

Women and Power in the History of Modern Architecture: The Case of the CIAM Women

In this article I will describe my research proposal to rewrite the history of the CIAM from a gender perspective. Despite the fact that the history of the CIAM has been written as a narrative of Great Male Architects, it was characterised by the performance of a group of strong, powerful women. The case of the CIAM is important in relation to the question of gendered power relations within professional networks and organisations. In fact, from a gender perspective the CIAM makes clear that these relationships are acted out on two levels. Firstly, there is the question of power as influence: how did these women, who often did not have a formal position as participants in the congress, succeed in obtaining influence? Besides formal power, informal power built upon relationships with people plays an important role here. Secondly, did these women use their influence to propose alternative plans? In other words, to what degree did these women identify with the modernist CIAM policies and to what degree did they have their own, autonomous, even subversive position. It is from this perspective that I will discuss the role of Charlotte Perriand (1903–1999) and Helena Syrkus (1900–1982).

Keywords: CIAM, networks, power relationships, historiography

In 2004 the American architectural historian Mary McLeod stated in an article that feminist architectural history had nearly disappeared.¹ The flood of interesting publications in this field had come to a halt and schools seemed to prefer classes in new themes such as sustainability, digitalisation and globalisation over gender and architecture. As one of the reasons for this setback McLeod states that the very success of gender studies in architecture may have contributed to its decline. Names of once-forgotten women have been resurrected, the reputation of architecture's male heroes has been taken down and discrimination in the profession has been exposed. If McLeod is right, why then still study the role of women in modern architecture? One reason may be present in the persistence of gender inequalities in the architectural profession. Another reason is that, contrary to what McLeod believed, women in architectural history still remain poorly studied. For example, many books have been written about the Austrian philosopher of science Otto Neurath, but who knows the story of his yearlong assistant, and later wife, Marie Reidemeister? Who knows the story of Stanisława Nowicka and Edith Schreiber who together with Charlotte Perriand worked at the atelier of Le Corbusier?

Three decades after the first pioneering activities of feminist scholars, it is still necessary to think of strategies to make visible the presence of women in architectural history. The history of the CIAM presents a clear example of a narrative that continues to be written from a male perspective and that, as a consequence, contains many female actors that remain until this day undetected. The aim of my research is to rewrite the history of the CIAM on the basis of gender balance: as a history in which both men and women are present. In addition, my research also challenges some of the orthodoxy surrounding feminism today. Therefore, I will start this article with a short excursion on gender studies and modern architecture, before moving on to the case of the CIAM women.

¹ Mary McLeod, "Perriand: Reflections of Feminism and Modern Architecture," *Harvard Design Magazine* no. 20 (2004), 64.

Gender Studies and Architecture

For my research the difference between women's history as it emerged in the 1970s and contemporary gender studies is important. Today, gender studies has moved away from a narrow focus on emancipation and equal rights and starts with the recognition of 'gender' as a complex historical and social category. Also, this process happens in creative dialogue with other turns in historiography, such as the postcolonial turn, or the move towards global history. Therefore, it is important to reflect on feminist historical writing and to re-examine its methods and assumptions.

The development of women's history in architecture was closely connected to the so-called second feminist wave that began in the late 1960s. In fact, the earliest considerations of gender in architecture came as a result of the realisation of the exclusion of women architects from the discipline. A hallmark in this respect was the exhibition *Women in American Architecture* curated by the architect and scholar Susana Torre and held in the Brooklyn Museum in New York in 1977.² The exhibition was part of an inquiry from a feminist point of view of the conditions surrounding the production of space, and especially domestic space. Feminist researchers wanted to trace the extent of women's participation in that production as designers, theoreticians, or users. However, it was equally important to expose how the subordination of women was embodied in space and the complex role that architectural design played in that subordination. As a consequence, doing feminist research in the 1970s and 1980s meant a break with the dominant way of writing architectural history. It meant a break with the history that is focused exclusively on the figure of the architect and his work, or on movements and styles. Instead, feminist architectural history wanted to describe the social and cultural conditions of space production and the question, how women fit into the complex puzzle that ensured their invisibility.

