

Towards Understanding Visual Styles As Inventions Without Expiration Dates

How the View of Architectural History as Permanent Presence Might Contribute to Reforming Education of Architects and Designers¹

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“... the axe invented by historians to divide ancient from modern architecture never existed in the minds of users of architecture, but only in the minds and intentions of the ‘employees’.”
– Paolo PORTOGHESI, 1980

“Modern architecture is like Esperanto, an attempt to invent and impose a common ‘rational’ language and succeeding only in being incomprehensible and alien to the majority of people.”
– Louis HELLMAN, 1986.

“Scared of being just the design department of the construction industry, [modernists have] created a monstrous delusion of self-importance.” – Robert ADAM, 2009²

¹ This essay adds to the sizable work of many writers who have felt, during the past 50 years or so, that something was seriously amiss with the foundations of the modernist architecture, and who searched for alternatives to the reigning modernist concepts. The present paper has in various ways drawn from them all. I listed many of these authors in the penultimate section of MICHL, J.: A Case Against the Modernist Regime in Design Education. In: *Archnet-IJAR*, Vol. 8, Issue 2, July 2014/A (36-46) (online at <http://janmichl.com/eng.apartheid-ijar.pdf>). – The present text develops further some themes discussed in the following articles of mine: MICHL, J.: On Seeing Design as Redesign: An Exploration of a Neglected Problem in Design Education. In: *Scandinavian Journal of Design History* 2002, no. 12, pp. 7-23 (online at <http://janmichl.com/eng.redesign.html>); MICHL, J.: *The Modernist Idea of Architecture – or Please, Do Not Disturb: Busy Producing Art Historically Correct Expressions of the Modern Epoch*. 2011 (unpublished; online at <http://janmichl.com/eng.modernism-plymouth.html>); MICHL 2014/A (see above); MICHL, J.: Taking Down the Bauhaus Wall: Living Design History as a Tool for Better Design. In: *The Design Journal* 2014/B, vol. 17, issue 3, pp. 445-454 (online at <http://janmichl.com/eng.livingdesign.pdf>).

What is new here are twin concepts from Karl Popper’s late philosophy: his theory of “objective knowledge”, and his concept of “world 3”. As far as I know, they are employed here for the first time with the aim of establishing a realistic philosophically sound alternative to the modernist view of the past. – A shorter version of the present text was read at the International Karl Popper Symposium, *The Written Word*, at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria, in February 2015. – The title of the text was inspired by Martin Horáček’s path-breaking article on what he labelled “the problem of expiration of style”; cf. HORÁČEK, M.: The Problem of Expiration of Style and the Historiography of Architecture. In: Lepine, A. – Lodder, M. – McKeever, R. (eds.): *Revival: Memories, Identities, Utopias*. London 2015, pp. 86-99 (online at <http://courtauld.org.uk/pdf/books-online/revival/7.%20HORACEK.pdf>).

² The three mottoes come from PORTOGHESI, P.: The End of Prohibitionism. In: *The Presence of the Past. First International Exhibition of Architecture*. La Biennale di Venezia 1980, p. 9; MILLAIS, M.: *Exploding the Myths of Modern Architecture*. London 2009, p. 1; and ADAM, R.: “Healing the Healthy.” In: *Building Magazine*, 22 May 2009, p. 25.

1. Does the art of the past dwell in the past?

During the previous hundred or so years, a strange disjunction has emerged between how the public perceives the architecture and design of the past and how contemporary architects and designers do – a disjunction that did not seem to exist during the time of revival styles in the 19th and early 20th century. To put it simply, in the eyes of the general public, art of the past is perceived as a natural part of the present, while in view of the architects of the modernist persuasion – the absolute majority of the profession – the present is defined, somehow, as absence of the art of the past, that is, as the modernist architecture minus the pre-modernist past. So for the modernists, past and present are two separate entities. Because they saw it as their aim to bring about an “authentic” style of the modern epoch, the modernists viewed the aesthetic world of past architecture as an impediment, standing in the way of their plans. There was to be no trace of it in the architecture of the present.

No comparable separation seems to exist in other contemporary art fields, be it music, literature, theater or film. There the repudiation of past stylistic idioms is just one of many stylistic options, while in today’s architecture, because of the modernists’ near-total monopoly on architectural and design education, the dismissive attitude towards the pre-modernist past has dominated the profession.³ The part of the public that does not belong to the art world,⁴ that is, a large majority, simply does not understand why in architecture only a single type of aesthetic idiom – the

modernist one – is considered legitimate, and why, as a consequence, all other architectural styles are excluded from the architectural curriculum. This monopoly of the modernist aesthetic seems to be the main reason why the public and the architectural profession of today do not see eye to eye. Or, to put it less mildly, why the public rather often dislikes, and sometimes intensely loathes, contemporary architecture.

The arguments we have been hearing in this conflict of opinions belong almost exclusively to the modernist side. That is not surprising, since the architectural profession is a closely-knit, guildlike body, and the mainstream media in general embrace the modernist cause. The modernist position – that the past is simply past and the present is simply present – has always had an immediate plausibility that proved difficult to argue against. On the other hand, the common-sense feeling here ascribed to the public, that art of the past is a natural part of the modern present, has been seldom clearly articulated, and is usually limited to short frustrated utterances relegated to newspaper comment columns.⁵ The main reason why a voiced support for the point of view of the public – the principal audience for the visual presence of buildings in public space – has been rare is probably simple. It has been incomparably more prestigious to side with the modernist cause and to applaud the “avant-garde” positions than to espouse the perspective of the “philistine” public.⁶ For contemporary artists and intellectuals to embrace and defend the modernist point of view has been almost an automatic reaction, as if irreversibly imparted during their extended higher education.

³ Robert Adam in his essay of 2011 commented on the “logical mismatch” between the preferences of the architects and those of the public. He pointed out that while “...*traditionalists number at most 2% of the UK profession*”, repeated surveys indicate “*a public preference for traditionally designed houses of somewhere around 85%*.” ADAM, R.: Progress Isn’t Always Modernist. www.ribajournal.com, May 2010, p. 40.

⁴ In referring to ‘the public that does not belong to the art world’, I take my cue from Ortega y Gasset’s 1925 essay “The Dehumanization of Art” where he cogently argued that the emerging modernist art was really “*an art for artists and not for the masses.*” In the same vein I speak then about “art public”, or “art people” comprising architects and artists and most of contemporary intellectuals, and about “non-art public”, or non-art-people”, i.e. the great majority. Cf. ORTEGA Y

GASSET, J.: The Dehumanization of Art. In: *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*. Trans. Helene Weyl. Princeton 1968 [1925], pp. 3-54.

⁵ However, the notion of a freestanding world of *objective knowledge*, discussed below in section 9 and onwards, seems to give support to that commonsense feeling.

⁶ There are exceptions to this rule, though; e.g. BOGART, M. H.: *Artists, Advertising, and the Borders of Art*. Chicago 1995; CAREY, J.: *The Intellectuals and the Masses : Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939*. New York 1993; CAREY, J.: *What Good are the Arts?* London 2010; HORÁČEK, M.: *Za krásnější svět. Tradicionalismus v architektuře 20. a 21. století / Towards a More Beautiful World: Traditionalism in Architecture of 20th and 21st Centuries*. Brno 2013.

This appears to be the main reason why the common-sense view of the public, for whom the art of the past dwells in the present, has gone undefended. A vindication of that view is long overdue.

2. Modernism is historicist in a special, Popperian, sense

In this paper I attempt to bring the thinking of the late British philosopher Karl Popper to bear on the disjunction described above. I will first clarify the logic of the modernist architectural vision, and its problems, mainly in the framework of Popper's critique of what he called *historicism*, by which he meant a belief in a predetermined course of history. From section 9 on, I will outline Popper's concepts of "objective knowledge" and of "world 3" that I believe suggest a way of mending the aforementioned disjunction.

I take the modernist theory of architecture and design to be based on a historicist belief, one that is in many ways similar to the Marxist concept of historical development, which Popper in his book *The Open Society and its Enemies*⁷ (1945) explicitly criticized and rejected.⁸ To illustrate the implications for human actors, of the historicist idea that the course of history is set, that it has a plot, I provide three exemplifying quotations, two from historicists Karl Marx and José Ortega y Gasset, and one from Karl Popper, who condemned that philosophy.

