character changed in November 1922 when Jozef Peeters<sup>17</sup> replaced Pijnenburg as co-editor and the magazine became internationalist-orientated. The final issue of *Het Overzicht* appeared in February 1925, after which Seuphor moved to Paris and Peeters established the publishing company *De Driehoek* (The Triangle) and a journal with the same name, much in line with the Dutch *Het Woord*.<sup>18</sup> The lifespan of this new magazine was quite short and its international outreach was no match for *Het Overzicht*.<sup>19</sup> Somehow, as a counterpart to Antwerp's Dutch-language journals, the French-language reviews *7 Arts* and *Anthologie* were published in Brussels (1922-29) and Liège (1921-40) respectively. Victor Bourgeois, Karel Maes and others were the editors of *7 Arts* whilst Georges Linze edited *Anthologie*,<sup>20</sup> and both magazines presented a wide selection of European avant-garde novelties. When it comes to Seuphor, having settled in Paris in 1925, he became involved in international initiatives such as *Documents Internationaux de l'Esprit Nouveau* (together with Belgian poet Paul Dermée; one issue appeared in 1927) or *Cercle et Carré* (co-edited with the Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres García in 1930).

Polish constructivism appeared on the international art scene when Tadeusz Peiper,<sup>21</sup> a great advocate of avant-garde art, founded *Zwrotnica* (Switch) in 1922. *Zwrotnica* was published in two series, each with six issues: from May 1922 to October 1923 and from May 1926 to June 1927. It contained numerous theoretical essays which later proved to have had a fundamental influence on the Polish avant-garde movement, e.g. 'Punkt Wyjścia' (Point of Departure; no. 1, 1922) or 'Miasto. Masa. Maszyna.' (Metropolis. Mass. Machine.; no. 2, 1922).<sup>22</sup> Peiper himself was regarded as 'the father of Polish avant-garde' by his contemporaries, who tried to involve him, unsuccessfully, in almost every artistic project they set up after *Zwrotnica*. Two years later than *Zwrotnica*, a major Polish constructivist formation *Blok* (Block) was established; however, its constructivist programme appeared already in 1923 in the catalogue of the *Exhibition on New Art* in Vilnius featuring artists who were soon to establish *Blok*. *Blok* was the major Polish constructivist magazine and between March 1924 and

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<sup>16</sup> Geert Pijnenburg (pseudonym of Geert Grub; 1896-1980) – Belgian poet, writer, Flemish activist, co-founder of *Het Overzicht*.

<sup>17</sup> Jozef Peeters (1895-1960) – Belgian artist, an important figure on the Belgian avant-garde scene, co-founder of *Het Overzicht* and *De Driehoek* and secretary of the *Kring Moderne Kunst*.

<sup>18</sup> M. Entrop and M. Verhoeff, 'Een vechttijdschrift, of de absolute nul: over Het Woord (1925-1926) van Jan Demets', *De Parelduiker*, 2, 5 (1997), 3-19.

<sup>19</sup> A.H. den Boef and S. van Faassen, *Van De Stijl en Het Overzicht tot De Driehoek* (Antwerp/Apeldoorn: Garant, 2013), p. 139.

<sup>20</sup> Victor Bourgeois (1897-1962) – Belgian architect and theoretician, co-founder of *7Arts*, member of CIAM and author of *Cité Moderne* – a garden-city in the outskirts of Brussels; Karel Maes (1900-74) – Belgian artist and designer, co-founder of *7Arts*, member of the *Kring Moderne Kunst*; Georges Linze (1900-93) – Belgian poet and writer, founder of *Anthologie du Groupe Modern de Liège* and linked to the Liège-based group *L'Équerre*.

<sup>21</sup> Tadeusz Peiper (pseudonym of Marian Bielski, Jan Alden, Jan Badyński; 1891-1969) – Polish poet, writer and theoretician, founder of *Zwrotnica* author of poetry volumes *A*, *Żywe Linie* (Living Lines) and *Raz* (Once).

<sup>22</sup> The latter was also reprinted in *La Vie des Lettres et des Arts* (no.13, 1922).

March 1926 it published articles and works of, among others, Van Doesburg, Oud, Van Eesteren, Werkman, Le Corbusier, Léger, Marinetti and Malevich.<sup>23</sup>

Following *Blok's* split-up, some of its former contributors became involved in another modernist association, *Praesens*, initiated by the architect Szymon Syrkus.<sup>24</sup> Although architecture was the main focus of *Praesens*, other art forms, such as painting, sculpture, theatre, were also featured in the two issues of the journal (June 1926 and May 1930). In 1929 Strzemiński, Kobro and Stazewski left *Praesens* to establish the *a.r.* group ('revolutionary artists' or 'real avant-garde') together with the poets Julian Przyboś and Jan Brzękowski (earlier linked to *Zwrotnica*).<sup>25</sup> *a.r.* did not create its own magazine but issued short bulletins instead and published avant-garde books, which formed the *a.r.* collection. The first bulletin was published in March 1930 and the second, with a considerable delay in December 1932. The *a.r.* group failed to form a new organ of the Polish avant-garde, probably due to the fact that at that time the Polish avant-garde scene, instead of one single firm base, had a number of small, weak and short-lived magazines which actually competed against each other: among others *Europa* (Europe), edited by Stanisław Baczyński, and the Polish-French *L'Art Contemporain – Sztuka Współczesna* (Modern Art) run in Paris by Brzękowski and Chodasiewicz-Grabowska (also known as Nadia Léger).<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, through the *a.r.* group, Strzemiński was able to realise his major project and establish an International Collection of Modern Art in Łódź, the very first collection of modern twentieth-century art in Europe.

