



The control room of the Kelenföld Power Plant

Budapest, 1931, Ernő Bánó (architect: Virgil Bierbauer) © Hungarian Museum of Architecture

strategy and agency in architectural photographs: imaging strategies that shaped an architectural magazine in interwar hungary

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*“Without modern photography modern architecture could never have been ‘put across’” claimed the English architecture critic Philip Morton Shand in 1934¹. As he stated, photography had the power to spread modern architecture to a broad audience, and indeed its dissemination was largely due to modern photography and print culture. One of the key figures in the mediation of modern architecture in interwar Hungary was the architect Virgil Bierbauer, who between 1928 and 1942 edited the main platform of modernist architects in Hungary, the journal *Tér és Forma* (Space and Form). This richly illustrated magazine reported on modern architecture in a state-of-the-art manner, featuring both Hungarian and international examples as well as theoretical arguments. Bierbauer was in contact with architects and editors from all over the world, as can be traced through his vast correspondence preserved at the Hungarian Museum of Architecture in Budapest. This network of professionals shaped the way modern architecture was presented in the pages of the magazine. In my paper, I focus on the representation of international modern architecture in *Tér és Forma* while analysing Bierbauer’s editorial work. Professional networks, photographs and imaging strategies are all considered as means of communication that factored into the editing processes of the magazine. I consider Bierbauer’s role as an editor, architect and traveller and how these different guises were reflected in the magazine.*

keywords Modern architecture, Mediation, Architectural press, Virgil Bierbauer, Interwar period, Hungary

introduction

“Mediation”, “communication” and “dissemination” are among the particular expressions that shape architectural histories today. Print culture has been a key issue when considering the mediation of architecture and the knowledge-production of architects since the invention of the printing press². The birth of photography and the technological progress of printing multiplied the number of publications worldwide and the acceleration of the exchange of information significantly shortened the time architects needed to access any material on the most recent architecture. Textual information as well as renderings and photographs disseminated the latest ideas and information about recently-built structures. Especially after the invention of half-tone printing, photographs began to overwhelm the printed page in architectural periodicals and other publications³. Architects kept abreast of the architectural production of their times via these magazines and books and they also relied on their professional network and personal connections in order to understand the news. This was an unmatched opportunity for architects to reach worldwide recognition in a relatively short time. In this framework, photographs contextualised by the layout of the printed page and constructed using different strategies served as means of communication⁴. In this paper the architectural press of the interwar period is considered, which can be characterised by a highly biased publication system in which editors and architects took the lead while using the visual potential of images shaped by photographers.

personal archive – public media

The leading architectural periodical in interwar Hungary, *Tér és Forma* (*Space and Form*), was the main platform of modernist architects for disseminating their latest works. The journal dominated the architectural scene of the era under the editorship of the architect Virgil Bierbauer (also known as Virgil Borbír, 1893-1956) between 1928 and 1942. *Tér és Forma* ceased publication in 1948, six years after Bierbauer's resignation. The monthly journal reported on modern architecture in a state-of-the-art manner addressing the latest products of Hungarian and international architecture, competitions, theoretical arguments on building types, interior design and urbanism, as well as reviewing the latest events, exhibitions and publications.

In addition to editing *Tér és Forma*, Bierbauer also wrote a considerable number of the articles, in particular the editorials, the polemics as well as the essays on the buildings of architects with whom he was in continuous contact. Therefore, in addition to his works as an architect his main contribution to Hungarian architecture was his editorial work, as he selected and defined the content of the magazine for the most part while also acting as its principal voice. He presented the latest ideas in modern architecture in order to generate a crucial change in local architectural thought. His efforts were successful due to his extensive and continuously growing professional network, which not only covered Europe, but also the United States of America, South America and Japan. His vast correspondence related exclusively to his professional connections comprised almost 900 letters, and this is now held at the Hungarian Museum of Architecture in Budapest, in the context of the Bierbauer archive⁵. The letters of such notable architects as Walter Gropius, Heinrich Lauterbach, Marcel Breuer, J. J. P. Oud, Jan Duiker, Alvar Aalto, Giuseppe Terragni, Wells Coates and Richard Neutra are preserved in this comprehensive material. The significance of his correspondence lies in the fact that it provides a remarkable amount of information about the editing and decision-making processes behind the production of the magazine. He also used his connections to disseminate his own work as the designer of the Kelenföld Power Plant (1925-1934) and Budaörs Airport (1936-1937) in Budapest, among others⁶. It is also worth noting that his wife, Adrienne Graul (1896-1973), helped him to a great extent as his secretary, translator and, after Bierbauer's death, the manager and interpreter of his archive⁷.