Today, it is the question how we can move forward with the legacy of feminist research in mind. Feminism is ultimately about ending women's subordination, which in the past implied a harsh confrontation with male-designed institutions as well as well-defended patriarchal family structures. However, today we may raise the question, if this feminist ideology, with its emphasis on the struggle for equality and rights, did not also lead to a certain simplification. Perhaps today we need to take more distance from judgements of good and bad and reductive charges of sexism and victimization that seems to be implicit in feminist ideology.

To look at women's history beyond the dominance of feminist ideology means to cast a new focus on what it meant for women to have an unequal position in the century of equality. It means to ask the question after what enabled these women to find their way and to exercise influence. The history of the CIAM congresses provides a good example of how women were able to gain influential positions, while not being among the major protagonists in architecture and while not always being

visible. Therefore, the question that informs this research considers the strategies that women employed not so much to challenge male monopolies but to exercise influence within them.

In the following I will analyze two case studies that give an answer to the question: how did women within the CIAM from an unequal position succeed in exercising influence?

Poland: Helena Syrkus

The first CIAM congress organized in Switzerland in 1928 resembled an exclusive gentle men's club, with architects like Hans Schmidt from Switzerland, Ernst May from Germany and Mart Stam from the Netherlands attending. There were however, also two women present, although far less visible: one was Hélène de Mandrot, who played a crucial role in the foundation of the CIAM and the other woman was Molly Weber, a female architect from Hannover (Fig. 1).

At the time of this first CIAM meeting, Poland was not yet present. However, two weeks after the meeting the Polish architect Symon Syrkus received a letter from the secretary of the newly founded CIAM, in which he invited him to become delegate for Poland for the CIRPAC, which was the executive committee of the CIAM.³ At that time both Simon and Helena Syrkus belonged to Poland's most prominent avant-garde architects. At the end of the 1920s they faced a substantial task: not only were they involved in the reconstruction of the country after its destruction by the Great War, but they were also engaged in giving the country a new identity after its independence as a nation state in 1918. Like most Polish progressive architects, Simon and Helena Syrkus entertained close relationships with international avant-garde movements. Simon Syrkus had received a substantial part of his training abroad; he had studied architecture in Vienna, Graz, Riga and Moscow and in the early 1920s he had spent a couple of years in Berlin, Weimar and Paris where he became acquainted with the work of Cézanne, De Stijl and the Cubists. Helena was a well-known figure in Warsaw avant-garde circles; she too had an international focus and her



Fig. 1. Group photograph, First CIAM Congress, La Sarraz, Switzerland, 1928. Published in Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960* (©Gta Archiv/ETH Zürich).

² Susana Torre (ed.), *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1977).

³ Olgierd Czermer and Hieronim Listowski (eds.), *The Polish Avant-Garde, Architecture and Town Planning, 1918–1919* (Paris: Editions du Moniteur; Warsaw: Interpress, 1981), 83.



Fig. 2. Helena Syrkus sitting in between Giedion (standing on the left) and Le Corbusier (sitting on the right), CIAM IV, 1933. Courtesy of Gta Archiv/ETH Zürich (Nachlass Karl Hubacher).

knowledge of languages enabled her to translate foreign avant-garde literature into Polish. It is no surprise then that both Simon and Helena Syrkus were convinced of the necessity to found a Polish avant-garde journal as a vehicle for the diffusion of new ideas. Both were founding members of the journal *Blok* ('Block') followed in 1924 by the journal *Preasens* (latin for 'present').

Although both Helena and Simon Syrkus were active in international avant-garde movements, the CIAM invitation was addressed solely to Simon. The direct occasion to invite him was his participation in the competition for the Palace of the League of Nations organized in Geneva in 1927. Against the background of Le Corbusier's frustration with the outcomes of this competition –the outspoken modernism of Le Corbusier's project was rejected in favour of a more traditional design– Simon Syrkus' project was judged to be in the right camp