The historicist standpoint was, according to Popper, pithily summarized in Marx's 1867 preface to *Das Kapital*, where Marx wrote: "... *it is the ultimate aim of this work, to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society — [this modern society] can neither clear by*

bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs." According to Marx, the course of history is, in other words, set. The only right thing an individual can do is to assist, like a midwife, the birth of the new order of things.

In 1925, the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset spelled out the historicist attitude to arts in his essay "The Dehumanization of Art"⁹ where he stated: "*In art, as in morals, what ought to be done does not depend on our personal judgment; we have to accept the imperative imposed by the time. Obedience to the order of the day is the most hopeful choice open to the individual.*"

Karl Popper, distancing himself from such positions, emphasized, in 1957, that for a historicist, "[o]nly such plans as fit in with the main current of history can be effective. (...) Only such activities are reasonable as fit in, and help along, the impending changes. Social midwifery is the only perfectly reasonable activity open to us ..."¹⁰ Both Marx and Ortega y Gasset had in common a belief that a new epoch had arrived, in which an entirely different kind of economic system, an entirely new style of art, even a new man, Modern Man, were historically due.

Popper's critique implicitly rejected what can be called the sequentialist concept of art history and cultural history¹¹, built on the belief that the course of history is predetermined. Popper argued, to put it shortly, that the idea that direction of human history is set, and that men can discern and detect its future course, had its modern roots in an infallibilist view of knowledge, based on the mistaken idea that induction was *the* method of science. His critique contended that the historicist belief was groundless.

⁷ Cf. POPPER, K.: *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. London 1995.

⁸ Here I list some writers who have discussed modernism in architecture in terms of Popper's critique of historicism, and (in the case of Hillier) in terms of Popper's theory of conjectural knowledge: JARVIE, I.: Utopian Thinking and the Architect. In: *Planning for Diversity and Choice*, edited by Stanford Anderson, 8-31. Cambridge, Mass. 1968; HILLIER, B. et al.: Knowledge and Design. In: W. J. Mitchell (ed.) *Environmental Design: Research and Practice*. Edra 03 conference, Los Angeles 1972, pp. 29-3; WATKIN, D.: *Morality and Architecture: The Development of a Theme in Architectural History and Theory from the Gothic Revival to the Modern Movement*. Oxford 1977; O'HEAR, A.: Historicism and Architectural Knowledge. In:

Philosophy, no. 68, 1993, pp. 127-144; WATKIN, D.: Epilogue. *Morality and Architecture Revisited*. London 2001, pp. 139-53. Watkin's book of 1977 was the first to introduce Popper's critique of historicism into the discussion of the modernist historiography of architecture.

⁹ See note 4, above.

¹⁰ POPPER, K. R.: *The Poverty of Historicism*. London 1969, p. 49.

¹¹ GOMBRICH, E. H.: In Search of Cultural History. In: *Ideals and Idols: Essays on Values in History and in Art*. Oxford 1979, pp. 24-59.

Neither the Marxist political leaders nor, ipso facto, the modernist architects, had any defensible reasons to see themselves as instruments of a “historical necessity” as they suggested, because there simply was no such thing as “historical necessity”.¹² According to Popper, the course of history cannot be predicted the way natural science can predict astronomic events such as solar or lunar eclipses. What, in Popper’s view, happens next in any human society depends on the future state of knowledge, and since our future state of knowledge is, in principle, unpredictable (science in his view is a system of not yet refuted conjectures, rather than a body of unshakable truths), the future is also unpredictable. The only thing we can be sure of is that what happens will surprise us.¹³ Neither human history – nor art history – can therefore be seen as a part of a predesigned process, suggested by neo-Hegelian art historians, and taken for granted by key modernist theorists and historians such as Nikolaus Pevsner or Sigfried Giedion.¹⁴ Popper considered such historicist beliefs quasi-scientific superstitions.

3. For our purposes, “periodism” is a less confusing name than “historicism”

In discussing the historicist nature of modernism, it is important to avoid a terminological confusion that might be caused by Popper’s term *historicism*. I will therefore refer to Popper’s *historicism* in gen-

eral, as well as to the *modernist* kind of historicism, as “periodism”¹⁵. My justification for employing a different term is that in post-1940s modernist parlance, the term “historicism” had become an accepted critical (and contemptuous) term reserved for the practice of 19th century stylistic revivals of earlier architecture. All those revivals, results of the politically and economically liberal 1800s, were seen by the adherents of modernism as paradigms of artistic backsliding. On account of its alleged failure to express the “true” character of its own era, the 19th was even branded “a diseased century”¹⁶. The *historicist* label was also later censoriously applied to the work of those architects and designers in the 20th and 21st centuries who eschewed the modernist idiom.¹⁷ Modernists simply saw all “historicisms” as examples of inadmissible “period imitations”.

The reason all such “historicisms” were considered inadmissible was because modernists firmly – but, as we shall see, mistakenly – believed that there was a method of design that was free from the “historicist” approach. That method, of course, was their own periodist approach. Taking their cues from the new, 19th century Hegelian discipline of art history, they saw the history of architecture as sequences of stylistic expressions, each pertaining to a bygone period. They claimed that the modern era, the latest in the historical sequence, had to have an art all of its own, just as each previous epoch supposedly had.

¹² “I guess, indeed, that it is the suppressed sense of our own fallibility that is responsible for our despicable tendency to form cliques and to go along with whatever seems to be fashionable: that makes so many of us bowl with the wolves.” POPPER, K.: *Towards an Evolutionary Theory of Knowledge*. In: *All Life is Problem Solving*. London 1999, p. 61.

¹³ This is an almost verbatim reproduction of Ian Jarvie’s condensation of Popper’s 1968 “Preface” to his *Poverty of historicism*; cf. JARVIE, I.: *Utopian Thinking and the Architect*. In: *Planning for Diversity and Choice*, edited by Stanford Anderson, 8-31. Cambridge, Mass. 1968. p. 12; see also JARVIE, I. C.: *Popper on the Difference between the Natural and the Social Sciences*. In: *Thinking About Society: Theory and Practice*, Boston studies in the philosophy of science ; v. 93. Dordrecht; Boston, Hingham, MA. 1986, p. 76.

¹⁴ Cf. WATKIN, D.: *Morality and Architecture Revisited*. London 2001; and MOWL, T.: *Stylistic Cold Wars: Betjeman versus Pevsner*. London 2000.

¹⁵ In opting for the term “periodism”, I am taking my cue from Ernst Gombrich. At the beginning of his lecture “Styles of art and styles of life”, he uses the word “periodism” as a critical term for conceiving of art styles as expressions of an age. The word seems to be largely synonymous with Popper’s “historicism”. GOMBRICH, E. H.: *The Styles of Art and Styles of Life*. London 1991, p. 1.

¹⁶ Pevsner, in his book *An Outline of European Architecture* (1943), quoted in Watkin 1977, wrote: “...it was a grave symptom of a diseased century that architects were satisfied to be story-tellers instead of artists. (...) Architects believed that anything created by the pre-industrial centuries must of necessity be better than anything made to express the character of their own era.” See WATKIN, D.: *Morality and Architecture: The Development of a Theme in Architectural History and Theory from the Gothic Revival to the Modern Movement*. Oxford 1977, p. 105.

¹⁷ Cf. PEVSNER, N.: *The Return of Historicism*. In: *Studies in Art, Architecture and Design; vol. II, Victorian and After*. London 1968, pp. 243-259.

While the new architecture was to be entirely unlike anything that came before, in one respect it still had to follow – in order to be historically correct – a purportedly fundamental feature of the art of the past epochs. It had to be as aesthetically homogeneous, as distinct from past styles, as those earlier epochs supposedly were.¹⁸ That was why this new, “period-correct” art, rejected the reuse of any aesthetic idioms or features of the pre-modernist past.