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Bierbauer aimed at strengthening international relations by featuring content from all over the world in order to raise awareness about the international proliferation of modern architecture. Bierbauer also aspired to circulate *Tér és Forma* in the international architectural community to secure its place among leading architectural journals. He was in contact with magazine editors from all over the world in order to exchange their respective periodicals and he also regularly sent his magazine to his architect connections so as to acquire more content and recognition. His efforts met with great success and he must have been very satisfied to see *Tér és Forma* on Le Corbusier's desk during his visit to his studio in Paris in 1929⁸. Although the language of the journal was Hungarian, Bierbauer at times incorporated English, German, French or Italian captions, articles and resumes to summarise the content for foreigners.

building personal connections – using public communication

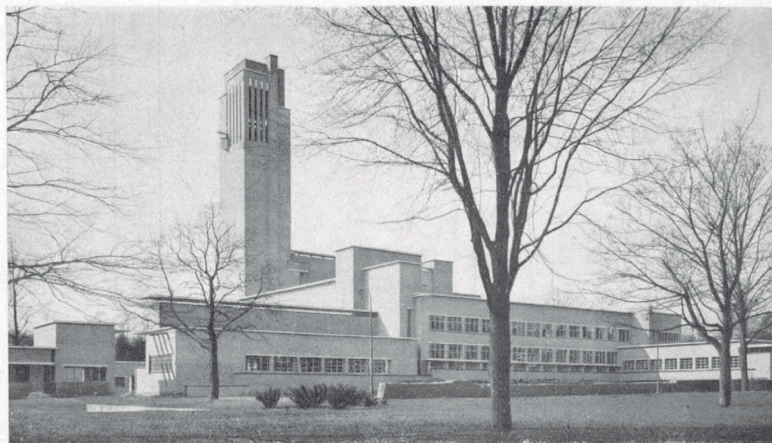
Virgil Bierbauer built a remarkable professional network that was based on his personal connections. Bierbauer frequently participated in international congresses and went on study tours where he used the opportunity to approach his colleagues. In 1930, the international congress organised by the Comité Permanent International des Architectes (CPIA) was an excellent occasion, since it was held in Budapest and the international relations were handled by Bierbauer. Moreover, as an editor of an acknowledged magazine, he easily made new connections via simply asking for material to be published in the journal. Communication in the era was remarkably fast, even compared with today's internet-based exchange. As Bierbauer noted, this was a time, “when we, here in Budapest at noon, can read a newspaper that was issued in the morning in London”⁹. It can be shown through the dates of the letters that Bierbauer and his colleagues were able to answer one another in a matter of just a few days. Thus Bierbauer collected information and publication materials rather quickly, which he generally published within a few months.



f1_Van Nelle Factory

Rotterdam, 1930 (architects: Jan Brinkman and Leendert van der Vlugt) in *Tér és Forma* 4 (1931): 358

Bierbauer, similarly to other editors from all over the world, had to work with pre-edited material sent by his colleagues for publication purposes. He only had the opportunity to select from this given material, but sometimes he asked for more, as he did in the case of the publication of the Van Nelle Factory in Rotterdam (1927-1931). As he was well informed about the entire photographic series in the Dutch magazine *Wendingen*, he asked for five more images from the architects Jan Brinkman and Leendert van der Vlugt to be able to publish a comprehensive account on the building.



