Various commentators had paid attention to visitors and their experience at exhibitions already at the end of the nineteenth century. They often pointed to the ever-increasing size of these events which prevented visitors from meaningfully inspecting the exhibition grounds.[11] As early as 1880, the German professor of mechanical technology Egbert Hoyer introduced the term "exhibition fatigue" [Ausstellungsmüdigkeit], which he used to describe a feeling from the abundance of great exhibitions and from a visit to each of these overwhelming events with thousands of exhibits.[12] Later exhibition critics agreed that such a state caused by prolonged exertion and exposure to displayed objects can lead to information overload, distraction, limited cognitive capacity and higher selectiveness of what to view or visit.[13] By the First World War, the end of the exhibitions era was discussed and a move away from these large enterprises suggested.[14] Yet the war changed that and brought a renewed need and eagerness for large exhibitions which, as was believed, could help political, cultural and social recovery, while also engaging the visitor.

Contemplating exhibition spaces

After the First World War, exhibition design became a more self-aware activity for many architects across Europe. Designers, architects and visual artists like Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, László Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer and El Lissitzky, linked to the Bauhaus, were engaged in rethinking exhibition spaces.[15] Their work was reflected in Czechoslovakia, where individual designers, organizations and schools established exchanges with the Bauhaus.[16] Some of

11 Alexander C. T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities. Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 211.

12 Egbert Hoyer, "Über die heutige Praxis der Ausstellungen," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Volkswirtschaft* 1 (1880): 16–23. Quoted in Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, 210–11.

13 Cf. for example Stephen Bitgood, "Museum Fatigue: A Critical Review," *Visitor Studies* 12, no. 2 (2009): 93–111; Stephen Bitgood, "When is 'Museum Fatigue' not Fatigue?" *Curator: The Museum Journal* 52 (2009): 193–202; Gareth Davey, "What is Museum Fatigue?" *Visitor Studies Today* 8 no. 3 (2005): 17–21; Benjamin Gilman, "Museum Fatigue," *Scientific Monthly* 12 (1916): 67–74.

14 A. Anderson, "The Paris Exhibition and Some of its Buildings," *Architectural Review* 7 (1900): 29–37; George Collins Levey, "Exhibition," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 9, 13th ed. (London: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1926), 67–71; cf. Geppert, 215.

15 Olivier Lugon, "Dynamic Paths of Though: Exhibition Design, Photography and Circulation in the Work of Herbert Bayer," in *Cinema beyond Film: Media Epistemology in the Modern Era*, eds. François Albera and Maria Tortajada (Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 118.

16 Markéta Svobodová, *Bauhaus a Československo 1919–1938: studenti, koncepty, kontakty. The Bauhaus and Czechoslovakia 1919–1938: Students, Concepts, Contacts* (Prague: Kant, 2016); Nicholas Sawicki, "Czechoslovakia: Bauhaus Students and Associates," *Centropa* 3 no.1 (2003): 27–40; Leo Kohut, "Bauhaus. Un-

the ideas also made their way into the Czechoslovak pavilion in 1937 and therefore merit a short overview.

El Lissitzky was particularly active in designing exhibition spaces, especially in Germany, and started considering the effects that exhibition space had on the visitors. The static, inactive onlooker was to be surpassed by an active viewer, whose activity, however, was not left to chance and was regulated by interior design.[17] El Lissitzky developed these ideas in Proun rooms [Prounenraum], or demonstration rooms, which were installations of various materials that included for instance paint, wood, or foil, developed between 1919 and 1927. They had to be experienced spatially, El Lissitzky believed, giving the visitor an active role.[18] Alan C. Birnholz has placed these attempts at inciting active participation of the visitor to the Russian devotional traditions of physical and emotional interactions with icons as well as the performativity of Jewish rituals.[19] Active participation in festivals, public celebrations and pageants, which brought art into the streets, was also an important input for the Russian avant-garde. What these events share with exhibition design is the need to direct large masses of people, make them visually engaging and attract their attention.

El Lissitzky developed his innovative approach further, for example, in the Great Berlin Art Exhibition in 1923 and the International Art Exhibition in Dresden in 1926. In the latter, he tried to conceive of the space in a way that did not overwhelm the visitor at once nor brought them "into a numb state of passivity."[20] He intended to make the visitor active with his design and tried to organize the display in such a way that would automatically invite everyone to perambulate in it.[21] "Perambulation," or the way people walk around a space,

garn-Tschechoslowakei. Zur Bauhaus-Rezeption in Ost-europa," in *Bauhaus-Archiv, Museum. Sammlungs-Katalog, (Auswahl), Architektur, Design, Malerei, Graphik, Kunstpädagogik*, eds. Hans Maria Wingler et al. (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1981), 283–287.

17 Alan C. Birnholz, "El Lissitzky and the Spectator: From Passivity to Participation," in *The Avant-garde in Russia 1910–1930. New Perspectives*, eds. Jeanne D'Andrea and Stephen West (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1980), 98.