4. The problem is not the modernist idiom as such, but its periodism-based educational monopoly

It was this periodist conception of the present, as aesthetically isolated from the allegedly defunct past, which became since the late 1940s the basis of architectural education in the industrialized world¹⁹ – much on the lines of the Bauhaus school of design, which pioneered this approach two decades earlier. Nowadays, there is very little of the periodist rhetoric, but that is only because the periodist perspective has become an unquestioned educational norm. As a result, during the past seventy years or so, practically all Western schools of architecture and design have taught their students only one aesthetic idiom: the modernist, abstract, non-figurative, minimalist language of form. Since contemporary education has confined all would-be architects within this abstract

idiom it has resulted, as one critic cogently said, in “*buildings designed with no reference to the past, except to other buildings of the past that have no reference to the past.*”²⁰

It is important to clarify, however, that the problem has not been the modernist abstract idiom itself. Indeed the minimalist, abstract, nonfigurative aesthetic that emerged in the 1920s²¹ has indisputably become an enrichment of the modern stylistic lexicon. In connection with scores of new industrial products, as well as many types of buildings, it became a welcome aesthetic option. But such appraisal of the modernist contribution would be, I am afraid, deeply offensive to modernists, because it implies that the modernist idiom has been more of a chosen way of *styling* the shapes of buildings and products than something unavoidable, mandated by history, as modernists still believe. Due to their periodist persuasion, modernist architects and designers have been simply unable to accept that even if their new abstract aesthetic fitted many tasks, it did not, and could not, fit each and every one of them. The new idiom could not satisfy every single solution “from the spoon to the city”, as the modernist saying went. That probably was *the* most destructive idea of modernism. Because of the irreducible diversity of aesthetic preferences in modern heterogeneous society, the demand for non-minimalist, non-modernist idioms would never disappear. The new aesthetic could suppress the phenomenon of stylistic diver-

¹⁸ Ernest Gombrich questioned the assumed homogeneity of periods, epochs, ages or eras with the following skeptical remarks, explaining at the same time how the problem of heterogeneity of the modern period was “solved” by the concept of *avant-garde*. “*It is a commonplace, that at any time the stage of history is crowded with several generations of people of infinitely diverse views, influence, power and taste. Here the theory of progress could come to rescue by postulating that those who remain stuck in the past, do not count. The age is identified by the avant garde which alone represents the march of history. It was no doubt this persuasive creed that led to that deification of history which Popper has called historicism ...*” Ian Jarvie in his article on “Cultural Relativism” (1995) is as skeptical of the heterogeneity claims as Gombrich. Jarvie writes: “... *societies and cultures are not homogeneous and integrated. Or, more precisely, societies and cultures are homogeneous and integrated only under certain descriptions. Conformity to custom seldom if ever reaches one hundred per cent. Even a description of a language, the backbone of culture, is a simplification of diversities of usage, vocabulary cluster, and idiolect. The same is true of generalisations about the ideas held in a culture concerning the world and human conduct. No*

society is homogeneous in these matters, and in almost all societies they are the subject of incessant discussion and dispute.” GOMBRICH 1991 (see in note 15), p. 15; JARVIE, I. C.: *Cultural Relativism*. (Written in 1995, unpublished; online at http://www.yorku.ca/jarvie/online_publications/CultRel.pdf).

¹⁹ Though not in the Soviet Union and its satellite states before 1960s.

²⁰ Bill Dennis quoted in BRUSSAT, D.: Dissertation on Modern Architecture. In: *Providence Journal*, Thursday, April 15, 2004 (online at http://www.projo.com/opinion/columnists/content/projo_20040415_15bruss.14347e.html)

²¹ As to the modernist view of the relation between abstract art and architectural aesthetic, cf. HITCHCOCK, H.-R.: *Painting Towards Architecture*. New York 1948; for a non-modernist view, see MICHL, J.: Modernismens to designdoktriner: funksjonalisme og ‘abstraksjonisme’. In: HALEN, W. (ed.): *Art Deco – Funkis – Scandinavian Design*. Oslo 1996.

sity only if the mechanism of supply and demand was dictatorially controlled. In the absence of such controls, the new idiom was bound to become a *contribution* to the pre-existing diversity of styles, and that is what it has been all along.

So in spite of the modernist dreams about an aesthetically homogeneous epoch, stylistic diversity has remained a permanent trait of architecture and design during the modernist reign as well.²² The fact that nearly all large and prestigious commissions in today's architecture are designed by modernist architects in the modernist idiom alone should therefore be seen more as a result of modernism's political clout,²³ plus its educational monopoly, than construed as a sign that now the stylistic pluralism is on the wane. Because architectural education has refused to acknowledge the essential heterogeneity of the modern time, architects and designers who graduated during the past seventy years or so acquired no practical knowledge of idioms other than the modernist one.²⁴ What they acquired instead was a mindset that made the idea of embracing a non-modernist idiom, in a straightforward rather than ironic manner, an almost unspeakable abomination.

5. The allure of the modernist periodism has been its self-promoting and self-serving capacity

Now, how could this persuasion, so obviously ill-adapted to society's pluralist reality, acquire such

enormous staying power? The answer seems to be that it both facilitated and sanctioned the already mentioned modernist aesthetic monopoly. In other words, the periodist belief has shown extraordinary self-serving and self-promoting potential.

My own longtime suspicion of the self-serving nature of the modernist periodism²⁵ was reinforced by Popper's remark on the nature of Hegel's philosophy. In Popper's view, Hegel, the modern father of periodism, deemed man *not* to be a creative agent. Paradoxically, this denial appears to be the key to the appeal of the periodist thinking. What, according to Hegel, ultimately moves man is the hypostasized Objective Spirit, the divine self-consciousness of the Universe.²⁶ In Hegel's view, which modernists embraced, individuals were not creative in their own right, but "only" as instruments of the Spirit of the Period, or Epoch. They were creative solely on behalf of the particular *Zeitgeist*. It was this theory of "world-historical men" conceived as instruments "already formed in the womb of time"²⁷, that provided architects with roles much more attractive than those pertaining to ordinary professionals: those of midwives, channels, mediums, or instruments of the Spirit of Time. In this way, modernist architects participated in developments purportedly designed by History with capital H. In mediating and expressing the plans and intentions of that elevated non-human Client, the modernist architects felt they had not only a right, but an obligation, to jettison the rank-and-file user with his hopelessly "anachro-

²² Cf. HORÁČEK 2013 (see in note 6); POSTREL, V. I.: *The Substance of Style : How the Rise of Aesthetic Value is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness*. New York 2003.

²³ Robert Adams reports that British adherents of modernism succeeded in making the anti-traditionalist word "pastiche" a part of official language of administration when decisions were made about how public buildings should and should not look. As Adam put it, it has become a code word for "modernism good, traditional bad." ADAM, R.: *The Idiot's Guide to Architecture*. In: *Building Magazine*, 2008, p. 25.

²⁴ Joseph Agassi has indirectly commented on the present guild-like architectural education: "It is no accident that the most advanced individuals in our society, the intellectuals, the academics, the members of the free professions, are organized in semimedieval guilds and educated in schools with limited access, where entry to the guild is usually possible only through its educational system. (...) the guild justifies the

school by making schooling essential, and the school justifies the guild by pretending that its leaders produce [quality]." Cf. AGASSI, J.: *The Functions of Intellectual Rubbish*. In: *Research in Sociology of Knowledge, Science and Arts*, vol. II, 1979, pp. 209-227 (225).

²⁵ Cf. MICHL, J.: *Form Follows WHAT? The Modernist Notion of Function as a Carte Blanche. 1:50 – Magazine of the Faculty of Architecture & Town Planning* [Technion, Israel Institute of Technology, Haifa] (10, Winter) 1995: 31-20 [sic] (online at <http://www.janmichl.com/eng.fff-hai.html>).

²⁶ POPPER, K. R.: *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*. Revised ed. Oxford 1979, pp. 125-126.

²⁷ HEGEL, G. W. F.: *Introduction to Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. In: *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 1-107. Trans. J. Sibree. London 1881, p. 32.

nistic” preferences.²⁸ This “jettison pass”, felt to be issued by History itself, is, I submit, the reason for the undying appeal among architects of thinking in terms of periods. At the same time, this periodism-given right to disregard the user must be seen as the main reason for practically all problems modernism has been criticized for.²⁹

6. The form-follows-function “method” was to legitimize a clean separation of present from past

The jettison pass was handily summarized in the three-word slogan “form follows function”, considered by friend and foe alike as the gist of the modernist approach to design. It was coined in 1896 by the Chicago architect Louis Sullivan but came into full use only after the Second World War. The slogan appeared in an article written by Sullivan, where he argued against the earlier revivalist solutions of the facades of new, tall office buildings later known as skyscrapers.