so to speak: it was a design that attracted the admiration of Le Corbusier.⁴

In a self-evident way, Helena Syrkus seems to have followed in the wake of her husband, so that at the time of the first conference of CIRPAC delegates in Basel in 1929 Simon appeared with his working partner and together they presented a plan for a worker's settlement.⁵ In this way, as the essential other half, Helena obtained her entry-ticket into the CIAM. However, while at first she was very much part of the 'Syrkus couple' and in a way stood in the shadow of her husband, from the 1930s onwards she was more or less emancipated within the CIAM and increasingly accepted roles and responsibilities independently from him. Thus she was able to obtain an influential position within the CIAM. She was a member from 1928–57, vice-chairwoman 1945–54 and the co-editor of the *Charte d'Athènes*. She entertained personal friendships with Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius (Fig.2). She saw herself as the chronicler of the CIAM and was interested to research its intellectual and ideological underpinnings. To understand how Helena could obtain such a central position, there are two factors which need to be considered: firstly, her biography and secondly, the specific character of the Polish group within the CIAM.

4 Eric Paul Mumford, *The CIAM discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960* (Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press, 2000), 27.

5 Czerner, Listowski, *The Polish Avant-Garde*, 84.

Helena Syrkus was born Helena Eliasberg in 1900. She studied architecture at Warsaw's Technical Academy but she also took drawing lessons and she studied philosophy at the University of Warsaw, in addition to languages.⁶ So, Helena was many-sided in her range of interests and competences and this defined her professional career. Even if both Simon and Helena had a keen interest in theory, Simon was more of a prototypical architect, intent on creating a built oeuvre. Helena, on the other hand, seemed to be able to translate her passion for architecture into a wide range of activities. As a couple, both Simon and Helena were convinced of the value of modern architecture for society. Modern architecture was for them the synthesis of the arts, aiming to create a new space and a new aesthetic for the New Man. The formulation of this doctrine also meant that architecture was for them a matter of teamwork in which the collective was more important than the individual contribution. This was the modernist paradigm of universality, in which each person was perceived in the abstract, stripped of gender identity. Thus Helena declared that she was no feminist, because architecture was teamwork in which the gender of each participant was not relevant.⁷ However, even if this was their ambition, the reality was that within these teams men were often seen as protagonists while women mostly disappeared into the margins. Helena also had a marginal position but she was still able to exert a considerable influence. This was first of all due to her unconditional belief in Modernism and her support the ideas of both Le Corbusier and Gropius. However, in a more pragmatic way it was equally important that she could make herself 'useful' in various ways. It was the variety of her talents that enabled her to do such essential work as the writing of reports of the discussions held during CIAM meetings, act as interpreter, translate and edit texts. Those were all assisting activities in a way but they also put her in a position where she could exert influence.⁸

However, Helena's role within the CIAM would have been inconceivable without the special position that Poland enjoyed in the network. Within the CIAM, Poland was considered a special case and a fertile ground, because as a new nation state it was in a sense a tabula rasa in which the theory elaborated in the West could be practically applied. Where matters in the West were already fixated and defined, Poland seemed to offer opportunities to realise planning ideas.⁹ However, this in no way meant that Poland faced a smooth process of growing into a nation state. In fact, besides the challenge of forging a population with different ethnic origins into a coherent national community, the country also faced substantial economic and social problems due to backwardness in many regions. At the end of the 1920s, the capital city of Warsaw alone was one of the most densely

6 Czerner, Listowski, *The Polish Avant-Garde*, 283.

7 Maria Lésniakowska, "Simon and Helena Syrkus, Biography," *Culture Place* (2015), <http://culture.pl/en/artist/szymon-and-helena-syrkus> (accessed December 23, 2015).

8 Lésniakowska, "Simon and Helena Syrkus"; Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*.

9 Martin Kohlrausch, "'Houses of Glass': Modern Architecture and the Idea of Community in Poland, 1925–1944," in Rajesh Heynickx and Tom Avermaete (eds.), *Making a New World: Architecture and Communities in Interwar Europe* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 93–105.

and highly populated cities of Europe with more than 2000 inhabitants per hectare in its central districts; also, it was the result of unplanned and uncontrolled growth. In this situation, in which the pressure to solve urban problems was very high, the CIAM became a platform of great importance to Polish architects. The ideas and proposals put forward during the CIAM meetings were of great interest to them as the incentive to opt for new solutions was exceptionally strong. In return, Polish architects gained a certain prestige within the CIAM for their dynamic and intense participation in debates. Also, the radical functionalist plan for Warsaw presented by Simon Syrkus during the IV (fourth) CIAM meeting met with approval and admiration within CIAM circles. For Le Corbusier, it meant a new step in the development of large scale planning methods.¹⁰ The prestige of Poland as an active, militant and open-minded group was an important element that contributed to the rise of Helena within the CIAM.