## Internal Tensions between Avant-Garde Nodes in the Low Countries

Complex interpersonal relationships and animosities between avant-garde artists influenced the functioning of the network to a great extent. As a result, it was divided into fractions, which competed and argued with each other. Moreover, there were also conflicts and animosities within these fractions. Particular 'ties' between members of a given formation constantly fluctuated – not infrequently from 'strong' to none – which reverberated through the network, including 'bridges' to other nodes. Scholars in the field have already pointed to the fact that *De Stijl* was not a coherent collective; on the contrary, some of its contributors soon withdrew from

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<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, *Blok 2* from April 1924 featured one of Kazimir Malevich's very first theoretical texts to be published outside Russia, namely 'O Sztuce' (On Art) [cf. A. Baudin and P.M. Jedryka, *L'Espace uniste: écrits du constructivisme polonais* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'Homme, 1977), p. 33].

<sup>24</sup> Szymon Syrkus (1893-1964) – Polish architect and town planner, linked to *Blok*, *Praesens*, member of CIAM, great advocate of socially-oriented architecture and one of the key authors of the reconstruction plans for post-WWII Warsaw.

<sup>25</sup> Władysław Strzemiński (1893-1952) – Belarusian-Polish artist, theoretician and teacher, linked to *Blok*, *Praesens*, *a.r.*, *Europa*, student of Malevich and founder of the International Collection of Modern Art in Łódź; Katarzyna Kobro (1898-1951) – Latvian-Polish artist and teacher, linked to *Blok*, *Praesens*, *a.r.* and author of innovative space compositions; Henryk Stazewski (1894-1988) – Polish artist and theoretician, linked to *Blok*, *Praesens*, *a.r.*, *Cercle et Carré*, *Abstraction-Création* and co-founder of the Warsaw-based Foksal Gallery; Julian Przyboś (1901-70) – Polish poet and translator, linked to *Zwrotnica*, *a.r.* and *Linia*; Jan Brzękowski (1903-83) – Polish poet, writer and theoretician, co-founder of *L'Art Contemporain – Sztuka Współczesna* and linked to *Zwrotnica*, *a.r.*, *Linia*, *Cercle et Carré*.

<sup>26</sup> T. Kłak, *Czasopisma awangardy*, p. 185.

the journal due to interpersonal animosities. J.J.P. Oud's friendship with Van Doesburg came to an end in the course of 1921 after the latter submitted colour solutions to Oud's housing project Spangen in Rotterdam.<sup>27</sup> Initially their cooperation on this project went smoothly and Oud was keen on Van Doesburg's ideas but eventually Oud found them too extreme. This was enough to destroy the 'strong tie' between the artists – Van Doesburg's reaction was sharp, e.g. in *Bouwkundig weekblad* he emphasized that aesthetic principles of Neo-Plasticism should be the basis of new architecture, not utility, which often prevailed in Oud's case. In addition, in *De Bouwwereld* he tried to prove that Oud had actually never been a *De Stijl*-architect and accused him of betraying its ideals.<sup>28</sup> Oud, on the other hand, saw Van Doesburg as a danger to architecture as he was an idealistic artist, not an architect, and therefore perceived architecture only as an art. Oud wrote about it to his friend Szymon Syrkus, a Polish architect:

M. van Doesburg est un peintre avec beaucoup d'esprit, mais voyant finir la peinture en sa forme présente s'est sauvé dans l'architecture sans aussi le moindre idée de bâtir; n'ayant jamais bâti, il proclame une architecture spéculative qui fait beaucoup de mal à l'œuvre des architectes modernes sérieux.<sup>29</sup>

The table 'Principieele medewerkers aan De Stijl', published in a special issue commemorating the tenth anniversary of *De Stijl* in 1927, listed all the contributors<sup>30</sup> to the journal, showing the maelstroms and discontinuities in the cooperation between various artists. Here one may notice that the 'ties' (whether 'strong' or 'weak') between *De Stijl* artists did not last long and some artists withdrew within the first three years. Interestingly, the 'ties' between some members of *De Stijl* were somehow dependent on third parties, as was the case of Wils or Oud, whose relation to Berlage was particularly attractive to Van Doesburg.<sup>31</sup> Those 'ties' proved thus to be too 'weak' and architects Jan Wils and Robert van 't Hoff,<sup>32</sup> the signatories of *De Stijl*'s first manifesto, left the journal as early as 1919.<sup>33</sup> Following Oud's departure in 1921,

<sup>27</sup> H. Esser, 'J.J.P. Oud', in C. Blotkamp et al., *De Stijl*, p. 124. See also A. den Boef and S. van Faassen, *Het pseudo-moderne nevens het ware* (Antwerp: Zacht Lawijd / Garant, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> See T. van Doesburg, 'De betekenis der mechanische esthetiek voor de architectuur en andere vakken', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 25 (18 June 1921), 28 (9 July 1921), 33 (13 August 1921); J.J.P. Oud, 'Over de toekomstige bouwkunst en hare architectonische mogelijkheden', *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 24 (11 June 1921); T. van Doesburg, 'De architect J.J.P. Oud "voorganger" der "kubisten" in de bouwkunst?', *De Bouwwereld* 30 (26 July 1922).

<sup>29</sup> See Oud's letter to Syrkus dated 12 April 1926, Archief J.J.P. Oud (AO), Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam (inv. nr. 30:26:78)

<sup>30</sup> Alongside factual contributors to *De Stijl*, the table also names Aldo Camini and I.K. Bonset, which were pseudonyms of Van Doesburg himself.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. C. Blotkamp et al., *De Stijl*. Hendrik Petrus Berlage (1856-1934) – prominent Dutch architect and town-planner, member of CIAM, and author of among others *Beurs van Berlage*, *Plan Zuid* (Amsterdam) and *Gemeentemuseum* in The Hague.

<sup>32</sup> Jan Wils (1891-1972) and Robert van 't Hoff (1887-1979) – Dutch architects, members of *De Stijl* and signatories of its first manifesto and authors of innovative architectural projects such as the Amsterdam Olympic Stadium, *Hotel De Dubbele Sleutel in Woerden* (J. Wils) or *Villa A.B. Henny* in Huis ter Heide (R. van 't Hoff).