In the article, as a way of introducing his approach to design, thereafter summarized in his slogan, Sullivan stated: “*It is my belief that it is of the very essence of every problem that it contains and suggests its own solution. This I believe to be natural law.*”³⁰ This formulation seems to explain much better than “form follows function” itself, what Sullivan had in mind. He was

suggesting that the aesthetic solutions the architect was supposed to arrive at were simply *inherent* in “problems”, or “functions”. That is, both “functions” and the issuing formal solutions were to be seen as something preordained, or predestined. Such supposedly intrinsic aesthetic solutions, conceived of as expressions of those “functions” were, of course, not to be invented, but discovered. They were to be found in *non-aesthetic* factors, such as construction or production processes, the nature of materials and the practical use of the building, all often loosely designated “functions”. The designer was always supposed to start the search for his formal solutions at a *zero level* – not from precedent solutions, as all architects and designers before modernism took for granted – but from inside those “functions”.

The reason why it is necessary here to put quotation marks around the word function is that “function”, as used by Sullivan, was not a practical, down-to-earth term it seemed to be, but an *other-worldly* notion. No science, natural or social, uses the term function as something that precedes form. If anything is said to have a function, it must necessarily be a function of something that is, or was, there. Even when we think of a completely novel “function”, we invariably think of improving an earlier but unsatisfactory solution. From the point of view of a realistic design theory, Sullivan’s “function” without a form should therefore be seen as an empty word. It

²⁸ In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel temptingly characterized the “world-historical men” – the very opposite of rank and file – as “...*thinking men, who had an insight into the requirements of the time – what was ripe for development. This was the very truth for their age, for their world; the species next in order, so to speak, and which was already formed in the womb of time. It was theirs to know the nascent principle; the necessary, directly sequent step in progress, which their world was to take; to make this their aim, and to expand their energy in promoting it. World-historical men – the Heroes of an epoch – must, therefore, be recognized as its clear-sighted ones; their deed, their words, are the best of that time. Great men have formed purposes to satisfy themselves, not others. (...) They are great men because they willed and accomplished something great; not a mere fancy, a mere intention, but that which met the case and fell in with the needs of the age.*” HEGEL 1881 (see in note 26), pp. 31-33. David Hume’s essay “Of miracles” published in 1748, that is, some 90 years earlier, has a passage that can be read as an *avant la lettre* critique of the self-serving nature of Hegel’s periodist reasoning in the quotation above. Hume writes: “*But what greater temptation than to appear a missionary, a prophet, an ambassador from heaven? Who would not encounter many*

dangers and difficulties, in order to attain so sublime a character? Or if, by the help of vanity and a heated imagination, a man has first made a convert of himself, and entered seriously into the delusion; who ever scruples to make use of pious frauds, in support of so holy and meritorious a cause?” HUME, D.: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford ; New York 1999, pp. 182-183.

²⁹ For a recent discussion of the formalist, unpractical, dysfunctional, and often staggeringly expensive, solutions in a long line of often renowned modernist buildings, see SILBER, J.: *Architecture of the Absurd: How “Genius” Disfigured a Practical Art*. New York 2007; and MILLAIS 2009 (see in note 2); Millais’ book, with its incisive critical analyses of key modernist buildings, constructions and ideas, would make a highly instructive introduction for the first year students of architecture.

³⁰ SULLIVAN, L. H.: *The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered*. In: *Kindergarten Chats (revised 1918) and Other Writings*. Ed. I. Athey. New York 1979 [1896], pp. 202-13.

was a “fantasy”³¹ that made sense only as something pre-designed, that is, as a periodist idea.³² The design philosophy of Sullivan and all later modernists then boils down to a kind of rhetoric, aimed at marketing a novel, purportedly non-revivalist (i.e. “non-historicist”) approach to architecture and design. So the form-follows-function argument makes sense only as a rhetorical justification of the modernist solutions where nothing is left from the pre-modernist precedents.³³ The primary aim of Sullivan’s claim – that forms *follow* (that is, that they *inhere in*) functions – seems to have been to disqualify the 19th century revivalist and eclectic styles as valid aesthetic options by insinuating that the 19th century architecture and design were based on misunderstanding of the most elementary principles of design.

7. Buildings, where aesthetic solutions are understood as expressions, tend to be one-addressee buildings

Since modernists saw their new forms as expressions of various given factors, rather than as solutions addressing the user, this “expressionist” approach resulted in buildings that were, aesthetically speaking, left without human addressees. Or rather, without human addressees other than the modernist architects themselves. That the goal of an aesthetic solution is primarily to captivate the architect himself might, admittedly, be considered unproblematic as all architects, in order to judge their own solutions, are in a sense their own first addressees. But with modernism, the architects became the first and only addressees. In agreement with the modernist dogma, the architect was seen as the only reliable liaison with “functions” and with the “New Epoch”, while the rank and file user, as already suggested, was felt to be something of a nuisance, standing in the way.

³¹ The British designer David Pye was one of the first to point out that the notion of function, as used by designers, was as a hollow term. Cf. PYE, D.: *The Nature and Aesthetics of Design*. London 1978, ch. 1, where appears his suggestion that “function” is just fantasy. William J. R. Curtis, in his widely used course book on the history of modern architecture, comments on Sullivan’s 1896 article and submits that Sullivan “tended to look at the situation in ‘organic’ terms, meaning that the function must have an inherent and specific identity, striving for

This one-addressee kind of design seems also to explain why modernists, while talking incessantly of functions, have had no use for the notion of *aesthetic* function. To be an *expression* has been the only task of the modernist form. This is just another way of saying that modernists have had no concept of audience for their design – architects themselves remained the only important audience. To put it differently, with the theory of forms as expressions of “functions”, and of “the Epoch”, modernist architects ceased to have a use for the user or the public, in spite of the fact that architecture is the most public of all art forms – the only kind of art the public cannot willingly avoid.

8. The prime attraction of the modernist approach was that it made architecture the concern of architects alone

To summarize, the ultimate reasons for the staying power of the modernists’ fairytale-like concept of design aesthetic can be formulated as follows. What was, and remains the prime attraction of modernist periodism is its success in removing mental hurdles that had stood in the way of making architecture the concern of architects alone. The right of the user to have a say in stylistic decisions was abolished in the name of the architect’s higher Historical calling. Periodism provided the modernists with the most august client they could dream of: Art History Itself. With such a dream client (in both meanings of the term) architects and designers became instruments of Historical Forces, now feeling they were operating on a “world-historical” plane. But since the idea of History as *the* true client was hardly more than a piece of wishful thinking, it in reality provided the modernists with a complete *carte blanche* – an aesthetic mentality of free artists, constrained only by the rules of their chosen abstract idiom.

direct and honest expression.” However, he leaves this chimerical concept of function without comment. CURTIS, W. J. R.: *Modern Architecture Since 1900*. London 1996, p. 47.

³² Cf. also MICHL 1995 (see in note 25).

³³ Sullivan considered his own ornaments as independent of historical precedents and would probably argue that, as such, they too were examples of forms following functions.

Because the idea of modern plurality of aesthetic and stylistic choices was seen as illicit and therefore not to be allowed – and certainly not promoted – a logical consequence was the restriction of architectural education to a single stylistic idiom. Periodism, in other words, provided an effective rhetorical defense against the validity of aesthetic demands of people other than architects, designers, artists and fellow intellectuals. Now, the question is whether this entrenched modernist concept of architecture, built on an otherworldly approach to design, and continuing to inform the architectural education, can ever be reformed.

Be that as it may, the first condition for reform is a realistic alternative to the modernist thinking in terms of periods, a revision of the established strict separation of present and past. Here, I believe Karl Popper's late philosophy can be of cardinal help.

9. Popper's term *world 3* postulates the existence of a vast realm of publically accessible products of human minds

Popper's critique of periodism implied, as I tried to show, that the modernist philosophy of design rested largely on a flight of fancy.³⁴ However, his critique, though highly clarifying, did not alone provide a palpable alternative that had bearing on the modernist separation of past and present – a separation which I believe is *the* single nail on which practically all pro-modernist arguments are hanging. It was only in Popper's later philosophy that such an

alternative appeared, one that can perhaps, in effect, cause the nail to give.