France: Charlotte Perriand

The designer Charlotte Perriand represents a different type of female protagonist within the CIAM. Where Helena Syrkus was part of a couple, Perriand was an autonomous designer who worked for Le Corbusier: where Helena's passion for modern architecture was mixed with a talent for writing and networking, Perriand was mainly a designer who established a reputation on the basis of her creative work. Perriand's design career was intertwined with the figure of the so-called 'New Woman' who after the First World War gained opportunities that were hitherto unheard of.¹¹ In general, for French women, the Great War was a turning point, with huge numbers of women entering the workforce, often in non-traditional jobs.¹² During the first part of her career Perriand's interest in innovative design coincided with the daring and independent lifestyle of a New Woman. In the spring of 1927, it was her bravado which led her to go to the studio of Le Corbusier to ask for a job. She was by then a 24-year old art school graduate who was bored by the traditional Beaux-Arts designs around her. At that time, Le Corbusier's office was still small, consisting only of Le Corbusier, his partner, Pierre Jeanneret, and the Swiss architect, Alfred Roth. Le Corbusier's employment of Perriand was not without ambivalence. In fact, Le Corbusier was vocal on the issue of women entering the profession of interior design. In the journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*, for example, he criticized women for their 'nineteenth century' taste in design and for their 'lack of an overall sense of order'.¹³ However,

after he had seen Perriand's design of the so-called 'Bar in the Attic' which was exhibited at the 1927 *Salon D'Automne*, he realized that she could provide a substantial contribution to his studio (Fig. 3). What also played a role in this decision was his difficulty in designing a convincing interior. While designers like Breuer and Stam developed the Wassily chair and the cantilevered side chair, and while a company called 'Standard-Möbel' was created in Germany, Le Corbusier still furnished his villas with either Thonet bentwood chairs or with furniture that looked as if it was serially produced but was actually hand made.¹⁴ Also, in the exhibition for the *Weissenhof Siedlung* Le Corbusier had trouble completing the furniture for his houses.¹⁵ He realised that to remain credible in his interior designs he needed an expert. With the help of Perriand, Le Corbusier gained a deeper understanding of, for example, the kitchen, the bathroom and of domestic life in general. He was now able to present innovative furniture, such as the tubular-steel chair. Le Corbusier's busy agenda – Perriand arrived at the studio at a moment when Le Corbusier's practice grew and when he became increasingly involved in competitions and urban issues – guaranteed that Perriand had considerable freedom in shaping interior designs; this also goes for her activities in the CIAM. It is telling that, despite their differences of opinion about modern life and modern interiors, these issues would never constitute a final ground to part ways. Politics did, however.

Perriand's introduction to the world of architecture coincided largely with her ten year-long collaboration with Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret. However, she was not present during the first three CIAM congresses. In her autobiography, which was published one year before her death in 1998, Perriand gives as a reason for this absence that she was 'not yet ready, as I well knew', indicating the formative value that working for Le Corbusier had for her.¹⁶ During the second congress held in 1929



Fig. 3. Charlotte Perriand, Bar in the Attic, Salon d'Automne, 1927. Published in McLeod, *Charlotte Perriand* (©Artists Rights Society).

¹⁰ Czerner Listowski, *The Polish Avant-Garde*, 49–53.

¹¹ Mary McLeod, "New Designs for Living, Domestic Equipment of Charlotte Perriand, Le Corbusier, and Pierre Jeanneret, 1928–29," in Mary McLeod (ed.) *Charlotte Perriand: An Art of Living* (New York: H.N. Abrams in association with the Architectural League of New York, 2003), 59.

¹² Mary McLeod, "New Designs for Living," 11.

¹³ Le Corbusier, *L'Art Décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Crès, 1925), 136–37, now in Mary McLeod, "New Designs for Living," 37.