18 Olivia Crough, "El Lissitzky's Screening Rooms," in *Screens. From Materiality to Spectatorship – A Historical and Theoretical Reassessment*, eds. Dominique Chateau and José Moure (Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 224; Éva Forgács, "Definitive Space: The Many Utopias of El Lissitzky's *Proun Room*," in *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, eds. Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (Getty Publications, 2003), 47–75.

19 Birnholz, "El Lissitzky," 98.

20 El Lissitzky, "Exhibition Rooms," *Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution*, transl. Eric Dluhosch (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1970), 149.

21 El Lissitzky, "Proun Space, The Great Berlin Art Exhibition of 1923," in El Lissitzky, *Russia: An Architecture for World Revolution*, 139.

was meant to be a pleasurable activity, which El Lissitzky also discussed in his theoretical texts, most importantly in *Exhibition Rooms*.[22]

The ephemerality of El Lissitzky's exhibition projects provided an opportunity for experimenting. One of the most discussed designs was for the Soviet section at the International Press Exhibition (Pressa) in 1928 in Cologne with a large photomontage, the so-called Photo-Fries, depicting "The Task of the Press is the Education of the Masses."[23] Lissitzky created the photomontage with Gustav Klucis in Moscow and made use of a dynamic and asymmetrical space design which included unconventional material like cellophane.[24] Even though this approach to space, complicated with movement, letterings and pictures of various sizes, was not adopted in Czechoslovakia completely, the ideas of the unity of space and spectator's interaction with the exhibits were. Lissitzky's theoretical and practical ideas about the exhibition space in general resonated in the work of several Czech designers in the latter half of the 1920s and in the 1930s if not in their realizations, then in many planned designs.[25]

Art and design periodicals in Czechoslovakia regularly published articles by international designers and about international and national exhibitions.[26] Czech authors would also write texts about exhibition design which theorized and reflected on exhibition spaces, looking for possible new directions and approaches. The architect and designer Jiří Kroha (1893–1974) was one of the first in Czechoslovakia to engage with exhibition design. His interest in the display techniques, unity of space, and the spectator overlap with El Lissitzky's attempts which he combined with awareness of the buildings ephemerality. In his article on exhibition architecture published in 1927, Kroha described ephemeral pavilions as "a manifestation of modern architecture," and as structures that, at least, aspired to be such manifestations.[27] Their modernity could be detected in the latest technologies and construction techniques used, and in what Kroha termed "psychology of building."[28]

In Czechoslovakia, debates that considered not only the physical but also the psychological side of exhibition architecture appeared in various articles on

22 El Lissitzky, "Proun Space," 139.
23 Jeremy Aynsley, "Pressa Cologne, 1928: Exhibitions and Publication Design in the Weimar Period," *Design Issues* 10, 3 (1994): 71.
24 Herbert Bayer, "Aspects of Design of Exhibitions and Museums," *Curator* 4, no. 3 (1961): 267.
25 I am deliberately using the adjective Czech, rather than Czechoslovak here, in relation to designers and architects of Czechoslovak expositions because Czechs constituted overwhelming majority in these roles. The reasons for this are explained throughout the book.
26 Articles were published in journals *Výtvarné snahy*, *Typografia*, *Index*, *Stavba* etc.
27 Jiří Kroha, "Několik poznámek k výstavní architektuře," *Horizont* (1927): 99 .
28 Kroha, "Několik poznámek," 99.

exhibitions from this period that indicate designers' growing awareness of the role of such architecture. Pavilions were no longer considered as mere shells for the exhibits; they were means of promotion and propaganda aimed at the "customer." This was a term Kroha used to describe the recipients of the visual presentations put on display either at exhibitions or in more commercial spaces. Kroha was also a renowned designer of shop windows and department stores interiors, which informed his work for exhibitions. Careful thinking about the distribution of information via the objects was therefore essential and cognizant of disciplines which applied the established means of visual communication, like advertising and typography but also stage design.

This translated into looking for new approaches to the organization of space and distribution of objects. Kroha himself pointed out that designers treated the relationship between the exhibited objects and the exhibition space as novel and different from how the object would appear in real life. In doing so, designers should rouse new interest of the visitors/customers in the displays. A chair, a table and a vase thus did not have to be shown in the utilitarian function they have at home; in exhibitions, they can be shown inventively against the conventions and traditions.

Many of Kroha's ideas were reflected in the Czechoslovak exhibition architecture of the 1930s. Moreover, his work for the 1927 and 1928 National Exhibitions in Mladá Boleslav and Brno was an important step in the development of pavilion architecture and design. Yet he himself never designed a national pavilion for an international exhibition; the reason most probably being the fact he stood outside the right circles of influence. Although Kroha was one of the leftist architects who were ardent promoters of socialist values in architecture, he was not considered a member of the avant-garde. For example, he was not one of the artists of Devětsil, a short-lived but significant and vocal association that had an impact on how modern art and architecture were framed in interwar Czechoslovakia.