This later philosophy of what Popper called *objective knowledge*, or *world 3*,³⁵ represents a truly bold attempt to conceptualize a fact known or at least suspected by, every productive person. Namely, that our human creativity is anchored in, and incessantly draws upon, a realm outside the individual creator's head. Although Popper's conceptualization of *world 3* seems to be in parts sketchy and not entirely easy to grasp (mainly, I assume, because of the profundity of his novel approach), I submit that it implies a powerful alternative to the governing modernist "timekeeping", and simultaneously a more realistic view of the nature of creativity in the field of architecture and design.

The philosophical background of the term *world 3* can be outlined in the following way. According to Popper, in order to comprehend reality, it is not helpful to reduce that reality to just a single principle – whether that of matter or of mind – as was, for example, characteristic for Marx, the materialist monist, or Hegel, the idealist monist. But neither dualism captures, in Popper's view, the pluralistic nature of reality.³⁶ Popper accepts the separate existence of both matter and mind, but in addition to these two realms, he postulates an ontologically freestanding third dimension, *world 3* of *objective knowledge*, a realm of products of human minds that exist independently of their makers. This is the dimension that makes human creativity possible. For Popper, the universe – reality – is in other words better understood as consisting of three ontologically distinct but

³⁴ *Flight of Fancy: The Banishment and Return of Ornament* was the title of an exceptionally incisive book, critical of modernism, written by the US architect Brent C. Brolin; cf. BROLIN, B. C.: *Flight of Fancy: The Banishment and Return of Ornament*. 1. ed.. London 1985.

³⁵ My information on these twin concepts and on their implications is based on the following sources: ECCLES, J. C.: *Facing Reality*. New York 1970, chs. X and XI; POPPER, K. R.: Indeterminism is Not Enough. In: *Encounter* (April) 1973 : 20-25 (online at <http://www.unz.org/Pub/Encounter-1973apr-00020>); POPPER, K. R. – ECCLES, J. C.: *The Self and Its Brain*. Berlin 1977; POPPER, K.: Three Worlds. The Tanner lecture on human values, delivered at the University of Michigan, 1978 (online at http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/p/popper80.pdf); POPPER, K. R.: *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*. Revised ed. Oxford 1979; JARVIE, I. C.: *The Rationality of Creativity. Thinking About Society: Theory and Practice, Boston studies in the philosophy of science; v. 93*. Dordrecht ; Boston, Hingham, MA. 1986, pp. 282-301; NIINILUOTO, I.: *World 3: A Critical Defense*. In: *Karl Popper: A Centenary Assessment*, vol. 2. Ed. by K. Milford – I. Jarvie – D. Miller. London 2006, pp. 59-69 and on CHAMPION, R.: *A Guide to Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (The Popular Popper: A Series of Karl Popper Readers for a General Audience.). Kindle eBooks 2013.

³⁶ Popper lists various objections to his concept of *world 3* by both monists and dualists in POPPER 1978 (see in note 35).

interacting sub-universes, each of which is the result of a singular evolutionary development.³⁷

I will now briefly describe how Popper sees the making of these three worlds. The earliest is the “world 1” of *physical* events, states or processes, or physical things, such as stones or stars or the bodies of animals and humans (or materiality of architecture) – that is, the traditional world of “matter”. Next there emerged the entirely novel biological world of human *mental* states, an evolutionary product that developed from the world of organisms.³⁸ This is the psychological realm of conscious experience – feelings, thoughts, decisions and observations (the traditional “mind”) – that Popper designates “world 2”. Then, through an evolutionary process from world 2, there came into existence a third, again entirely novel, non-biological and non-material realm consisting of *products* of the human mind, such as languages, religious myths, stories, scientific theories, symphonies, works of painting, sculpture, architecture, or feats of engineering. This *world 3* is then conceived as a product of our mental world 2, embodied in the material world 1. The *world 3* objects are “objective contents of thoughts” – objective because they exist separately from our subjective minds and bodies in the form of “exosomatic”, that is extra-bodily, man-made things. That realm of *world 3* objects is what Popper describes as *knowledge in an objective sense, knowledge without a knower, without a knowing subject*,³⁹ or simply *objective knowledge*. This objective, or objectified, exosomatic character of knowledge makes it possible to expose all products of the human mind to criticism – in contrast to our own unembodied world 2 thoughts. As a consequence, objects in *world 3* keep changing as they are rejected, improved upon, recombined and developed further. This explains the rapid rate of the non-biological,

cultural or technological changes, compared to the slow pace of biological evolution.⁴⁰

10. The concepts of *world 3* and of *objective knowledge* rethink the notion of culture – and of human creativity

If the *world 3* objects are different both from the world 2 of human mind and from the world 1 of physical things, however, what kind of existence do they actually possess? What are they, and where are they?

Popper obviously found it difficult to come upon a more comprehensible name than the rather nondescript term *world 3*, one that would be close to established understandable terms such as *matter* or *mind*. He held mostly to pure philosophical terminology, characterizing the *world 3* objects, alternatively, as *objective contents of thoughts*, as *the world of intelligibles*, or *knowledge in the objective sense*, as *abstract objects* (while their physical realizations are concrete objects), as *ideas in the objective sense*, as the world of *possible objects of thought: world of theories in themselves, of arguments in themselves; of problems in themselves, and of problem situations in themselves*.⁴¹

There are, nevertheless, two significant remarks by Popper that may clarify the immaterial nature of *world 3* and help us to see it in more recognizable terms. In one, Popper points out that his *world 3* has much in common with the Platonic world of Forms or Ideas and therefore also with Hegel’s Objective Spirit.⁴² But he immediately adds that *world 3* differs radically from both: it is neither something eternal nor divine, but entirely man-made, just as birds’ nests and spiders’ webs are created by birds and spiders. It is a world 2-independent reality, though the physical world 1 is both temporally and ontologically a precondition of *world 3*.⁴³

³⁷ Popper argued that his postulation of three separate worlds provided a pluralistic approach to reality. Each of these realms could be, according to him, further subdivided, if we so wished. Ibidem, p. 143.

Cf. also POPPER, K. R.: A Pluralist Approach to the Philosophy of History. In: Popper’s *The Myth of the Framework: In Defence of Science and Rationality*. Ed. M. A. Notturmo. London 1994, pp. 130-153.

³⁸ POPPER 1978 (see in note 35), p. 166.

³⁹ Cf. POPPER 1979 (see in note 26) p. 109.

⁴⁰ MEDAWAR, P. B.: *Technology and Evolution*. In: *Pluto’s Republic*, 184-90. Oxford and New York 1982.

⁴¹ POPPER 1979 (see in note 26) pp. 116, 156, 154, 145; POPPER 1978 (see in note 35), pp. 156.

⁴² POPPER 1979 (see in note 26), p. 106.

⁴³ NIINILUOTO 2006 (see in note 35), p. 63.



1. As these contemporary “selfies”, and the picture of crowds besieging Mona Lisa remind us, architecture and art of the past are, at the same time, architecture and art of the present.

The other important clarification is Popper’s remark that his notion of *world 3* is “*very nearly the same*” as the term culture. What is called cultural evolution, Popper says, covers very much the same as *world 3* evolution. But here he again adds an all-important qualification: “*anthropologists are inclined not to distinguish the world 1 embodiments of world 3 objects from the world 3 objects themselves.*”⁴⁴ Culture in the sense of *world 3* then, is not the same as either physical objects of culture (world 1), nor as “cultural” thoughts in

our heads (world 2) as it is often interpreted.⁴⁵ It is something immaterial, though objective, existing outside our heads, out there.⁴⁶

From all this follows an important conclusion: our individual creativity, in whatever field, is always anchored in theories, or problems, or artistic or technological solutions, dwelling in the exosomatic *world 3* of objective contents of thought. Creativity, in Popper’s view, is a *world 3* matter.⁴⁷ A *world 3* of *objective knowledge* provides a way of understanding

⁴⁴ POPPER 1978 (see in note 35), p. 166.

⁴⁵ Popper perhaps reasoned that from seeing cultures as collections of world 1 objects produced by world 2, there was only a short step to conceiving of cultures as *expressions* of the respective cultural periods. That would make products of cultures bound to the place and time of their origin, that is, it would tend to deny the cultural objects their status of objective knowledge. Such view would collide with Popper’s idea of world 3 that takes culture as a shared realm of human

creativity and a common pool of knowledge.

⁴⁶ Rafe Champion speaks about the three worlds as the worlds of “bodies, minds and *ideas*”. Cf. CHAMPION 2013 (see in note 35), loc. 528.