¹⁴ Mary McLeod, "New Designs for Living," 37.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Charlotte Perriand, *Charlotte Perriand: A life of Creation: An Autobiography* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998), 55.



Fig. 4. Charlotte Perriand, Le Corbusier, Small bedroom of Equipment for a dwelling as an example of the 14 square meter cell, published in 1931 by Le Corbusier in the journal *Plan*. Published in McLeod, *Charlotte Perriand* (©Artists Rights Society).

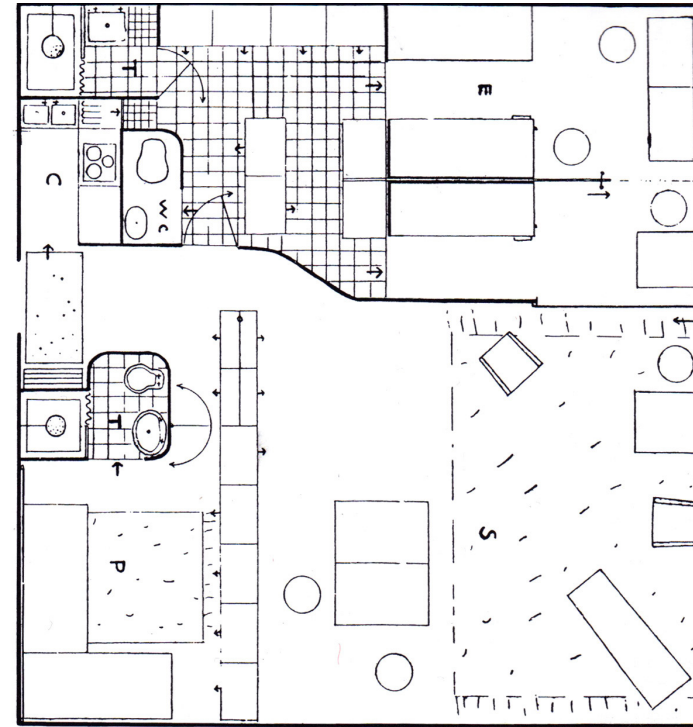


Fig. 5. Charlotte Perriand, Le Corbusier, Jeanneret, Apartment for a couple with three, four, five, six children (as part of the plans for Radiant City), 1930. Published in McLeod, *Charlotte Perriand* (©Artists Rights Society).

in Frankfurt she did contribute in an indirect way through her work in Le Corbusier's atelier. In line with the theme of this congress: 'Minimal Dwelling', Perriand went through great pains to think of a suitable interior design for a family with children who had to live in a very small home (Figs. 4 and 5).

The French CIAM group was highly international –reflecting the multicultural metropolis that Paris was at the time– but also slightly chaotic and tainted by internal dissent.¹⁷ The French architectural avant-garde at this time was highly organized but at the same time not a unified front. The first French CIAM group largely coincided with another group of progressive architects: the Union des Architectes Modernes de France. Both groups only had male members: architects like Willy Boesiger, Philippe Jourdain and Pierre Jeanneret were members. It was only after the first group had dispersed that

¹⁷ Evelien van Es et al. (eds.), *Atlas of the Functional City: CIAM 4 and Comparative Urban Analysis* (Bussum: Toth Publishers; Zürich: GTA Verlag, 2014), 148–161.

new recruits, including Perriand, received their chance within the CIAM; this was in the year 1933.¹⁸ Perriand was recruited together with other colleagues from Le Corbusier's studio who, together with architects like Bossu and Nitzsche, had to keep the group running. Le Corbusier himself had little time to engage in CIAM affairs. He was concerned mainly with its general supervision and direction. The organisation of CIAM Five, dedicated to the theme of *Logis et Loisirs*, was one of Perriand's main tasks (Fig. 6).¹⁹