<sup>33</sup> Esser, 'J.J.P. Oud', p. 140.



*De Stijl* no longer had an architect among its members. In 1922 Van Doesburg met Cornelis van Eesteren,<sup>34</sup> who replaced Oud and designed three houses together with Van Doesburg.<sup>35</sup> Their relation too came to an end a few years later. Once the 'tie' to *De Stijl* disappeared, some of its former sympathizers formed new ones and joined other initiatives, for instance *Cercle et Carré*.

Granovetter's assumption that the so-called 'marginal' individuals create as many 'ties' to other individuals and formations as possible, sheds some light on Van Doesburg's efforts to reach Berlage or to maintain his relationship with Piet Mondrian,<sup>36</sup> even though it was marked by constant disputes and polemic. For instance Mondrian was not aware that Van Doesburg had started writing under pseudonyms (I.K. Bonset from May 1920 and Aldo Camini from July 1921).<sup>37</sup> Van Doesburg's pseudonyms, as well as the Dadaist magazine *Mécano*, allowed him to express his severe opinions, which he could not voice as openly as editor of *De Stijl*. The artists' theoretic standpoints gradually grew apart and in 1922/23 fundamental differences appeared between Mondrian and Van Doesburg – after the latter came to live in Paris, their contacts became more frequent than before and it soon became apparent how much they actually differed. A year later, in August 1924, they agreed not to meet anymore and correspond only if necessary.<sup>38</sup>

Relations to other formations were based on 'bridges' between their representatives, which is why internal animosities within *De Stijl*, despite their significant influence on its very functioning, did not substantially affect the 'ties' to other formations – i.e. constantly changing its nature, *De Stijl* managed to maintain links to different formations. However, when such a struggle did appear between two formations linked by a 'weak tie' co-created by Van Doesburg, the impact was relatively bigger. For instance, the deterioration of the 'weak tie' between Van Doesburg and Peeters substantially influenced the dynamics of the whole Dutch-speaking avant-garde. Initial cooperation – Van Doesburg supplying Peeters with a number of addresses to various magazines and artists, which allowed him to organise two congresses on modern art in 1920 and 1922, and Peeters inviting Van Doesburg to give a series of lectures in Belgium in 1920<sup>39</sup> – soon turned into hostility. Both Peeters and Van Doesburg aimed to play a substantial role in the Dutch-speaking avant-garde network using every occasion to emphasize their input and position. The 'weak tie' between the artists was particularly fragile and tensions between the Dutch-speaking nodes grew; in Michel Seuphor's words: 'La revue [*Het Overzicht* – M.W.] avait une certaine diffusion en Hollande. [...] Cela faisait un peu concurrence à *De Stijl*'.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Cornelis van Eesteren (1897-1988) – Dutch architect and town-planner, member of *De Stijl* and CIAM, and author of *Hôtel Particulier*, *Maison Particulière*, *Maison d'Artiste* (together with Van Doesburg) as well as *Algemeen Uitbreidingsplan* for Amsterdam.

<sup>35</sup> C. Blotkamp, 'Theo van Doesburg', in C. Blotkamp et al., *De Stijl*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>36</sup> Piet Mondrian (also written Mondriaan; 1872-1944) – Dutch painter and theoretician, linked to *De Stijl*, *Cercle et Carré*, *Abstraction-Création*, author of the Neoplasticist theory (*Nieuwe Beelding*), and signatory of *De Stijl*'s first manifesto.

<sup>37</sup> M. White, 'Theo van Doesburg: A Counter-Life', in *Van Doesburg & the International Avant-Garde*, ed. by G. Fabre and D. Wintgens Hötte, p. 71.

<sup>38</sup> Blotkamp, 'Theo van Doesburg', pp. 34-5, 72.

<sup>39</sup> D. Wintgens Hötte, 'Van Doesburg Tackles the Continent: Passion, Drive & Calculation', in *Van Doesburg & the International Avant-Garde*, ed. by G. Fabre and D. Wintgens Hötte, p. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Den Boef and Van Faassen, *Van De Stijl*, pp. 77-8.

Once the 'bridge' between *De Stijl* and *Het Overzicht* was damaged, they not only stopped referring to each other,<sup>41</sup> but Van Doesburg also tried to ridicule the Belgian avant-garde and Peeters in particular. Under his Dadaist pseudonym I.K. Bonset – of which Peeters was unaware – he wrote a short boisterous comment on Paul van Oostaijen's *Bezette stad* (*De Stijl*, December 1921).<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the fourth/fifth issue of *Mécano* (dated January 1923, printed in 1924) contained a fictional dialogue between Van Oostaijen en Peeters entitled '...waar de maes K en Scheldwoorden vloeiën...' and signed as 'Cornelis Nelly MESENS'. This signature is an amalgam of three different names: Cornelis van Eesteren – *De Stijl*'s architect at the time, Nelly van Doesburg – Theo's wife, and E.L.T. Mesens – a Belgian artist. The title of this text refers to the Flemish *Lied der Vlamingen* created by Hiel and Benoit, pointing to two Belgian rivers, the Maas and the Schelde (the latter flows through Antwerp where *Het Overzicht* was published), as well as to Karel Maes, the editor of *7 Arts*. The text ridicules the Belgian avant-garde, in particular the journal *Het Overzicht* – due to its irregular appearances it is here referred to as an 'onmaandelijksch tijdschrift Poverzicht' suggesting that it gives a 'poor view' rather than an 'overview'. Here Van Doesburg not only insults Peeters, but also his wife Pelagia Pruym (here 'P. Ruim') and Oud – once the latter disagreed with Van Doesburg and left *De Stijl*, he became increasingly involved with *Het Overzicht* where he could share his views on architecture.<sup>43</sup>