⁴⁷ In this context, Ian Jarvie states: “*The status of creativity as a property in its own right [that is, without the notion of objective knowledge] is highly questionable*”. JARVIE 1986 (see in note 35), p. 290.

human creativity without need for notions such as self-expression⁴⁸ and without explanatory recourse to metaphysical entities such as Spirits of Time, or to supernaturally warranted “functions”. From the Popperian perspective, creativity is a socially defined event in the world of ideas, or of art. That is, in the realm Popper called the world of the objective mind, or *world 3*. What makes a theory a new theory or a work of art an original work of art is the objective relationship it bears as a *world 3* object to other *world 3* objects, other theories and other works of art.⁴⁹

Had Popper been still alive and active today, he would have probably resorted to up-to-date analogies in order to make the concept of *world 3* more widely understandable, such as, for example, “World Wide Web”, “Public Domain”, “Open Source”, or “Creative Commons”. *Creative Commons* in particular might serve as an accessible synonym for Popper’s *world 3*.⁵⁰

11. In the *world 3* there are no zero starting points – everything there is contemporaneous with everything else

For our purposes, the autonomous ontological status of *world 3*, understood as a realm of ideas in the objective sense, implies a radical departure from

the modernist perception of past works of art and past stylistic periods. While modernists saw the pre-modernist architectural idioms as time-bound visual expressions, forever fixed to past epochs, as if copyrighted by their “Spirits”, Popper’s notion of *world 3* implies a permanent presence of all denizens of that world, in a realm transcending time and space.⁵¹ In relation to our problem, outlined in the first section it means that all products of human minds, as intelligible *world 3* objects, are *contemporaneous* with each other. Not only that: as such, they are always contemporaneous with ourselves.

Just as the philosophies of Plato or Aristotle or Hegel or Marx are all alive today, because they exist as *world 3* objective contents of thought,⁵² so are the surviving monuments and artefacts of the past – increasingly so thanks to growing numbers of art books and pictures and photographs and recently through billions of images on the internet. Of course, it is in one sense correct to claim that the pre-modernist architecture is a part of bygone ages. However, it is correct in a sense that is largely trivial. If that was the whole story, how would it be possible that scores of people, at this very moment, take their “selfies” in front of the Coliseum in Rome, or in front of thousands and thousands of other works of art of past epochs?

⁴⁸ Popper’s critique of the theory of self-expression, taken as the key to understanding art, can be found above all in POPPER, K. R.: *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography*, London 2002, chs. 13 and 14; and in POPPER 1978 (see in note 35), section VII. Cf. also Ernst Gombrich’s critique of the idea of self-expression in GOMBRICH, E. H.: *Art and Scholarship*. In: *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*. London and New York 1978, pp. 106-119. Castigating the “expressionist” art historians, Gombrich summed up the problem in this way: “*The art historian who sees the styles of the past merely as an expression of the age, the race or the class situation, will torment the living artist with the empty demand that he should go and do likewise and express the essence and spirit of his time, race, class or, worst of all, of the self.*” (p. 119).

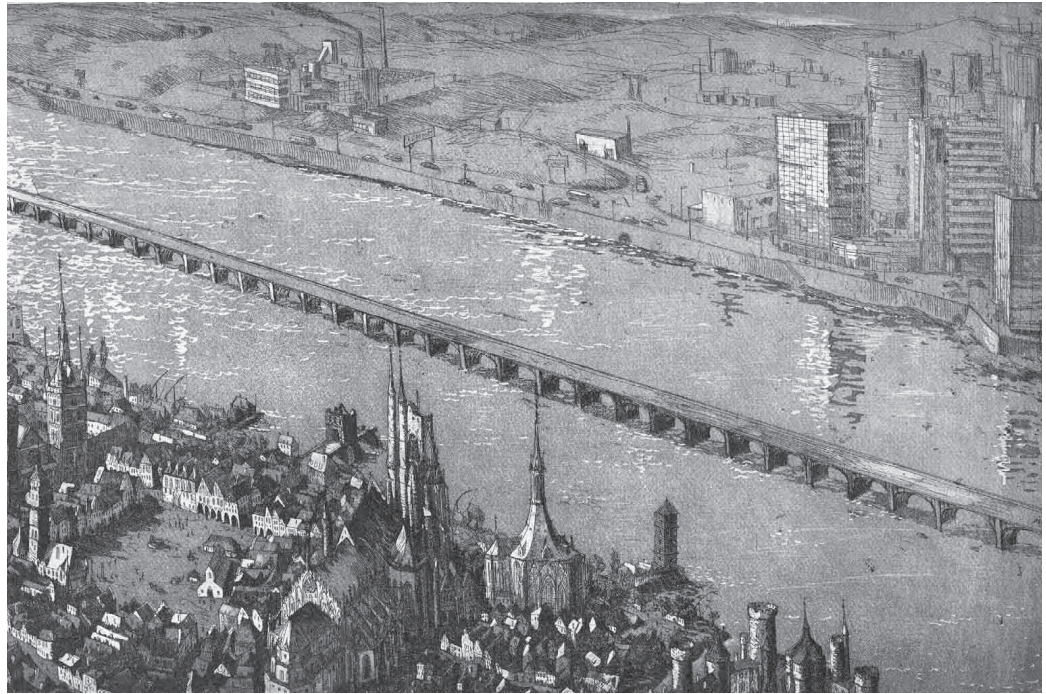
⁴⁹ The three preceding sentences are almost verbatim reproductions of Ian Jarvie’s masterful précis of Popper’s perspective. The consequences of the idea of objective knowledge for the received notion of creativity implies, in my view, an annihilation of both the modernist, periodism-based theory of architecture as well as of the modernist self-understanding. Cf. JARVIE 1986 (see in note 35), pp. 282-301.

⁵⁰ My own proposal for a graspable alternative to the term “world 3” would be *Great Mental Rental*.

⁵¹ According to JARVIE 1986 (see in note 35), p. 295.

⁵² The fact of contemporaneity of all surviving human products, that the notion of *world 3* in my view implies, seems to explain why Popper, in his 1945 book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, discussed and argued with the above-mentioned philosophers as if they were his contemporaries – which they, from the perspective of *world 3*, indeed were. The contemporaneity implication of the idea of objective knowledge also throws light on why Gombrich, the art historian closest to Popper’s thinking, and always critical to the periodist philosophy of modernism, could write, in 1950s, that “... *every picture owes more to other pictures painted before than it owes to nature.*” Cf. POPPER 1995 [1945] (see note 7); and GOMBRICH, E. H.: “André Malraux and the Crisis of Expressionism.” In: *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, 78-85. London and New York 1978, p. 82.

2. In the periodist view of the modernist architects, the past and the present are seen as two separate worlds, and that is why they ought not to be connected in any manner. In his 1976 etching “The Bridge”, the Czech artist Jan SOUČEK (1941-2008) deemed such a conviction preposterous.



The answer, as not only Popper’s concept of *world 3*, but any lowly tourist postcard reminds us, is that buildings of the past are in fact buildings of the present. They are sought after not as piles of stones but as objectively significant *world 3* artefacts. They are a part of the present because they reside in the world of *objective knowledge*. As such they have been contemporary with people living in entirely different eras, contemporary in fact with whoever happens to be alive. Modernist architecture, as well as the modernist architectural education, is, however, founded on ignoring the *world 3* dimension of past works of art in which they continue to exist in the present. So, except for monuments and art works destroyed before the advent of graphic or photographic techniques, or unless never mentioned in literature, all artefacts ever created exist, as *world 3* objects, in the now. For most people these “past” artefacts are as alive as things created today. All this seems to suggest that the idea of *world 3* of objective knowledge, and the perceptions of the non-modernist public, that

sees past stylistic epochs as a part of the presence, are on a similar track.