As part of the preparations of CIAM Five, Perriand was present as a member of the French group at the CIRPAC meeting held September 1936 at the castle of La Sarraz. During this meeting, it was discussed that the French and Catalan group would prepare a publication based on the outcomes of CIAM Four and aimed at a wide audience. Also, a provisional program was discussed containing, among others, Stam's functional city analysis of Berlin.²⁰ However, in January 1937 Le Corbu, Jeanneret, Perriand, Sert and Weismann decided to abandon, without consulting the other CIAM members, the decisions of the 1936 La Sarraz meeting, in favour of a theme which they considered to be more urgent: that of the dwelling. Inseparably linked to this concept was, according to them, the theme of 'leisure'.²¹ This high-handed decision of the French group should also be seen in the context of the difficult political situation in Europe around that time. By the middle of the 1930s, Hitler was gaining territory in Germany and Mussolini felt secure enough to invade Ethiopia. In reaction to these developments, the French Communist Party agreed to form a coalition with other leftist parties, called the Popular Front. This strategy was extremely successful: the leader of the Popular Front, Léon Blum, was elected Prime Minister in June 1936. Against this background, the preparations for CIAM Five, which was to be held in Paris in 1937, were strongly politicized. As Mumford claims, around this time Le Corbusier began to use the CIAM

¹⁸ Enrico Chapel, "France – From Paris to Athens," in: Van Es, *Atlas of the Functional City*, 148.

¹⁹ There is very little reception of the activities of Perriand in the CIAM by critics. In general, the designs of Perriand received wide coverage in the press. However, most critics discussed the objects designed by her – furniture for example or apartment plans. This often occurred on occasion of an exhibition in which she participated, such as the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs of 1928. However, her organisational activities within the CIAM were rarely a theme for critics. See: Mary McLeod, *Charlotte Perriand*, 62–65.

²⁰ Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 105.

²¹ Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 110.



Fig. 6. Charlotte Perriand, with Grete Hubacher and Sert, CIAM IV, 1933. Courtesy of Gta Archive/ETH Zürich (Nachlass Karl Hubacher)

and the upcoming congress to convince the French left wing of his sympathy for the Communist Party: he wanted the support of the Popular Front government for his proposals on among others agrarian reform.²² In this way, the fifth CIAM congress, which was held at the end of June 1937 in Paris, did not continue earlier CIAM approaches that had emphasized analytical rigor and scientific inevitability - see for example the 'Functional City' exhibition organized in Amsterdam in 1935. Instead, a theme was chosen that was in line with the policies and ideals of the Popular Front: what was now at stake was city planning as the blueprint for a balanced society.²³ A more broad-based appeal to the masses was made, and leisure-time possibilities were perceived as an integral part of these needs. Concretely, the program of CIAM Five consisted of a large number of speakers: three main talks and an extensive number of 'interventions and communications.' Perriand was involved in the organisation of these talks.²⁴ The end of CIAM Five coincided with the inauguration of the *Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux* in July 1937. It was Perriand's task to design the interior decoration of the Pavillon, which consisted of a blue, white and red canvas tent, with an interior steel framework and adorned with political slogans and photomontage murals. It was also Perriand's task to design its exhibition, dedicated to the ideas of the CIAM.²⁵

During the first years of her CIAM activities, Perriand was still fully loyal to Le Corbusier. In 1934, for example, Perriand took the initiative to write a letter to the French CIAM group in which she complained about her colleague André Lurçat, who was also a French CIAM member. During a Soviet conference on Western Architecture organized in January 1934, Lurçat had denounced Le Corbusier as a capitalist architect, perhaps even a fascist. Perriand was worried that Lurçat's statements would threaten the unity of the French group.²⁶ Later on, the unity was indeed broken, with Perriand choosing the side of Lurçat and the revolutionaries.

The middle of the 1930s signalled the years when Perriand was most active for the CIAM however, during these years she also gradually distanced herself from Le Corbusier. This departure should be seen against the background of her growing interest in both leftist politics and social issues.²⁷ Perriand started to attend Communist meetings and became engaged in left-wing cultural events. Whereas her taste in design had been up to that point rather luxurious and elitist, she now changed to a more egalitarian and populist style. Up to 1934, Perriand's agenda was still on a par with that of Le Corbusier who himself had become increasingly involved with social and political issues,

22 Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 103.

23 Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 110.

24 Ibid.

25 It was, as Mumford, states, a 'low-budget shrine to the CIAM....' presenting what was labelled as the CIAM-CIRPAC 'Resolutions of the Athens Congress' of 1933. Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 115.

26 Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 93.