The nature of the relationships between avant-garde nodes and artists was everything but stable, and the 'ties' between them evolved constantly. Hence, the deterioration of the 'strong tie' between Oud and Van Doesburg and of the 'weak tie' linking two Dutch-speaking formations *De Stijl* and *Het Overzicht* encouraged the creation of a new 'tie' between Oud and Peeters, even though their perception of architecture was not entirely akin. Likewise, the rift between Peeters and Seuphor ('strongly tied' to each other while editing *Het Overzicht*) led both artists to seek new 'ties': Peeters went to establish *De Driehoek* together with Du Perron,<sup>44</sup> inviting among others Werkman, editor of *The Next Call*, to contribute to it.<sup>45</sup> Seuphor also pursued new 'ties' within the Dutch-speaking avant-garde – he talked for instance to Van Doesburg about a new journal *Code*, which they planned to create. In a letter dated 6 June 1925 to Seuphor, Van Doesburg states that the new journal should contest certain tendencies, as well as illustrate different new movements, which Den Boef and Van Faassen interpreted as a direct reaction to Peeters' recent activities, to whom both Seuphor and Van Doesburg had previously been 'tied'.<sup>46</sup> Seuphor did not manage to set up the new journal with Van Doesburg and in 1926 he became the co-editor of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, which was to reappear. Seuphor tried to create new 'ties' to other artists and formations aiming to boost the reception of his new initiative. For

<sup>41</sup> *Het Overzicht* referred to *De Stijl* only once, in the sixteenth issue dated May/June 1923, while *De Stijl* stopped mentioning *Het Overzicht* in 1922, i.e. when Peeters joined its editorial board.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Van Oostaijen (1896-1928) – Belgian modernist poet and writer, Flemish activist and author of *Het sienjaal* and *Bezette stad*.

<sup>43</sup> See for example Oud's article 'Geschakelde aforismen over kunst en bouwkunst', *Het Overzicht* 15 (March-April 1923), 41, 43 as well as F. Berckelaers, 'Over kunst in 12 punt', *Het Overzicht* 20 (January 1924), 121-4.

<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, it was Seuphor who had put Peeters in contact with Du Perron, despite not being entirely keen on the latter, both as far as his works were concerned and on account of personal matters of the heart. See Den Boef and Van Faassen, *Van De Stijl*, p. 134.

<sup>45</sup> See Peeters' letter to Werkman of 10 February 1925 (WA, inv. nr. 1).

<sup>46</sup> Den Boef and Van Faassen, *Van De Stijl*, p. 136.

instance, he contacted Werkman asking him to contribute to it and suggesting that he wanted to organise Werkman's exhibition in Paris.<sup>47</sup> The same year Seuphor returned to Antwerp hoping to organise an international modern art congress in Antwerp and Brussels together with Marinetti. Antwerp-based artists, especially Van Ostaijen and Peeters, with whom Seuphor used to be 'strongly tied', gave him a very hostile welcome, which only confirmed Seuphor's negative image of the Belgian avant-garde circles.<sup>48</sup>

## Internal Tensions Between Avant-Garde Nodes in Poland

Similar dynamics and fluctuating relationships can be discerned on the Polish avant-garde scene, where, just like in the Low Countries, 'strong ties' between artists often deteriorated and turned into direct hostility. As a consequence, the changing nature of 'ties' within one formation led to serious regroupings, giving birth to new formations and adversely influencing links to other ones.

In many aspects *Zwrotnica* can be compared to *De Stijl*. Both journals were established around a certain circle of artists, with their leaders creating numerous 'ties' to other formations. Just like Van Doesburg, Peiper decided himself, without much consultation with the other contributors, on the final form and contents of each *Zwrotnica* issue. Despite the fact that *Zwrotnica* as a circle of writers and artists was characterised by certain sense of community – as shown by the use of the plural form 'we' in its writings – none of Peiper's co-workers was in the know of his editorial activities.<sup>49</sup> Peiper, like Van Doesburg, used different pseudonyms (Marian Bielski, Jan Alden, Jan Badyński) to sign some of his poems and polemical articles. Yet, he managed to form many 'ties' to Polish artists who contributed to *Zwrotnica* and later had a major impact on the Polish avant-garde. Strzeмиński started working with *Zwrotnica* from the third issue onwards (articles on Russian art and the Vilnius exhibition), shortly after his return from Russia. It is through *Zwrotnica* that Strzeмиński met Przyboś<sup>50</sup> with whom he later collaborated at the *a.r.* group. Moreover, in the fourth issue of the journal (February 1923), Mieczysław Szczuka<sup>51</sup> published his first programmatic statement.

When it comes to *Blok*, similarly to *De Stijl*, it was far from being a coherent unit and the relationships between its members continuously fluctuated, breaking or changing the existing 'ties' within it. A significant note was placed on the first page of its second issue: '*Blok* represents people united into a combat group by the slogan of absolute construction. However, within the group there are different directions, represented by the particular contributors of the

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<sup>47</sup> See Seuphor's letters to Werkman of 24 November 1926, 30 May 1927 and 10 June 1927 (WA, inv. nr. 1).

<sup>48</sup> A. Paenhuysen, *De nieuwe wereld. De wonderjaren van de Belgische avant-garde [1918-1939]* (Antwerpen: Meulenhoff Mantelau, 2010), pp. 195-6.

<sup>49</sup> Kłak, *Czasopisma awangardy*, pp. 30-2.

<sup>50</sup> *Idem*, p. 170.