From the *world 3* perspective, the notion of “contemporary art”, used pragmatically to distinguish the art of “today” from the art of “yesterday”,⁵³ acquires too a novel meaning. All of art history, all art of the past, becomes – when seen from the perspective of *world 3* – a *contemporary* art. To understand this in connection with architecture, it is enough to take a stroll in the center of almost any European town. The modernist practice of seeing expiration dates on every building and artefact style from before the Bauhaus makes sense only when one subscribes to the periodist view, based on the aforementioned fanciful idea that the course of history is set. For any doer, creator, or practitioner unbound by the modernist strictures, the decisive point is not that things were born in the past, but the fact that they are not inaccessibly crag-fast in that past, bound to and circumscribed by the time of their origin and thus rendered forever aesthetically impotent. The

⁵³ “Today” and “yesterday”, except when referring to a calendar date, are endlessly stretchable and contractible notions; they stretch or contract, depending on the problem, we at any

time have in mind. For a short discussion of “present” and “past” as such context-dependent notions, see MICHL 2002 (see in note 1), section IV:1.



4. Popper's idea of World 3, of the enormous realm of "objective knowledge" outside our heads, can perhaps be likened to the world of public sculptures. They exist out there, entirely independent of ourselves and therefore accessible to anybody interested. We can engage with them, among other things, in the witty ways that each person in these pictures chose – relating to them as if they were alive, rather than an inanimate matter. Just like the world of "objective knowledge", the sculptures too offer surprising possibilities, different from their original purposes. Observant, inventive persons can discover such novel dimensions of the content of world 3, and in that way add to it.



the point of view of a non-modernist architect or designer (all non-modernists appear to be instinctive supporters of the idea of contemporaneity of all art), each and every solution may be criticized as functionally unsatisfactory, aesthetically or visually out of place, or simply unfashionable, but not stigmatized as *historicist*, or *anachronistic* or branded as *pastiche* or as something *faux*. In other words, there can be many reasons for finding a formal solution objectionable, but not the one that points out that it hails from a past epoch – which is what the modernist critical arguments against the contemporary non-modernist stylistic idioms invariably boil down to. As already

suggested, such branding makes sense only when one subscribes to the periodist belief that there is an intrinsically correct aesthetic expression pertaining to the modern period and that this correctness can be discovered only by designers and architects that have turned their back on the past.⁵⁴

I submit that in postulating a non-periodist view of culture, the idea of *world 3* offers a philosophically robust platform for a realistic theory of design. Since what we call history – of whichever human achievement – is in the *world 3* perspective a permanently present past, the architect's and designer's working base has come to be radically expanded – in fact

⁵⁴ Hannes Meyer, shortly before he was put in charge of the newly established department of architecture at the Bauhaus in 1927, wrote: "Each age demands its own form. It is our mission to give our new world a new shape with the means of today. But our knowledge of the past is a burden that weighs upon us, and inherent in our advanced education are impediments tragically barring our new paths."

The unqualified affirmation of the present age presupposes a ruthless denial of the past. MEYER, H.: The New World. In: Benton, T. – Benton, C. – Sharp, D. (eds.): *Form and Function: A Source Book for the History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939* (pp. 106-109). London 1975, p. 197.



5. This fairly ordinary but charming public square in a Czech town can be used to show why a central assumption of modernism was deeply misguided. Modernists believed that their novel type of aesthetic idiom, taken to be a “historically necessary expression of the new epoch”, would meet every single design situation, or, as their slogan had it, fit everything “from the spoon to the city”. However, if the task was to design a new public square in a small town, the modernists, equipped only with their abstract, minimalist visual vocabulary, would have no chance of creating a common space with such unassuming, pleasant qualities, as this one. To solve this kind of task, only a willingness to embrace straightforward historical references would do. But for modernists, such solution has always been unacceptable in principle.

from “zero” to infinity.⁵⁵ The illusory, unfeasible zero level starting point demanded by the modernist theory of design (and still largely informing architectural education, though impossible to practice) is now, with the idea of *objective knowledge*, replaced by a permanent access to all kinds of cultural readymades, modernist and non-modernist alike, present as *world 3* objects.⁵⁶

Let me, nevertheless, add again that this aesthetic expansion of the architect’s and designer’s working platform does not preclude or invalidate the modernist kind of aesthetics as such. What it does invalidate is both the periodism-anchored, now seventy years

long educational monopoly of the non-figurative idiom, and its standard periodist defense. In the *world 3* qua *world 3* there are simply no periods to resort to, neither in order to defend one’s own solutions, nor in order to criticize the solutions of others.

13. Future education of architects ought to realign with public perception of permanently present past

The concept of art history, implied in Popper’s idea of *world 3*, seen as collection of works of art that all have simultaneous existence in the now, seems to

⁵⁵ No architect or designer has ever really started from zero. The reason, as Popper put it, is simple: “...if anybody were to start where Adam started, he would not get further than Adam did ...”. All architects and designers, including the modernist ones, always start where others, or themselves, left off – that is from earlier solutions. That is why the modernist zero has always been a “zero”. POPPER 1979 (see in note 26), p. 122.

⁵⁶ The architectural book that is, in my view, entirely periodism-free, and in its attitude probably closest to Popper’s notion of the world 3 of objective knowledge, is Christopher Alexander’s *A Pattern Language* of 1977. Alexander’s work influenced another important contemporary anti-modernist architectural

theorist, Nikos Salingaros. Among non-periodist architectural writers of the recent past, I would like to mention Brent Brolin, Witold Rybczynski and Anthony Sully. The 2013 book by Martin Horáček also belongs here. Cf. ALEXANDER, C., et al.: *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*. New York 1977. SALINGAROS, N. A. – MEHAFFY M. W.: *A Theory of Architecture*. Solingen 2006; SALINGAROS, N. A.: *Unified Architectural Theory: Form, Language, Complexity*. Kathmandu 2013; BROLIN 1985 (see in note 34); RYBCZYNSKI, W.: *Home: A Short History of an Idea*. London 1986; RYBCZYNSKI, W.: *Looking Around: A Journey Through Architecture*. New York 1992; SULLY, A.: *Interior Design: Theory and Process*. London 2012; HORÁČEK 2013 (see in note 6).

vindicate the way the general public perceives pre-modernist architecture. Popper admittedly claimed, as late as in mid-1990s, that greater part of people were steeped in historicist (i.e. periodist) thinking,⁵⁷ and in that he was no doubt right. Nevertheless, as far as the diversity of aesthetic idioms, and the attitude towards past works of art is concerned, most people do not seem to be periodists at all. They tend to take the pervasive presence of all stylistic idioms for granted. Non-art people distinguish, of course, between the chronologically old and chronologically new aesthetic idioms, but in contrast to modernist architects and designers, and the art-public in general, they do not tend to see flashing best-before dates on every pre-modernist idiom. On the contrary, the general understanding characteristic for the non-art public seems to be that all aesthetic inventions and discoveries of the past stylistic periods, including the modernist inventions, are here right now, for everybody to see and enjoy – and use. That is probably the explanation of why the demand for non-modernist stylistic idioms has never disappeared. As against the modernists, who mentally keep to their periodist single-idiom house, the non-art public seems to take the diversity of existing aesthetic demands and plurality of existing stylistic positions joyously for granted. Here a future theory of design, based on the idea of a permanently present past, will hopefully help to realign the future architects' perceptions of past and present with those of the public.

14. Towards the concept of stylistic idioms with no expiration dates

The idea of a *world 3* of exosomatic, objectified knowledge shows above all why the conception of art as expression is misguided. The “expressionist”

understanding of art, a by-product of the modernist periodism,⁵⁸ takes art and culture in general to be a kind of epoch-generated discharge, where validity and usefulness of aesthetic solutions expires with the epoch's end. Such view of validity of styles is almost identical with approaches to fashions, which in fact might enrich our understanding of the nature of stylistic periods.⁵⁹ But style idioms, conceived of as expressions, are seen as something beyond fashions because such idioms are purportedly not results of choices of men in the marketplace. They are products of various non-human factors with volitions of their own, expressing themselves, as already mentioned, through the medium of architects, all those who, in Hegel's words “*had an insight into the requirements of the time [and] what was ripe for development.*”⁶⁰ The problem with such periodist understanding of one's work is that it entails a one-way-street approach to artistic creation, an uncritical take-it-or-leave-it attitude. According to Popper, the expressionist understanding of art is misguided because artists, like everyone else, are engaged in solving problems. In whatever we do, Popper writes, “*... everything depends upon the give and take between ourselves and our task, our work, our problems, our world 3; upon the repercussion upon us of this world; upon feedback, which can be amplified by our criticism of what we have done.*”⁶¹

The notion of a *world 3* of objective knowledge defuses the expression-based, periodist concept of art and offers instead a view of stylistic idioms as visual inventions with no expiration dates. This may solve two problems at once. (1) By offering an evolutionary, that is, non-expressionist explanation of culture in general, and of art in particular, it makes it difficult to conceive of oneself as a one-way creator of final solutions. (2) The concept of *world 3*, in denying the architect, or anybody else, an elevated role as instru-

⁵⁷ As he put it in 1994, they “*believe ... that the good, right, wise politician is the one who foresees what will happen next, who has a gift of prophecy in the realm of politics. But in my opinion this is a fantastic prejudice, a kind of madness. You cannot predict the future. The future is not fixed, it is open.*” CHMIELEWSKI, A. J. – POPPER, K. R.: The Future is Open. A Conversation with Sir Karl Popper. In: Jarvie, I. – Pralong, S. (eds.): *Popper's Open Society After Fifty Years: The Continuing Relevance of Karl Popper*. London 1999, pp. 28-38 (32).