27 Danilo Udovicki-Selb, "'C'était dans l'air du temps', Charlotte Perriand and the Popular Front," in McLeod (ed.), *Charlotte Perriand*, 69–89.

embracing a small nonconformist movement called Regional Syndicalism.²⁸ However, increasingly Perriand's commitment to reform extended beyond Le Corbusier's political position. She produced independent designs with the goal of awakening both her colleagues and the public to urban poverty and suffering. Perriand also started to write Marxist articles; in January 1935, for example, she wrote a Marxist critique of current dwelling for the magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*.²⁹

The years leading to the fifth CIAM congress in 1937 saw a deepening of the conflict between Le Corbusier and the younger, Marxist inspired generation. Illustrative of the widening gap between Le Corbusier and Charlotte Perriand was a conflict about the *Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux* exposed at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et des Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* which was organised in the same year as CIAM Five, in 1937.³⁰ In 1934, Le Corbusier decided the French CIAM group would also participate in the international exposition. Perriand became responsible for the organisation of a collective show of the CIAM group. Inspired by her left-wing commitment, Perriand suggested to Le Corbusier to bring a group of young Communist designers into the show. Le Corbusier did not have any interest in the ideas of this group but he did see it as a chance to gain the sympathy of the left-wing intelligentsia. It was also a source of free labour to him. Le Corbusier promised the young designers they would be full members in the 'collective' CIAM project and that they would receive a normal salary. However, the designers never received any money or the opportunity to do interesting work. They had been just free labour force. Perriand was outraged with this situation. The gap between her political idealism and Le Corbusier's opportunistic behaviour had become too wide. Perriand decided to quit both Le Corbusier's atelier and the unfinished pavilion. The CIAM history at this point also came to an end for her.

In this way, Perriand had been a member of the French CIAM for a relatively short period, from 1933–1937. Still, she did succeed in exercising a certain influence. During the Frankfurt congress she played an important role in changing the scope of Le Corbusier's designs from a clientele that was well-to-do to a clientele of modest means. She designed the small bedroom of the Equipment for a Dwelling which Le Corbusier presented at the 1930 CIAM meeting in Brussels to illustrate a 14-square-meter unit. She also designed the apartment plans based on that unit and made for bachelors and families with three, four, five and six children, later published in the journal *Plan* (Figs. 4 and 5).³¹ In the second place, Perriand played a role in raising the political awareness within the CIAM. Up to the 1930s, the CIAM had always regarded itself as linked in a somewhat loose way to

28 Joan Ockman, "Lessons from the Objects: Perriand from the Pioneer Years to the 'Epoch of Realities,'" in McLeod, *Charlotte Perriand*, 162.

29 Udovicki-Selb, "'C'était dans l'air du temps,'" 81; McLeod, "Charlotte Perriand's *Art de vivre*," 14.

30 Udovicki-Selb, "'C'était dans l'air du temps,'" 75–76; Van Es, *Atlas of the Functional City*, 160.

31 The small bedroom was part of the model apartment shown at the *Salon d'Automne* of 1929. This was a large apartment for the middle class. In his paper for the 1929 Frankfurt CIAM congress, Le Corbusier used the small bedroom of this apartment as an illustration of his residential cells of 14 square meters. See: McLeod, "New Designs for Living," 64.

the collectivist politics of the left. However, in the 1930s, Perriand reminded the CIAM members of the need to choose sides, rather than rendering oneself available to each power that was willing to modernise. Her clash with Le Corbusier can, in this way, also be regarded as illustrative of a wider discussion within the CIAM.

Conclusion

So, how did Syrkus and Perriand succeed in gaining influence in the CIAM? Firstly, what was important was their association with an established, influential male architect. This literally opened doors for them. Secondly, both Syrkus and Perriand were, at the time of their CIAM participation, passionate Modernists. They considered themselves part of the cultural avant-garde and did not contend with society's conventions. Within the CIAM, Helena Syrkus had the possibility to grow into an autonomous role, based on her non-architectural qualities. Syrkus displayed intellectual qualities and was interested in the ideology of the Modern Movement. For Perriand the situation was different: as a designer working for Le Corbusier, loyalty to the boss always played a role. However, even in this limited space, Perriand succeeded in leaving a mark.

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