<sup>51</sup> Mieczysław Szczuka (1909-1927) – Polish artist, co-founder of *Blok* and leftist magazine *Dźwignia* and one of the first to have used photomontage in political graphic design.

magazine.<sup>52</sup> Indeed *Blok* consisted of ‘weakly tied’ artists who programmatically had little in common. The first animosities appeared shortly after it was established: Szczuka and Henryk Berlewi<sup>53</sup> competed with each other to gain the pivotal position in the Polish avant-garde, emphasizing their own key role in the creation of *Blok*. As a result Berlewi decided to organise his own exhibition and open it only one day before the exhibition of *Blok* (14 and 15 March 1924 respectively). Soon Berlewi left *Blok* and broke the ‘ties’ with other members. The theories put forward by Strzemiński and Szczuka prevailed and they differed significantly. Szczuka’s utilitarian theory required art dedicated to social needs, whereas Strzemiński’s *Unism* pleaded for autonomous art. The differences in the theoretical approaches between the artists soon proved to be insurmountable and, after the third issue, Strzemiński and Stażewski withdrew from *Blok* leaving the lead to Szczuka and Żarnower.<sup>54</sup> The breakup did not only destroy the ‘ties’ between them, but also between Szczuka and professional architects linked to *Blok* – mainly due to his radical socio-political views.

Jan Brzękowski, a key figure of the Polish avant-garde, met Peiper in Cracow shortly after the first series of *Zwrotnica* was published. For a long time both writers remained linked by a ‘strong tie’ which was not, however, free of disputes – later Brzękowski described Peiper as a good and giving person, yet a very difficult companion.<sup>55</sup> When Brzękowski moved to Paris and became involved in the international avant-garde life, his ‘tie’ to Peiper gradually weakened. After starting *L’Art Contemporain – Sztuka Współczesna*, Brzękowski repeatedly invited Peiper to contribute to it, but the latter refused considering *L’Art Contemporain* as competing with *Zwrotnica*. In a letter to Przyboś dated 16 May 1929 Peiper strongly criticized this journal. Peiper’s ‘ties’ to other Polish artists were rather weak as well. When Strzemiński invited Peiper to contribute to *Europa*, a place of literary polemics between tradition and the avant-garde, the invitation was declined and as a result *Europa* 8 (1930) published a negative review of Peiper’s *Tędy* (This Way) questioning his originality and the pioneering position of *Zwrotnica*. In addition, the first *a.r.* bulletin (created by Strzemiński and Brzękowski) sought to dissociate *a.r.* from Peiper’s theories, but this fragment was eventually removed, probably in order not to reveal any internal differences among avant-garde artists.<sup>56</sup>

## National Antagonisms and Their International Intertwinement

As described above, the relationships between the avant-gardes in Warsaw and Cracow, just as between those in Leiden and Antwerp, were very dynamic and often far from amicable. The leaders of these nodes – ‘marginal’ individuals in Granovetter’s terms – made numerous attempts to broaden their formations’ reception by creating ‘bridges’ to other artists. Such

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<sup>52</sup> ‘Blok reprezentuje ludzi, związanych w bojową grupę hasłem bezwzględnej konstrukcji. W łonie grupy jednak zachodzą różnice kierunków, których przedstawicielami są współpracownicy pisma.’ See *Blok* 2 (April 1924), p. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Henryk Berlewi (1894-1967) – Polish artist, graphic designer and theoretician, linked to *Blok* and *Jung Idysz*. He took part in the Congress of International Progressive Artists in Düsseldorf in 1922 and is the author of ‘Mechanofaktura’.

<sup>54</sup> Teresa Żarnower (1895-1950) – Polish artist and graphic designer, linked to *Blok* and *Dźwignia*.

<sup>55</sup> J. Brzękowski, ‘Wspomnienie o Awangardzie’, *Życie Literackie* 1 (January 1967), 8.

<sup>56</sup> Kłak, *Czasopisma awangardy*, pp. 122-34, 152-79.

'bridges' would rely on 'weak ties' between representatives of various circles, and also existed between Poland and the Low Countries. Significantly, these 'weak ties' were often considerably more stable than the 'strong ties', shaping the internal relationships within the formations themselves, but often short-lived. The fluctuating dynamics of particular formations have been well documented (e.g. *De Stijl*) and, bearing their changing nature in mind, I will explore how national circumstances were internationally intertwined – in this case how 'strong and weak ties' within and between Polish, Dutch and Flemish formations influenced the exchange between them and how this was reflected in the magazines.

The analysed periodicals and artists' correspondence reveal links between the Cracow-based *Zwrotnica* and Flemish *Het Overzicht* formed by 'weak ties' between Peiper, Brzękowski and Seuphor. Peiper had been exchanging letters with Seuphor since 1922<sup>57</sup> and subsequently *Het Overzicht*, as one of few international journals, published information about the Vilnius exhibition in 1923 – the actual beginning of Polish constructivism – and short notes on two of Peiper's poetry volumes. *Het Overzicht* also published an article on modern Polish art<sup>58</sup>, which initially was to be written by Peiper, but he asked Brzękowski to write it instead. In February 1924 Brzękowski's French text was sent to Antwerp and translated into Dutch (by Peeters), despite Peiper's suggestion to publish it in French in order to allow more foreign readers to get acquainted with Polish modern art.<sup>59</sup> Finally, the Dutch version was published with a certain delay in April 1924 (no. 21). Brzękowski's article published in *Het Overzicht* and in *Pasmo* led to much controversy among *Blok* artists and weakened the national 'ties' between *Zwrotnica* and *Blok*. Published in 1924, it had been written a year earlier and therefore did not include *Blok* – still inexistent at that time – among modern Polish movements.<sup>60</sup> As a result, the sixth/seventh issue of *Blok*, edited by Szczuka and Żarnower, included a warning to all avant-garde journals that criticised Brzękowski's text, its sources and the fact that he had ignored a number of modernist writers.