⁵⁸ For the Romantic roots of the “expressionist” understanding

of art, see WOODMANSEE, M.: *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics*. New York 1994.

⁵⁹ Cf. GOMBRICH, E. H.: The Logic of Vanity Fair: Alternatives to Historicism in the Study of Fashions, Style and Taste. In: *Ideals and Idols: Essays on Values in History and in Art*. Oxford 1979, pp. 60-92.

⁶⁰ HEGEL 1881 (see in note 27), p. 31.

⁶¹ POPPER 2002 (see in note 48), p. 229.

ment of some Superhuman Force, provides again, as a consequence, room for the user – that is, for the diversity of the market demands in a pluralist society – that architectural modernism spirited away.

The modernist periodism firmly glued pre-modernist visual cultures to their respective periods, making them illegitimate to reclaim. When they become unglued again – and Popper's idea of a world of *objective knowledge* promises a powerful solvent – it is possible to expect inventive uses and surprising

innovative developments within not only modernist but also non-modernist idioms, until now left largely fallow.⁶² Of course, nobody can know what concrete results might emerge when the Bauhaus Wall⁶³, still standing in the minds of most of contemporary designers and architects, as well as historians, is finally leveled. This may, however, be a fair prediction: more and more, architects and designers are going to understand that all existing aesthetic idioms, not only the modernist one, are in principle equally legitimate starting points for aesthetic considerations.⁶⁴

**Proč lze přistupovat ke stylovým idiomům minulosti
jako k výtvarným vynálezům s neomezenou platností.
Pohled na dějiny architektury jako na permanentní přítomnost minulosti
a jeho důsledky pro vzdělávání architektů a designérů**

Resumé

Hlavní tezí článku je, že existují dobré důvody proč chápat předmodernistické idiomy jako časově neomezené a stále platné a použitelné výtvarné vynálezy, na rozdíl od modernistického názoru, který předmodernistické stylové idiomy chápal a doposud chápe jako mrtvé výtvarné výrazy minulých dob. Tuto tezi autor obhajuje pomocí argumentů, které se opírají o filozofii britského myslitele rakouského původu Karla Poppera.

Text napřed probírá hlavní rysy modernistické teorie architektury z hlediska kritiky toho, co Popper nazval historicismus, tj. víry, že chod historie je předurčen a že její směr jsou lidé s to rozeznat a podle toho správně jednat. Autor chápe modernismus jako přístup k tvorbě architektury, založený na právě takové víře, a modernistickou teorii odmítá jako sled argumentů sloužících vlastním zájmům přívrženců modernismu. Modernistická teorie architektury

⁶² "...architects are divided up into hostile camps. (...) This means that a good idea from one side never finds its way to the other." "If the establishment could make a more welcoming moral and intellectual space for traditionalists... , who knows what each could learn from the other?" ADAM, R.: The Dialogue of the Deaf. In: *Building Magazine*, 11 September 2009, p. 29; ADAM 2010 (see in note 3), p. 42. Both articles are accessible online at <http://www.adamarchitecture.com/publications.htm> .

⁶³ Cf. MICHL 2014/B (see in note 1).

⁶⁴ The prediction and hope expressed here differ, I suggest,

from the ethos of the post-modernist program of the 1980s and 90s. Its aim seemed to be the replacement of modernism with other stylistic idioms – as the prefixes *Post-Modern* and *Late-Modern* seemed to suggest. That was to a large extent still a periodist program. The present text does not propose to replace any style with any other style. What it does propose is a thoroughly non-periodist, or rather anti-periodist approach to architecture and design, where every existing stylistic idiom is taken to be contemporaneous with every other idiom. It proposes, in other words, to treat all existing stylistic possibilities, including the modernist ones, as inventions without expiration dates.

byla postavena na argumentu, že přišla nová doba, a ta že žádá stylový výraz, který musí být úplně jiný než dosavadní stylové idiomy, ale historicky stejně nutný jako byly údajně nutné stylové výrazy minulých historických epoch. Obrovský úspěch tohoto programu mezi architekty autor vysvětluje tím, že nabídl etablované heteronomní profesi novou identitu vykonavatelů intencí mimolidských „klientů“ označovaných jako „Moderní Doba“ či „Historie“. Přívrženci modernismu tak byli zproštěni povinnosti vyhovovat estetickým preferencím všech lidských objednavatelů či uživatelů, kteří preferovali tradiční, tj. nemodernistické výtvarné polohy a řešení před nefigurativní, minimalistickou estetikou modernismu. V důsledku své nové identity se modernisté začali vnímat jako téměř autonomní tvůrci.

Text dále konfrontuje modernistický postoj k architektonické minulosti s Popperovou převratnou tezí postulující existenci objektivního vědění, které Popper charakterizuje jako poznání „bez vědoucího subjektu“, tj. druh vědění, které je na subjektu nezávislé, protože existuje mimo něj, v samostatném, každému přístupném světě. Jako příklad objektivního vědění lze uvést knihovnu s knihami, obsahujícími existující teorie, hypotézy, diskuze, problémy a jejich řešení, ale podle Poppera sem mimo mnoho jiného patří stejnou měrou také všechny kategorie uměleckých děl včetně architektury.

Tato teze vrhá podle autora radikálně nové světlo na povahu lidské tvořivosti a tím i na modernistický postoj k minulosti. Popper vidí lidskou tvořivost jako cele zakotvenou v objektivním světě vždy už existujícího vědění, a bez tohoto zakotvení jako v podstatě nemožnou. (Elegantně to shrnuje jeho věta: „...kdyby chtěl někdo začít od Adama, dál než Adam by se nedostal...“). Klíčovým rysem světa objektivního

vědění je podle autora to, že každá jeho jednotlivost existuje v přítomném čase, současně se všemi ostatními jednotlivostmi; svět objektivního vědění je tudíž neustále přítomný, přístupný a osvojitelný pro všechny, kdo mají zájem si jeho obsahy osvojit. Tento svět je zároveň také kritizovatelný a právě jeho kritizovatelnost umožňuje, aby byl dále tvořivě rozvíjen. Z teze o existenci světa objektivního vědění tedy plyne, že veškerá umělecká díla včetně architektury, ač diachronického původu, existují všechna v synchronní dimenzi, v jediné neustálé přítomnosti. Ve světě objektivního vědění tedy rozdíl mezi „architekturou minulosti“ a „architekturou přítomnosti“ neexistuje, protože obě existují ve stejné časové dimenzi – totiž právě teď.

Pokud tezi o samostatném světě objektivního poznání přijmeme, bude zřejmé, že modernistická architektura nemohla nebýt součástí tohoto světa a že tudíž celou dobu operovala uvnitř tohoto světa existujících teorií, problémů a estetických řešení, jako ostatně kterákoliv jiná tvorba. Modernistické tvrzení, že architektura minulosti je nepoužitelná, protože je uzamčena v minulosti, je proto třeba vidět jako účelovou argumentaci, jejímž cílem bylo prosadit radikálně nový výtvarný idiom. Takový strategicky podmíněný názor na předmodernistickou architekturu nutně kolidoval s tím, jak architekturu minulosti vnímala a stále vnímá velká většina lidí, která modernistický cíl nikdy nesdílela.

Autor uzavírá, že neexistuje žádný rozumný důvod, proč by školy architektury a designu měly i nadále stavět na neudržitelné argumentaci svých modernistických předchůdců a vyučování budoucích architektů a designérů omezovat pouze na jediný, modernistický, výtvarný idiom.