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## *The culture of architectural design – the ideological basis of modern architecture*

It is common belief nowadays that the development of contemporary architecture was smooth and it originated naturally from the continuity of the development of civilization of societies. That is why industrialization of building which intensified especially after the Second World War and its architectural consequences are erroneously believed to be obvious. However, this would not have been possible without such favorable circumstances as deviations from diligence, designing talent and workmanship in favor of *semi-courage* and grandeur.

The creative capabilities of the pioneers of international modernism reached their pinnacle at the moment when new materials and engineering solutions enabled the development of totally new architecture. The destructions in the south of France, degradation of industrial regions in Germany after the First World War and especially dramatically growing residential needs of the people required building to become a mass industry. It was a problem which nobody could effectively solve at that time.

Modernists grew up when the decor of a typical burgher's house included heavy decorated furniture, plush upholstery and ubiquitous knick-knacks. It can be said that that kind of aesthetics achieved its highest level of development. However, its another form, instead of being an antidote against it, became the extreme opposite of that exaggeration. The authors of modern architecture claimed that it should be universal in respect of aesthetics and functionality because the only right way of building indeed can exist. They excluded all exceptions: *Oslo, Moscow, Berlin, Paris, Algiers, Port Said, Rio de Janeiro or Buenos Aires; it doesn't matter, the solution is always the same as it satisfies the same needs* (Le Corbusier) [1].

The most famous ideological dispute in modern architecture took place still during the development of Britz residential estate near Berlin (1925–1927). Howard's city-garden was divided into two parts "traditional" and "modern". This, however, did not mean at all that the advocates of international modernism came out of the conflict victorious. On the contrary, an assumption bordering on certainty can be made that only huge destruction suffered during the Second World War paved the road for a new, not necessarily better, perception of developed space and different methods of design. What was noticed in ugly architectural experiments by L. Hilberseimer, Ch.-E. Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), A. Loss, M. van der Rohe and others was primarily utilitarian necessity and not beauty and that is why they were universally ostracized even before they died.

The difference between residential needs and conditions before and a little after the Second World War regarded the damaged and lost resources. They were, however, so severe and extensive that they resulted in a dramatic change in social awareness and application of even radical solutions. That in turn resulted in a transformation of architectural thought, basing it on universalism and aesthetic purism as well as special material – concrete. It became possible then to carry out undertakings which earlier had been considered totally impossible. They were often carried out by untrained persons and amateurs<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> From among the representatives of international modernism listed here only L. Hilberseimer was profoundly educated in the scope of architecture; he completed five-year-long studies at University of Technology in Karlsruhe, whereas Le Corbusier at first studied engraving and chiseling at the art school in La Chaux-de-Fonds (1900–1904). He took his first architecture study trip when he was twenty (Austria-Hungary, Italy). M. van der Rohe took his training in a construction and decoration company (1899–1904) and at the age of eighteen he started his internship in an architecture office. At the age of twenty, A. Loos began three-year-long studies in architecture at Dresden Technical University (1890–1893).

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This was the origin of ideas which enabled the natural process of evolution in architecture and urban planning which lasted for centuries to stop.

The aesthetics of concrete extremely quickly became a showcase of the soulless movement in architecture called modernism<sup>2</sup>. It seems that it was supposed to terrify and confuse. Le Corbusier was one of those who especially adamantly glorified his destructive ideas as courage and unrestricted imagination: *Le Corbusier was to architecture what Pol Pot was to social reforms. He felt fulfilled in destruction* [1]. The comments of the representatives of international modern movement were ominous for the post-war development of cities in Europe and around the world. That is why it was difficult to be proud of it.

The aesthetic coherence of works of architecture was based primarily on the apotheosis of functionalism, and the design process as well as its culture was developed into an intellectual revolutionism. There was no escape from the dictates of the representatives of modern architecture: *Enthusiasm is the only way, the source of energy in human machine* (Le Corbusier). It can be said that this is when the first symptoms appeared of distortion of a fluid state in architecture – total philosophy, workshop minimalism, aesthetics of multi-motifs connected even with turpism. However, the canon of “out of the box” architecture which remains in total opposition to the values of civilization, humanity and natural environment, proved extremely catchy. This was happening despite many negative experiences connected with the mono-cultural designs of multi-family developments from the 1930s. Paradoxically, such slogans as *ornament and crime* (A. Loos), *less means more* and *God is in the details* (M. van der Rohe) instead of provoking protest were glorified as expression of creative genius of their authors.

Contrary to the declarations of the advocates of modern architecture, it was dehumanized. Human elements practically disappeared from drawings to prevent impeccably pure, almost platonic built environment. Everything had to be assigned a specific function to suppress any spontaneous interpersonal relations. Chandigarh in India (Le Corbusier) and Brasilia in Brazil (L. Costa, O. Niemeyer) testify to the grim visions and insufferable arrogance.

