

THE SEMANTIC CONFUSION AS TO THE PHENOMENON OF MODERNISM IN ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract. This essay consists of fragments of the chapters from the book *The Truth and Lies in Architecture* being in preparation. The character, the shape and the scale of it do not allow to treat in this place of Post-Modernism, regionalism and some more terms in the above mentioned book.

Key words: modernism, semantic aspects of architecture, philosophy of architecture

The decline of 19th century and the two first decades of the 20th century gave an occasion to a relatively quick revaluation in the perception of architecture. The nineteenth century ended the period of the West World tradition of antique origin, from around the Mediterranean Sea, lasting c. 5000 years, long before the Christian times came. In contrast to the first part of the rough age of the twenties, the human ideas and activities of the science, the art and the technology in the earlier century appeared, lasted and ended for a long period of time in a harmonic mood. Here is our architectural heritage. Though the great metamorphosis, the milestones of our history: Christianity, the geographical discoveries, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, Colonialism, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the belief in the antique order lasted. The Middle Ages brought the break, the Big Break existing for three hundred years: Gothic, Christian from the spirit, resisting the antique world, revolutionary on the large scale, accepted in England for instance up to the Romanticism. Yet, the main stream of architecture lasted *semper fidelis* to the Greek and Roman tradition – to the Modernism times.

The causes for the changes of *status quo* existed and increased in all the aspects of life of societies, in our culture in the time of one-two generations, in science, technology and art, these three disciplines which give us the three factors of architecture: the form, the function and the structure.

The changes of these three factors did not develop in an equal and harmonic way. As usual, the spirit is late in following the matter, and the technology left

the art behind: it was so in the second part of the 19th century. The constructions of bridges, exhibitions, different *Eiffel Towers* were quicker than the ordinary architecture to live in, traditionally decorated. Just the bridges and the towers created the condition for the new, modern architecture.

The progressing loss of the meaning and the role of the country and its misery, the people's migration and the boom of towns with the big growth of population, the progress in medicine and hygiene as the factors decreasing the mortality. All these things together with the universality of education had a big influence on the frequently much bigger demand for flats, according to the growth of places to work in cities. It happened because to the accelerating development of science and technology, the power of industry and trade, also as the result of colonization of the world by the West. The new situation caused the new possibilities for architecture in the field of housing and industry, but also in the new kind of buildings that appeared as the consequence of an explosion of inventions in different fields in our lives. It happened thanks to the development of science and technology.

And what about the artistic, artificial, esthetic, symbolic and also semantic aspects of architecture? The scale of changes in the picture of the new space had to happen in the qualitative, not the quantitative sense. It could not be in the consequence of the cosmetic change of the style as it was for many ages of the antique tradition. The Gothic style lasted for over three centuries; cathedrals were built sometimes at nearly the same time. Now high buildings grow in several months.

The term *Modernism* did not appear all of a sudden as we understand it now, though there is still no full acceptance of what it is. On the other hand, modernity is just hundred years old already or more, perhaps 20-30-50, it depends how to count: to begin from the second half of 19th century or from the first decades of 20th century. To my mind, the quintessence of Modernism is the time between the two World Wars, the times of villas of Rietveld, F.L. Wright, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, later his Unité d'Habitation, W. Gropius and Bauhaus Building. Also the Finnish architecture, modern but just of its own, individual and original, together with the meaning of the master Alvar Aalto, also the early achievements of Dutchmen; we cannot omit much earlier architecture of the British, Mackintosh and Voysey, also Behrens, Mendelsohn, Loos, ideas of Sant'Elia early Poelzig though not early Wright, rather his houses on the plan of the cross from the first years of 20th century. Just in the context of this architecture we can talk about the integration of the form, the function and the structure. Above all, the first quite important document of modern architecture on the international scale, Magna Carta of Modernism, was issued in the year 1933 at the CIAM Congress. This is neither the place nor the character to split hairs-let us leave it to art historians, the more that architecture does not belong exclusively to the sphere of art. There were neither such situations nor possibilities in the history of our culture to define the border between one and another period at

once, day by day. It is always floating. There must always be time of transgression. Perhaps it would be adequate to give the name *Pre-modernism* to this early period of our phenomenon.

Not only is the precious identification of the time of the beginning of Modernism doubtful but also what Modernism really is. It is much easier to define what it is not. It is not the style like the styles which traced their origin back to the antique culture but not just the gothic, a phenomenon in itself, something like the spell of the antiquity, the Great Digression, the Christian break in the pagan tradition. It is the time, like Modernism. In case of Rococo or Art Nouveau we can talk about the style, it was just a change of decorum in the art and lasted for a short time as the parts of longer periods. We cannot term Modernism *the movement* though some decades earlier there was the term the Modern Movement (two-in-one) but it was long ago and far away. We see it now from a distance, from a different point of view. The term modernism has much wider meaning than the style; we can notice different styles in Modernism like International Style, Functionalism, Brutalism and so on. Modernism means more than styles, movements, methods and fashions. We can risk the saying that Post-modernism was a short adventure; the whirl in Modernism itself, which (Modernism) still lasts. It may be adequate to use after Zygmunt Bauman the term *Liquid Modernity*.

Trying to find the recapitulation we can say that what we observe as the tradition in architecture is, once, the tradition of the Antiquity, twice, the tradition of the Vernacular and both ended with 19th century. The turning-point had place in changing of the long-lasting essential values for the new ones.

Exclusivity and egalitarianism. Architecture became egalitarian from the principle for the first time just in Modernism. Earlier the architect built for the privileged: residences – castles, palaces, one-family houses – and churches, not much more. Common people had to be satisfied with vernacular architecture, a cabin and a common church in the country, and by slums in the cities or: the vernacular architecture for the poor and the universal architecture dressed in the antique robes. The modern architects are not only the creators but also the socially-minded people.

The revolution of modernity had the roots in technology. For many ages the changes happened slowly, for a long time, step by step, just smoldering, and suddenly burned with the big flames. All that had to be a lot, more and more; it had to be repeated, producing a lot of copies, more and more blocks of flats, industry halls, houses and fragments of them, up to the *Big Plate*. In totalitarian systems they tried to repeat colonnades in ordinary houses and the people mistook them for palaces; nonsense.

The history of architecture is really the history of architecture as the rule: the sacred and the secular, the church and the town hall, the castle and the palace, also architecture of housing – the castle and the palace too, still the burgher's one-family house more. Much later appeared the tenement-house, burghers de-

cided to earn money thanks to architecture. That is nearly all, the city rose and lasted. All that was in agreement with the antique order: vertically with the column and horizontally with the ground course and the molding. New inventions generated new architectural functions, the antique scheme could not meet the high-tech and the large scale of airports, industry buildings, the Olympic stadiums and higher and higher sky-scrapers.

Finally, the revolution in art could not accept the traditional, archaic form. The principles were always the same; we have never looked back upon the past though never the changes have had so big acceleration having such a big scale like in the modern times. The new knowledge, the new technology and the new art were in accordance with the rules of the history. There was no chance to retreat, it could not be.

ZAMIESZANIE SEMANTYCZNE JAKO FENOMEN MODERNIZMU W ARCHITEKTURZE

Streszczenie. Artykuł składa się z fragmentów rozdziałów z książki pt. *Prawda i kłamstwa w architekturze*, będącej w opracowaniu. Charakter, kształt i skala nie pozwala traktować jej w miejscu postmodernizmu, regionalizmu i innych definicji we wspomnianej książce.

Słowa kluczowe: modernizm, semantyczne aspekty architektury, filozofia architektury

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