W. M. Dudok: A városház hátsó homlokzata, Hilversum — Rückseite des Rathauses

f2_Town Hall

Hilversum, 1930, C. A. Deul (architect: Willem Marinus Dudok) in *Tér és Forma* 4 (1931): 251

Architects usually owned one decisive series of pictures that they circulated worldwide and these appeared everywhere in a similar manner except for their context. The first appearance of the images was definitive, as usually all other publications –consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly– were based on this first spread originating from the architect's homeland. As an editor, Bierbauer received a notable number of international periodicals, which he attentively studied to select what to feature in his magazine. The colleagues he contacted readily provided the required material but they always wanted it back, especially the photographs, as architects usually possessed only one or just a few series of pictures over which they wanted to maintain control. These photographic series circulated all around the globe for at least one or two years after the completion of the buildings. Sometimes the versos of the photographs bear some information about their circulation in different countries, just like stamps in a passport. A few examples can be located in the Bierbauer archive, such as some images depicting the Kelenföld Power Plant (1925-1934) and its most spectacular space, the control room (1927-1931). The French inscriptions on the versos presumably signal their publication in the French architectural press. Architects determined the routes these images took and editors shaped the way they were published, but at this time photographers usually lost

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control over their products, frequently without even receiving credit for their authorship¹⁰. *Tér és Forma*, however, often indicated the photographers' name. But in Bierbauer's correspondence, only the letters from the Dutch architect Willem Marinus Dudok mention a photographer's name: C. A. Deul, who took pictures of the Hilversum Town Hall (1924-1931), among Dudok's other projects¹¹. Here, the photographer was given an active role, as Dudok suggested that Bierbauer contact Deul directly in order to acquire the required pictures, while also recommending the magazine *Wendingen* for further information and references to the images. Although contact with the photographer cannot be traced in the correspondence, Bierbauer managed to publish his images¹².

travel and publication as panoramas

Virgil Bierbauer was a frequent traveller over his years as a magazine editor and even prior to that. He studied at the Technical University in Munich, obtaining his diploma in 1915, and during his years as a student of architecture he took a number of study trips to Italy and Germany. In later years, Italy and Germany remained his preferred destinations besides a few trips to Austria, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, France and Poland. Although he was in contact with American and Japanese architects, he never managed to go overseas. Travel was a major opportunity to build his professional network and to visit the cities and see the architecture he knew only via photographs. His short reports on his travels paralleled such undertakings as Erich Mendelsohn's photographic book on North American cities entitled *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten* (1926)¹³ or Francis Rowland Yerbury's venture to record the architecture of his time in Europe and the USA¹⁴. Bierbauer's travel reports remained smaller in scale, but his work as the editor of *Tér és Forma* can be considered complementary. As a frequent traveller in Europe he was able to provide firsthand accounts on the latest architecture: he sometimes even had the opportunity to visit particular buildings with the guidance of the architect, like Fritz Höger's Chilehaus in Hamburg (1923) or the architect Josef Karel Riha's villa in Prague (1930). Otherwise, he used descriptions compiled by the architects or published materials in contemporary architectural periodicals. Although being an amateur photographer himself, Bierbauer used the official photographs provided by his colleagues to illustrate his journal, thus he only had the chance to select, frame and contextualise them. However, he also took the opportunity to take snapshots as a tourist during his travels, as can be traced in one of his articles on the vernacular architecture of Capri, in which he was expressly interested¹⁵. Bierbauer and his wife became good friends with the architect Giuseppe Capponi and his wife Inés Capponi, who had a villa in Capri where the Bierbauers spent a few summer holidays. Bierbauer recognised the photographic qualities of the island's vernacular architecture: the geometric masses, the white surfaces, the play of the sunlight on the exteriors and the picturesque appearance of the steep, narrow streets. He published his and his wife's photographs as fragments of a filmstrip in *Tér és Forma*, in the October 1932 issue, where he also featured the architect Heinrich Lauterbach and Peter Meyer's essays on the vernacular architecture of Santorini¹⁶.