In communist countries, the contempt for humanity dramatically exceeded words. This was evident in treating history as tyranny which should be rejected, as if nobody knew or created anything valuable earlier. The flat concrete surfaces, bare and abstract shapes perfectly suited the system difficulties. High-rise blocks dominated the structure of urban space in the cities very quickly, aspiring to become everlasting progress, whereas not so long earlier – during the interwar period – such architects as H. Kilus, P. Schmitthenner and H. Rimpl could design innovatively and harmoniously the same time. They did not, however, try to obsessively impose their own will on the

society but they did try to contribute to the civilization legacy of previous generations.

The totally unintentional and therefore the most sincere “homage” that has been paid to date to modernists and their continuators has been paid by mural artists. Uneducated and pauperized dwellers of big-city slums intuitively noticed what a lot of architecture designers tried not to see: namely that they often acted against ordinary people. It was most accurately described by the French philosopher J.-F. Revel: *it is a sign of the abiding strength of the totalitarian temptation that Le Corbusier [and the like] is still revered in architectural schools and elsewhere* [1].

The problem with creative activities of the architect is that they often represent ambiguous aesthetic value and moral aspect. Many historical figures can be undoubtedly considered the most prominent figures in specific historical periods. However, the thing is about their influence on the course of events and not merits. A similar attitude can be noticed among architects today too. As if the essence was not solving inherited problems but considering, with few exceptions, the past an error. That is why many modern projects and designs show that architecture can be both enchanting, sophisticated and soulless. This is best demonstrated by the ideas promoted by the advocates of the *New Bauhaus* school in Chicago, practical experiences connected with Marseille *L'Unité D'Habitation* as well as arcological visions of human habitat (Soleri).

However, it was only in post-modern societies that it was possible to improve the culture of design based on perfection, talent and reliable knowledge. It seems to have great significance in the situation of constant attempt at shortening the time needed to execute investments, primarily in respect of applying optimal design solutions, constant pressure of economic factors and low awareness of investors.

*Today it is the developers who are more and more often the actual city architects. Consequently, buildings must be constructed quickly and inexpensively. Combining those two features can be dangerous* [4].

Such a defective interaction can cause a decrease in motivation of a designer of architecture. This is not far from banality and repetitiveness of solutions designed for anonymous and “standard” users even if the solutions reflect the architect’s anthropocentric and holistic point of view. That can cause serious consequences which can be demonstrated by numerous examples of architecture with completely dehumanized graphic message, which at the same time is in compliance with the latest stylistic trends – minimalism or more catchy conceptual formalism<sup>3</sup>.

However, a lot indicates that the present development of architecture again began to smoothly result from the natural cycles of the development of societies. Fortunately, again it began to assume elements from other realms and more importantly it became exceptionally diverse. It

<sup>2</sup>The term “modern” in fact proved euphemistic as at least one of the main advocates of vernacular architecture in Germany before the First World War – P. Schmitthenner in Staaken Residential Estate (1914–1917) limited the number of apartment types to as few as five and intended to obtain the same living conditions for everybody.

<sup>3</sup>Formal conceptualism as an antithesis of minimalism was based on graphic constellations and multiplication of ornaments. These two styles in architecture were advocated by Swiss designers J. Herzog and P. de Meuron who were considered world class at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