Brzękowski's 'weak tie' to Seuphor allowed him to get in touch with other avant-garde artists and formations, e.g. Mondrian, Van Doesburg or Vantongerloo,<sup>61</sup> which was later reflected in *L'Art Contemporain*. For instance Seuphor revised Brzękowski's French translations of Polish poems and when still planning to publish its fourth issue, Brzękowski decided not to include any French translations of Polish poems, as Seuphor – at that time away from Paris – would not be able to revise them.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, it was through his 'tie' to Brzękowski that Seuphor was put in touch with Léon Mickun, the head of the Polish-French printing house *Imprimerie Polonaise / Ognisko* where he published *Cercle et Carré* and who

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<sup>57</sup> Turowski, *Budowniczość świata*, p. 98.

<sup>58</sup> J. Brzękowski, 'Nieuwe Kunst in Polen', *Het Overzicht* 21 (April 1924), p. 155. It also appeared in the Czech *Pasmo*, although according to Brzękowski it was meant to be published in *Disk*, cf. Brzękowski's letter to Tadeusz Kłak of 23 February 1977, Muzeum Literatury im. Adama Mickiewicza in Warsaw.

<sup>59</sup> See Peiper's letters to Seuphor of 15 December 1923 and 12 February 1924 (AMS, inv. nrs. 186877/1 and 186877/2).

<sup>60</sup> Brzękowski, 'Wspomnienie o Awangardzie', p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> J. Brzękowski, *W Krakowie i w Paryżu* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1968), pp. 219–26.

<sup>62</sup> See Brzękowski's letters to Przyboś of 3 June 1929 and 9 January 1930 as well as to Kurek dated 14 February 1931, quoted resp. in T. Kłak, *Źródła do historii awangardy* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1981), pp. 38–52, and in T. Kłak, *Materiały do dziejów awangardy* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1975), pp. 58–9.

later generously supported Seuphor.<sup>63</sup> ‘Bridges’ built upon ‘ties’ between Brzękowski, Seuphor and other artists originating from the Low Countries were directly reflected in avant-garde magazines – *L’Art Contemporain* published four texts written by Seuphor and six works by Mondrian, Van Doesburg and Vantongerloo. On the other hand, *Cercle et Carré* included texts and works by Brzękowski and Stazewski, e.g. Brzękowski’s article on abstract cinema, ‘Pour le film abstrait’, accompanied by a short script.

Brzękowski attended almost all *Cercle et Carré*<sup>64</sup> meetings and tried to become the ‘bridge’ between the group and other Polish artists. For instance, he informed Przyboś that Seuphor reacted positively to the former’s poem ‘Krajobraz / Le paysage’, printed in *L’Art Contemporain* 2, and that he wanted to incorporate some of his works in *Cercle et Carré*.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, in one of his letters Brzękowski wrote: ‘I suppose that I will be able to force you all into the next issues [of *Cercle et Carré* – M.W.], yet Seuphor is highly unpredictable, saying “yes” today and “no” tomorrow’.<sup>66</sup> He also gave Przyboś’s book *Zponad* (From Above) and the first *a.r. bulletin* to Mondrian and Seuphor. The French translation of the bulletin was to appear in *Cercle et Carré*, yet Seuphor decided not to print it because of its negative attitude towards Le Corbusier’s works. On the other hand, an article written by Georges Vantongerloo due to be included in the second bulletin was eventually omitted, probably following Brzękowski’s disapproval.<sup>67</sup>

The correspondence between the editors of *Zwrotnica*, *Blok* and *7 Arts* – linked to each other via ‘weak ties’ – as well as the magazines themselves reveal an interest in each other’s works and activities. Letters between Bourgeois and Peiper indicate that both artists were to supply one another with texts on Belgian and Polish modern art, which, however, never appeared, either in *7 Arts* or in *Zwrotnica*.<sup>68</sup> Bourgeois also wrote to the editors of *Blok* informing them about the launch of the third volume of *7 Arts* and requesting articles and reproductions of Polish art, whilst offering to supply *Blok* with relevant reproductions.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, those ‘weak ties’ left many traces of reciprocal exchange between *7 Arts* and Polish magazines. *7 Arts* published a variety of texts and reproductions of Polish provenance, for instance by Stazewski, Strzemiński, Szczuka and Żarnower, while *Zwrotnica* quoted an excerpt from an article from *7 Arts*, and *Blok* featured works by Bourgeois, Peeters and Servranckx. Polish and Belgian avant-garde magazines also regularly referred to each other, for instance the twentieth issue of *Het Overzicht* (January 1924) featured a list of congenial magazines, including Polish *Zwrotnica*, entitled ‘Het Network’ (The Network) – a tangible

<sup>63</sup> A. Grenier, *Michel Seuphor, un siècle de libertés* (Paris: Hazan, 1996), pp. 173-74; Brzękowski, *W Krakowie i w Paryżu*, pp. 91-2.

<sup>64</sup> M.-A. Prat, *Cercle et Carré: peinture et avant-garde au seuil ses années 30* (Paris: L’Âge d’Homme, 1984), p. 92.

<sup>65</sup> None of Przyboś’ texts ever appeared in *Cercle et Carré* (see Brzękowski’s letters to Przyboś of 9 January 1930 and 2 April 1930 in Kłak, *Źródła do historii awangardy*, pp. 52, 60-61).

<sup>66</sup> ‘Przypuszczam, że do następnych numerów uda mi się wpakować Was wszystkich, choć Seuphor jest b. nieobliczalny i dziś mówi tak, a jutro nie.’ (Brzękowski probably meant Peiper, Przyboś, Kurek and Wazyk), see Brzękowski’s letter to Kurek of 9 January 1930 in: Kłak, *Materiały do dziejów awangardy*, pp. 45-7.

<sup>67</sup> See Brzękowski’s letters to Przyboś of 2 April, 20 June 1930 and 19 February 1931 in Kłak, *Źródła do historii awangardy*, pp. 60-83.

<sup>68</sup> See Peiper’s letter to Bourgeois dated 13 October 1924 and Bourgeois’ letter to Peiper of 20 October 1924 quoted in *ICSAC Cahier 2/3* (Brussel: Internationaal Centrum voor Structuuranalyse en Constructivisme 1984), pp. 141-42.