Bierbauer as a traveller recognised the modified perception of space and time, pointing out that segments of reality are intermingled in his memory bringing about a "synthetic view" of all his experiences¹⁷. This was a condition shared with urban inhabitants, car drivers and air travellers, who experienced speed, simultaneity and fast changes of scenes. In Bierbauer's perception these flashbacks all shared a common space in his memory that generated the "synthetic vision" he expressed, such as in the photomural at Budaörs Airport, which he designed with the photographer Mrs. Elemér Marsovszky. The montage of aerial photographs of cities and sites from all over the world appeared on a single surface in order to prepare air travellers for the "sensation of flight"¹⁸. This simultaneity characterises *Tér és Forma*, where architectural photographs are gathered together regardless of time and space, while they share the common and homogenising space of the printed page.



f3_Virgil and Adrienne Bierbauer
Capri in *Tér és Forma* 5 (1932): 337

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f4_Budaörs Airport and its photomural

Budapest, 1937, Mrs. Elemér Marsovszky © Hungarian Museum of Architecture

Alberto Sartoris' undertakings stand out among essential exemplars of such panoramic collections of building images. His book entitled *Gli elementi dell'architettura funzionale. Sintesi panoramica dell'architettura moderna*, which was published in three editions in 1932, 1935 and 1941, was a definitive panorama that presented pieces of architecture via photographic images from all over the world covering numerous countries from Brazil to Japan¹⁹. Bierbauer was well aware of his mission, they corresponded and Bierbauer reviewed his publications in *Tér és Forma*. The Milan Triennial exhibitions served the same purpose in the 1930s, amassing examples of the new architecture on a worldwide scale. It is worth noting that Bierbauer was one of the organisers of the Hungarian contributions to the Triennials. Bierbauer directed a similar enterprise as a magazine editor, but of course on a different scale. In one of his first editorials he expressed his intention to cover the new architecture on an international level and to disseminate it to the Hungarian public with the goal of implementing it locally. International content with comprehensive photographic series dominated the issues in the early 1930s. Bierbauer took advantage of his continuously growing network, which supported his broad perspective: his major connections overseas included Richard Neutra in the USA and Masakazu Koyama, the editor of the Japanese periodical *Kokusai Kenchiku*. Over the following years he featured both the now classic examples of the modern movement such as the Zonnestraal Sanatorium in Hilversum (Jan Duiker

and Bernard Bijvoet, 1926-1931)²⁰ or the Lovell Health House in Los Angeles (Richard Neutra, 1929), as well as buildings that were later considered “expressionist” like Fritz Höger’s architecture. This was before the canon was formulated, and instead of any canon, Bierbauer covered all that was new, approachable and, in Bierbauer’s perspective, relevant to its time and for the lifestyle and needs of the modern man. Photographic images supported this panorama in the presentation of single buildings, examples of certain building types in thematic issues and, in one particular case, a comprehensive panorama manifested in the first (and only) international issue of *Tér és Forma*. The idea of an international architectural periodical was initiated during the 1930 CPIA congress held in Budapest and its sole realisation was the “*Revue Internationale d’Architecture*” that appeared as the single international issue of *Tér és Forma* in July 1931. Eleven countries are represented and to be true to the time the selection comprises examples of contemporary architecture featuring both conservative and modern buildings, as was expressed by Bierbauer in the editorial. Many different building types are represented in the photographs from residential and recreational buildings to industrial architecture. The images stand alone, following each other one by one, thus being removed from their original built environment and gathered into a new context: a panorama of the architecture of a certain limited time period.

In the mid-1930s, due to financial difficulties, the periodical’s length was reduced along with its international content. In the June issue of 1935, Bierbauer wrote an editorial entitled “Revision’s revision”, which along with the accompanying pictures provided an essential panorama of the contemporary architectural production in Europe, the USA and Japan²¹. He commented that this series of images replaced the comprehensive presentations with a rather schematic summary, the objective of which was to look around the world from the air at a glance, from Prague to Los Angeles and Tokyo²². These buildings, including the General Institute of Pensions in Prague (Josef Havlíček and Karel Honzík, 1933) recorded by the Brno firm Atelier de Sandalo, the Bergpolder Apartment House in Rotterdam (Jan Brinkman and Leendert van der Vlugt, 1932-1934), William Lescaze’s New York apartments (1934) and the VDL Research House in Los Angeles (Richard Neutra, 1932), were all covered later with longer spreads, meaning that Bierbauer considered it important to expand upon the constituents of this panorama with detailed introductions.