Kroha's exhibition architecture also received harsh criticism from Karel Teige, the art theorist, art critic and one of the leading members of Devětsil, an important voice of the interwar art world and the Czechoslovak avant-garde.[29] Teige called Kroha's architecture a misunderstood constructivism with its arbitrary forms, ostensibly conceived in the modern spirit and yet alien to rational archi-

29 Mariana Holá, "Teige, Karel (1900–1951)," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2016), doi:10.4324/9781135000356-rem1653-1; Eric Dluhosch and Rostislav Švácha, eds., *Karel Teige / 1900-1951: L'enfant terrible of the Czech modernist avant-garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1999); Rea Michalová, *Karel Teige: captain of the Avant-Garde* (Prague: KANT, 2018).

tectural conception.[30] Constructivism was, in Teige's view, not a simple denial of ornament, adoption of flat roofs, and corner windows which lacked revolutionary perspectives and elasticity.

Teige was one of the most vocal critics of Czechoslovak exhibitions, both national and international, and I return to his critical comments on the content of the Czechoslovak pavilions at both the 1925 and 1937 Parisian Expositions in Chapter Three. He also offered his views on what a successful modern exhibition should look like when he criticized the local exhibition efforts which, in his view, failed to comprehend the very substance of this enterprise. He found a great example of a modern exhibit in the Soviet Constructivist section at Pressa and its "beautifully laid out catalogue" which displayed modern and effective exhibition techniques.[31]

Teige also expressed his disapproval of the national Exhibition of Contemporary Culture that took place in Brno in 1928. It was conceived as a summary of the best achievements of the new state during the first ten years of its existence, for which an entirely new exhibition ground was built with pavilions by contemporary architects like Bohuslav Fuchs, Pavel Janák or Josef Gočár, featuring industries, agriculture, businesses and art schools. This event allowed Teige to contemplate "the art of exhibiting" more generally and conclude that in the Czech context it was flawed. Organizers and exhibitors often forget "that the art of exhibiting is primarily the art of organization, the art of grand plans and clear dispositions, not only the art of window dressing and decorations."[32]

The exhibition overall showed, Teige thought, how the Czechs lagged not only in the art of exhibiting but also in the art of propaganda and advertising.[33] He argued that the unimaginative, unattractive and undistinguished exhibits and installations were the result of the petit bourgeois mentality of the organizers and exhibitors. These would be the most visible and influential individuals and organizations behind Czechoslovak exhibits displayed abroad, linked to the government, key institutions and businesses.

Teige's criticism targeted the Czech regional and national exhibitions for lacking an overall exhibition concept and originality in the display. Although Teige directed his remarks primarily against the Brno exhibition, his recommendations for overall plans and disposition of the exhibits can also be applied to national pavilions at international exhibitions. However, El Lissitzky's ideas,

30 Karel Teige, "Výtvarné umění na brněnské Výstavě soudobé kultury," *Stavba* 7, no. 3 (1928/29): 45.
31 Teige, "Výtvarné umění," 44.
32 Teige, "Výtvarné umění," 44.
33 Teige, "Výtvarné umění," 47.

which Teige saw as a suitable model, could not be fully translated into the design of regional or national pavilions in Czechoslovakia. Here, the educational and commercial motivations of exhibitions took priority over visually impressive installations which would allow a degree of experimentation with design and display, the goal being to lure in random visitors.

On the national level, the messages needed to be as unambiguous as possible, the opposite of open-ended or abstract. While this partly applied to international exhibitions too—the products being shown needed a clear and explicit display—the extent of experimentation with the presentation and setting of exhibits was greater in these contexts. The visual display and its relationship to clear communication of information therefore became a topic debated by Czech designers, theorists, and the bureaucrats involved in the Czechoslovak display.

Three-dimensional graphic design: Ladislav Sutnar

Before the escalation in the debates about the concept of national displays at the Paris Exposition in 1937, new display techniques had been gradually introduced into Czechoslovak presentations. They developed significantly in the way they approached the exhibition space and its relation to exhibits and visitors. The first large pavilions that represented Czechoslovakia as an independent country in the interwar period in Rio de Janeiro in 1922 and Paris in 1925 were experimenting with the exterior of the architecture, but inside they were very much traditionally conceived exhibition spaces with display walls and glass cabinets full of objects [fig.23].

The Czechoslovak pavilion aside, the Parisian Exposition of 1925 could be considered a crucial moment in the history of exhibition design. Some pavilions built here adhered to a more conventional display in cabinets and exhibition rooms and this applied to the Czechoslovak, Austrian or Polish pavilions. Other structures, however, like Konstantin Melnikov's Soviet pavilion or Le Corbusier's L'Esprit Nouveau, were much more innovative in their handling of the physical form, minimalist approach to architecture and ideological content.

It was also around and after 1925 that a new generation of designers and architects in Czechoslovakia started approaching exhibition design as a self-sufficient field of work. One of the most prominent figures was Ladislav Sutnar, a graphic and product designer, designer of textiles, stage sets and toys, who also created marionettes as well as paintings. He was the director of the State Graphic School in Prague and worked as a book designer and typographer for