<sup>69</sup> See Bourgeois’ letter to *Blok* of 5 October 1924 in *ICSAC Cahier 2/3*, p. 140.

indication that avant-garde formations and their magazines perceived themselves as parts of a world-wide network. *7 Arts* and *Het Overzicht* were also mentioned in *Blok* (and vice versa), yet since its fifth issue there is no mention of *Het Overzicht* in *Blok*. It coincided with *Blok*'s editorial board being reduced to Szczuka and Żarnower, and with *Het Overzicht* publishing Brzękowski's aforementioned article, which visibly outraged Szczuka and destroyed the 'tie' between those formations.

The 'weak tie' between *Blok* and *De Stijl* dates back to 1922 when Berlewi ordered the subscription of *De Stijl*.<sup>70</sup> At that time Berlewi lived in Berlin where he met various representatives of Western avant-gardes and participated in the *Düsseldorf Congress of Progressive Artists* in May 1922.<sup>71</sup> The 'tie' to Van Doesburg and *De Stijl* was further developed by other Polish avant-garde artists:<sup>72</sup> e.g. Van Doesburg received the manuscript of Szczuka's 1924 article 'Le mouvement artistique en Pologne', which appeared in *Anthologie du Groupe Moderne d'Art de Liège*.<sup>73</sup> The information about the launch of *Blok* reached Van Doesburg (via the 'bridge' between Leiden and Warsaw), which was reflected in *De Stijl* 6, 8 from 1924. It included a comment on the first two *Blok* issues, acknowledging its resolute layout and claiming *Blok*'s affinity to 'all modern movements from Rousseau<sup>74</sup> to *De Stijl*.' Moreover, the same issue listed *Blok* alongside other avant-garde magazines, such as *Mécano* or *The Next Call*, as one of the journals, which 'deserve particular attention'. Since the following issue (no. 6, 9 published in 1925), Warsaw was listed as one of *De Stijl*'s cities (with Leiden, Hannover, Paris, Brno and Vienna) on the magazine's cover and the Librairie des Beaux-Arts in Warsaw as one of *De Stijl*'s distribution points. While primarily serving for the magazine's propaganda (a 'marginal' individual such as Van Doesburg would on every occasion emphasise the outreach and the impact of his initiative), it also confirmed Warsaw's status as a fully-fledged node of the avant-garde network and one of the important 'bridges' between *De Stijl* and other avant-garde circles. The following issues of *De Stijl* mentioned Polish magazines (*Praesens*, *Zwrotnica*) and books (by Peiper, Przyboś and Kurek). Moreover, based on the 'ties' to Polish avant-garde artists and architects, Van Doesburg was able to gather the necessary information and photographs to write three articles on Polish architectural novelties published in 1930-31 in *Het Bouwbedrijf*.<sup>75</sup>

'Ties' to *De Stijl* were also clearly visible in *Blok*, where Van Doesburg's theory on architecture found quite a positive response. *Blok*'s programmatic statement 'Co to jest konstruktywizm' (What is constructivism) quoted Van Doesburg's views on colour from his

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<sup>70</sup> Berlewi's postcard to Van Doesburg of 12 June 1922, Archive of Theo and Nelly van Doesburg (ATNvD), Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague (inv. nr. 801).

<sup>71</sup> Turowski, *Budowniczość świata*, p. 383.

<sup>72</sup> See the correspondence between March 1925 and March 1931 housed in ATNvD.

<sup>73</sup> The first page of Szczuka's manuscript is missing (ATNvD, inv. nr. 202). See also M. Szczuka, 'Le mouvement artistique en Pologne', in *Anthologie du Groupe Moderne d'Art de Liège* 3/4 (1925), 4-5.

<sup>74</sup> Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) – post-impressionist French painter, often referred to as *Le Douanier*, an important figure and inspiration for the avant-garde.

<sup>75</sup> T. van Doesburg, 'Kunst- en architectuurvernieuwing in Polen', *Het Bouwbedrijf* 18, vol. 7 (29 August 1930), pp. 358-61 and 365, vol. 8 (27 February 1931), pp. 87-90 and T. van Doesburg, 'Belangrijke nieuwe uitgaven over nieuwe architectuur', *Het Bouwbedrijf* 20, vol. 7 (26 September 1930), 401-3.

previous article published in *Blok*.<sup>76</sup> Its eleven issues featured several reproductions of works by Van Doesburg, Van Eesteren, Oud or Nieuwenhuis, and repeatedly referred to *De Stijl*. In addition, early 1926 Van Doesburg was invited to participate in *Blok*'s architectural exhibition held in Warsaw in March 1926 – although he did not attend, his further correspondence with Polish artists reveals that he was to visit Warsaw to give a series of lectures, which did not come to fruition due to financial reasons.<sup>77</sup> Interestingly the 'weak tie' between *De Stijl* and Warsaw did not disappear after the closure of *Blok*, but was cultivated by *Praesens*, whose editor, Szymon Syrkus, maintained long-lasting 'ties' not only with Van Doesburg, but also with Oud or Van Eesteren (also members of the CIAM). The catalogue of the Warsaw exhibition (i.e. *Blok* 11) listed 17 architectural projects from the Netherlands (by Oud, Van Ravesteyn, Rietveld and Van der Vlugt, with 16 illustrations) and an article on modern Dutch architecture. In order to write the text and obtain information, Polish architects had approached *Oud and Van Ravesteyn*.<sup>78</sup>