Even in the year when World War II broke out in 1939 he managed to extend his panorama by featuring Wu Tongwen’s house in Shanghai, designed by the Hungarian László Hudec (1935-1938) with a detailed description about how Western and Eastern cultures amalgamated there into a prosperous culture. This culture was soon endangered because of the war, due to which Hudec had to flee from China. It was also the war that terminated Bierbauer’s role as a journal editor and cultural mediator, as he had to join the army in 1942. Although he managed to continue working as an architect after the war, due to Hungary’s isolation behind the Iron Curtain he never again had the opportunity to regain his role as a protagonist in the international architectural and publication scene.

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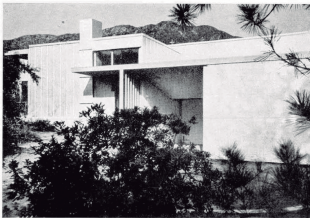
maió tereket keresek, hanem megelégszenek azval, hogy a kívíró hatóssá által készített programhoz, a kívíró elbírálta terehez minél hasonlabb méréket keressenek ki és azokat jómódú juttatásukra, viszont kizárják a szűkebbet a pályaműveket, amelyek a programon túlmenő, gondolatbeli újul nyújtottak és színgesték le.

Ez a tapasztalat hálván, a pályaműveket egyenesen kizárják, — mert ideális gondolatokból építéssel — azt a kívíró elbírálta, hogy ilyen körülmények között, amikor a szűre a program alapján szűre, elbírálta tereket talán a legalkalmasabbak, mi értelme van egyáltalán a terepajánlatoknak? — Hiszen ez az álláspont az a kísérő megoldások kiértékelés egyenesen megsejtet! — Így tehát etek az a képmás és alapra ete, hogy kizárják az elbírálta legjobb tereket alapján kell megsejtet! Igen körülmények között a terepajánlat csak azt vesgélje, hogy ki az, aki a kívíró elbírálta kértással azonos feltételek? Ha pedig ez így van és a javítás is így let, akkor építészünk szempontjából a terepajánlatoknak nincs sok értelme! Igen viszont ki az a terepajánlat elbírálta szempontból vége nem más, mint a maianálkálki építési munkák felszámolására rendezett sorjárat. Különösen ilyen jellegű volt a Yemaszibói Vándra kirdélt terepajánlat, amikor az építész a terepajánlat lejárta előtt már kiadta az összes tereket házi vállalkozójának? Legfrissebb tapasztalatunk alapján pedig még arra szeretném felhívni a figyelmet, hogy az a múltból tenemostól ete, hogy újabb pályaműveket a közönségt terepajánlatok nyertési háldassalok ki bírdó lapoknak, legutóbb is a mai viszonyok között nem a legszerencsésebb. Távol áll tőlém, hogy bárki ete is szerencsés ötlet emelje, de mintha az élmésem feltételek szűre egyes hajni bizonyos mértékig fészélyezett és kényelmetlen helyreke kerdőnek egyes pályaműveket szemem. Ne tessék megsejteteni az omlyaga néhez és képmás bírdó feladatokat!

Fopánja Szerkesztő Ér köszönetem azért, hogy megbírdézt és etel vállalat adni arra, hogy egyszer egy, ha nem is megbírdéztok, de amíg tők tapasztalatot rendelkező márt terepajánlat, képmás legutóbb szűre juthatol.

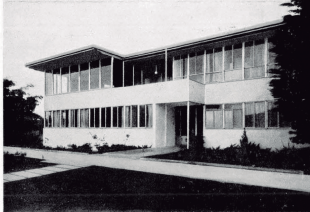
III.

Szerkesztő Ér azval a kívíró fordult hozzám, hogy én, aki a pályaműve kerdőben minél kálta álláspontot foglalom el, mit szűre a legutóbbi pályaműveket elbírálta, mit szűre az a tárgyban beírdézt kerdőhez. A nekem felolvasott levélben ez a mondat áll: „A terepajánlat költége sokszorosan megértül az szemlének mindenkérféle gnyós vállalkozásom.” Nem tudom, hogy P. J. Kérdőnek az utóbbi idők pályaműveit mennyire ismeri, illetleg milyen véle-



Almdona (California): Nyaraló.

T.: R. Neutra.



California: Lakóház.