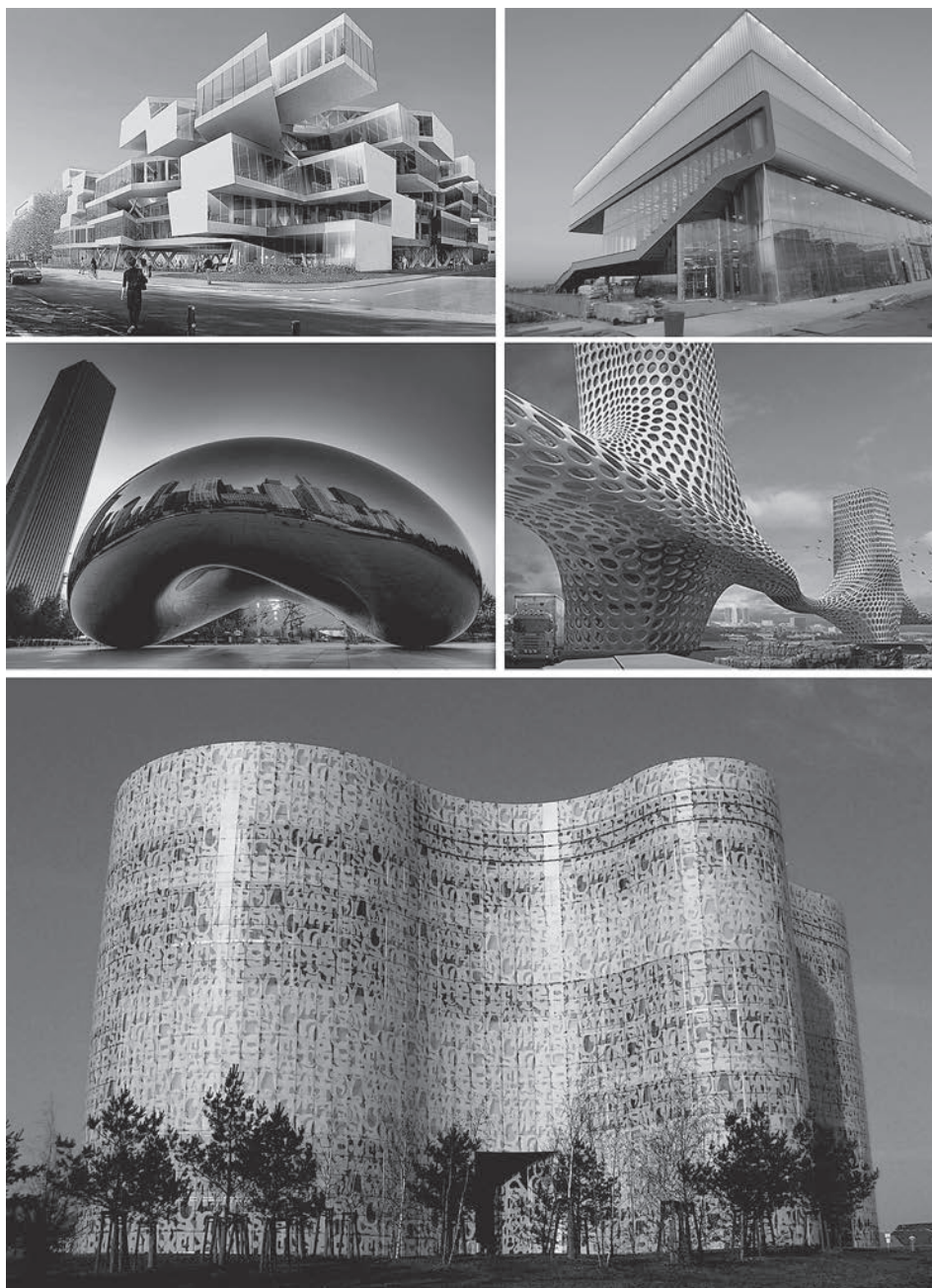


Fig. 1. Actelion Business Center in Allschwill (J. Herzog, P. de Meuron, Switzerland) – top left; source: [www.elpais.com](http://www.elpais.com) (02/02/2010). Renfo Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (Diller+Scofidio Architect, 2006) – top right; source: [www.archdialog.com](http://www.archdialog.com). Cloud Gate in Chicago (A. Kapoor) – left; source: [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com). Residential buildings “The three graces” in Dubai (NOX) – right; source: [www.designboom.com](http://www.designboom.com). University Library in Cottbus – bottom. Source: [www.pl.wikipedia.org](http://www.pl.wikipedia.org)

began more evidently to succumb to fashion, naturally more easily during economic prosperity than during crises. At the same time creative activities of architects, unlike in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (J. Ruskin), demonstrate that it can be both pure art (*I think that artistic expression is the juice which drives our collective soul*– F.O. Gehry) [2, p. 60], ‘engineering’ (*each new design is a series of construction problems that need to be solved* – P. Andreu) [2, p. 60], as well as virtual (*building was designed as a dynamic system with constant computer interaction between users, environment and the building* – L. Spuybroek) [2, p. 134]. This means that it does not have to serve exclusively utility purposes. Furthermore, since constructivism works of art have been created at the point where engineering meets art, and their scale as well as technology is not worse than the scale and technology of architecture structures, for instance famous Cloud Gate in Chicago (A. Kapoor).

Nowadays a great majority of architects present their own style, apply different materials and draw inspiration from other regional factors. Buildings are erected from concrete (T. Ando) or even paper (S. Ban) in figurative (B. Coates), futuristic (Z. Hadid), minimalistic (W. Arets) or sculptural style (F. Gehry). Apart from solving tasks given by the clients, architects try to impart to their works their own identity. The generation of neo-modernists only complements other international designers (T. Ando, T. Ito).

*On the basis of that diversity the following conclusion can be naturally drawn: one cannot talk today about an international style; there is no one way to look at presence. (...) A lot of buildings testify to a great acceleration of changes which take place in architecture. Today's architecture is driven by computers or the will to improve ideas that go back to modernism...* [2, pp. 7–8].

Designing architecture has always been an individual process of creation where the rational assumptions and skills of the architect should play the key role. These exact qualities determine the significance of the design culture among so many manifestations of activities of the architect.

*Architecture should be given back to people. It is connected with a specific place but it also leaves its imprint in the psyche. We like buildings that are noble, sensual, inspiring: those which we keep in our memory (...), as well as cheap architecture, custom made and precise [4].*

### References

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### ***O kulturze projektowania architektonicznego. Podstawy ideowe współczesnej architektury***

Zagadnienie kultury projektowania w architekturze współczesnej w dużej mierze odnosi się do nośnych niegdyś prądów modernizmu. Na początku XX stulecia doszło do gwałtownego przyspieszenia rozwoju ekonomicznego wielu państw europejskich. Pociągnęło to za sobą zmiany na polu kulturowym, a w dalszej kolejności w warsztacie architektów.

Aby móc odpowiedzieć na nurtujące nas dziś pytania o kierunki rozwoju architektury współczesnej należy poddać analizie przesłanki, które legły u podstaw powstania i ugruntowania się międzynarodowego stylu modernistycznego.

**Key words:** culture, modern architecture

**Słowa kluczowe:** kultura, współczesna architektura