The analysed historical material clearly indicates that the deterioration of particular 'strong ties' within national circles did not necessarily mean that the 'weak ties' between their representatives and individuals from other distant formations dissolved as well. Although 'strong ties' linking Van Doesburg, Oud and Van Eesteren no longer existed, Polish formations still maintained the 'weak ties' with all these artists. Yet, their correspondence reveals that the maelstroms on the Dutch scene did have an impact on the Polish formations – e.g. after Oud discovered that the newly established *Praesens* was to publish Van Doesburg's works, he sent the aforementioned letter to Syrkus strongly criticising Van Doesburg. However it did not prevent Syrkus from publishing Van Doesburg's works in the first issue of *Praesens*, yet he later assured Oud that his viewpoints were not in line with Van Doesburg's. What is more, in 1929 Szymon and Helena Syrkus wrote to Oud expressing their critique of Van Doesburg's magazine: 'Un de ces jours nous étions dans la bibliothèque et nous avons feuilleté DE STIJL. C'est devenu terriblement présomptueux et faux.'<sup>79</sup> Although *Praesens* maintained a consistent 'weak tie' with Van Doesburg – it planned to organise a *De Stijl* exhibition in Warsaw and publish a series of books with theoretical writings by Van Doesburg, Mondrian,<sup>80</sup> Oud and Vantongerloo – its 'tie' to Oud proved to be more solid. Not only were Oud's works considerably better represented in *Praesens* than in *Blok* (the latter published only one reproduction of his works), but the second issue of *Praesens* featured articles written by Oud, Van Eesteren and Mondrian, but not Van Doesburg – even though he had sent a text for the second issue and Syrkus confirmed that it would be published.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> 'Co to jest konstruktywizm', *Blok* 6/7 (September 1924); T. van Doesburg, 'Odnowienie architektury', *Blok* 5 (July 1924), 12-3.

<sup>77</sup> See van Doesburg's correspondence with *Praesens* (ATNvD, inv. nrs. 201 and 308).

<sup>78</sup> P. Meller, 'Nowoczesna architektura holenderska', *Blok* 11 (March 1926). See Rutkowski's letter to Oud of 20 January 1926 (AO, inv. nr. 28:26:14).

<sup>79</sup> See Syrkus' letters to Oud dated 16 June 1926 and 14 December 1929 (AO, inv. nrs. 31:26:108 and 60:29:151).

<sup>80</sup> In 1926-27 Mondrian worked on the layout of the Polish version of *Le Néo-Plasticisme* to be published by *Praesens*, which he mentioned in letters to Michel Seuphor (8 December 1926), J.J.P. Oud (20 December 1926), Félix del Marle (30 December 1926) and Albert van den Briel (n.d.), all to be found in Archief van de werkgroep Mondriaan correspondentieproject, Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague (inv. nrs. 20, 23, 63, 75).

<sup>81</sup> See Van Doesburg's 1926 letter to *Praesens* and Syrkus' reply of 13 November 1926 (ATNvD, inv. nrs. 201 and 308).



The 'weak ties' between Syrkus, Oud and Van Eesteren created not only a 'bridge' between the Dutch architects and *Praesens*, but also between Polish architects and other Dutch formations connected to Oud or Van Eesteren. Hence, in 1927 Oud invited Syrkus to collaborate with *i10*, which later published Syrkus' theoretical article 'L'architecture ouvrant le volume', accompanied by two reproductions of Malevich and Stazewski's works.<sup>82</sup> According to the correspondence more works of Polish provenance were to appear in *i10* – in September 1929 Syrkus sent 27 reproductions and architectural drawings and a progressive Polish architectural periodical *Dom i Osiedle* (House and Estate) asking Oud to choose relevant material to be published in *i10*.<sup>83</sup> Via such 'bridges' numerous works and texts of Polish avant-garde architects got published in Dutch and Belgian architectural periodicals, such as *de 8 en Opbouw* or *L'Équerre*, and vice versa – via Strzeмиński several Dutch artists received a survey on modern art issued by Polish *Europa*, which later published the reactions of Van Doesburg, Mondrian and Vantongerloo.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, *Europa* included the Polish version of the 1930 manifesto of concrete art 'Base de la Peinture Concrète' and fragments of Van Doesburg's *Classique-Baroque-Moderne* appeared in *Almanach. Katalog. Salon Modernistów* (1928).

## Conclusions

In this article I have presented a case study of mutual connections between Poland and the Low Countries in view of specific 'ties' linking particular avant-garde formations. Traces of such 'ties', as well as their evolution, are visible in the magazines and in private correspondence between the artists. They gradually evolved, often from friendship to hatred, which had a major impact on the dynamics of the network and directly influenced the exchange and circulation of works and ideas between different circles. This case study shows that the diffusion patterns were shaped both by 'strong and weak ties', yet the 'weak' ones formed 'bridges' between somehow distant circles, enabling their members to reach a broader audience and to gain indirect contacts to representatives of other formations. Given that the constructivist aesthetics and artists, with their difficult relation to mainstream cultural conventions, were marginalised and pushed to the side lines of contemporary literary and artistic life, their international exchange and the creation of new 'ties' and 'bridges' was not limited to geographically, linguistically or culturally related circles. The dynamics of particular formations and their interpersonal maelstroms are well researched and described in their national context, or in relation to the pivotal nodes of the network. This article shows however that the changing nature of interpersonal relationships within and between given formations had also major impact on the relations between more distant circles, for instance between Poland and the Low Countries.

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<sup>82</sup> See Syrkus' letter to Oud of 12 June 1927 (AO, inv. nr. 41\_27\_154) and S. Syrkus, 'L'architecture ouvrant le volume', *Internationale Revue i10* 5 (1927), 163-65.

<sup>83</sup> See Syrkus' letter to Oud of 29 September 1929 (AO, inv. nr. 59\_29\_131). *i10* did not publish any of the received material.

<sup>84</sup> T. van Doesburg, 'Uwagi. Ankieta Europy', *Europa* 2 (October 1929), 60-1; P. Mondrian, 'Nowa Plastyka', *Europa* 3 (November 1929), 90-1; G. Vantongerloo, 'Ankieta Europy', *Europa* 3 (November 1929), 87.

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