T.: R. Neutra.

f5 Beard House and VDL Research House

Los Angeles (architect: Richard Neutra) in *Tér és Forma* 8 (1935): 165

endnotes

1. Philip Morton Shand, "New Eyes for Old", *The Architectural Review* 75 (1934): 12.
2. Mario Carpo, *Architecture in the Age of Printing: Orality, Writing, Typography, and Printed Images in the History of Architectural Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.-London: The MIT Press, 2001).
3. Robert Elwall, *Photography Takes Command: The Camera and British Architecture 1890-1939* (London: RIBA Heinz Gallery, 1994), 35-50.
4. Recent studies include: Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, Mass.-London: The MIT Press, 1996); Andrew Higgott and Timothy Wray (eds), *Camera Constructs: Photography, Architecture and the Modern City* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); Kester Rattenbury (ed.), *This Is Not Architecture: Media Constructions* (London-New York: Routledge, 2002); Claire Zimmerman, *Photographic Architecture in the Twentieth Century* (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
5. Letters 'A-G' and 'H-M' in box no. 6, letters 'N-W' in box no. 7, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture, Budapest
6. I gave a lecture on this topic with the title "A Double Agent of Modern Architecture: Virgil Bierbauer as Architect and Editor" at the conference "The Site of Discourse: Thinking architecture through publication", Lisbon, 28-30 September 2015.
7. Adrienne Bierbauer wrote a memoir about her life together with Bierbauer, see: Adrienne Bierbauer, "Palackposta" (Bottle Post) (unpublished manuscript, box no. 15, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture, Budapest, 1958-1972).
8. Virgil Bierbauer, "Utazás Budapest körül II". (Travel around Budapest II.), *Magyar Művészet* 6 (1930): 20.
9. Virgil Bierbauer, "A revízió revíziója" (Revision's Revision), *Tér és Forma* 8 (1935): 161.
10. For more on the copyright issues of architectural photographers, see: Antoine Baudin, "From Collection to Encyclopedia: Issues and Milestones of an Exemplary Undertaking", in *Photography, Modern Architecture and Design: The Alberto Sartoris Collection - Objects from the Vitra Design Museum*, ed. Antoine Baudin (Lausanne: EPFL Press in collaboration with the Vitra Design Museum, 2005), 16-45, especially the section entitled "The Tomb of the Unknown Photographer", 25-28.
11. Willem Marinus Dudok's two letters to Virgil Bierbauer, 19 July 1928, D 24 and 22 July 1931, D 25, Virgil Bierbauer archive, Hungarian Museum of Architecture, Budapest
12. "Inleiding door Arch. J. Boterenbrood", *Wendingen* 9 (1928): 2-24.
13. Erich Mendelsohn, *Amerika: Bilderbuch eines Architekten* (Berlin: Rudolf Mosse, 1926).
14. Andrew Higgott, "Frank Yerbury and the Representation of the New", in Higgott and Wray, *Camera Constructs*, 23-33.
15. Virgil Bierbauer, "Caprii házak" (Houses in Capri), *Tér és Forma* 5 (1932): 336-42.
16. Heinrich Lauterbach, "Santorini" (Santorini), *Tér és Forma* 5 (1932): 329-33; Peter Meyer, "Santorini építészete" (The Architecture of Santorini), *Tér és Forma* 5 (1932): 334-35.
17. Virgil Bierbauer, "Egy építész németországi utazása" (An Architect's Travel to Germany), *Magyar Művészet* 3 (1927): 639-40.
18. Ibolya Cs. Plank wrote her PhD dissertation about the photomural of Budaörs Airport, see: Ibolya Cs. Plank, "A Budaörsi repülőtér és fotómontázsa mint a modernizmus szimbóluma" (Budaörs Airport and Its Photomontage as Symbols of Modernism) (PhD diss., University of Pécs, 2015). For more on the photomural in English, see: Harald R. Stühlinger, "Photographed Buildings on Buildings: When Architectural Photography Conquered Architecture", *Photo-Researcher* 18 (2012): 20-31.
19. Alberto Sartoris, *Gli elementi dell'architettura funzionale. Sintesi panoramica dell'architettura moderna* (Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1932, 1935, 1941).
20. "Revue Internationale d'Architecture", *Tér és Forma* 4 (1931): 207-46.
21. Bierbauer, "Revision's Revision"
22. Bierbauer, "Revision's Revision", 158.

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