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Beyond Modernism

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BEYOND MODERNISM

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ABSTRACT

Various trends and movements influenced architectural transcendence after Modernism. Well-known history includes European architects calling for human scale and variety and Anglo-Saxon architects adopting a visual language of archetypes, popular taste, and symbolism. In other regions, various emanations and terminology can be found, like Metabolism, Critical Regionalism or Late Socialism. Despite the fact there is a growing interest in this young legacy, many buildings from the 1970s and 1980s are threatened with demolition or drastic transformation. They are facing the same issues as the Modern Movement legacy, being camouflaged at the risk of vanishing. This conference session, therefore, aims to develop and share knowledge of architecture dating from the decades after Modernism. Documentation of various international cases, movements, and developments is considered a first step towards making comparisons, evaluations, and, finally, informing decision-making in regard to conservation.

This paper discusses several themes and theories, aiming to explore a framework for identifying and discussing similarities and differences in their underlying ideologies and contexts. The first theme addressed is pluralism, as defined by Charles Jencks. Pluralism is observed as a socio-political plurality, with various cultural, geographical and regime-related contexts. Additionally, on the building scale, the absence of a dominant ideology led to the combination of architectural styles. A second theme is nostalgia, relating, for instance, not only to classical references in post-modern buildings but also to the increased interest in heritage in the 1970s and onwards. The current interest in the 1970s and 80s legacy can once again be considered a nostalgic longing. In contrast to nostalgia, futurism is the last theme discussed. Metabolism and high-tech have created visions and solutions to current societal and environmental issues.

Although the themes discussed do not provide a complete or comprehensive representation of the building stock under discussion, they aim to foster discussion on its characteristics and underlying ideologies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the decline of Modernism, new architectural ideas and expressions emerged. Rather than adhering to a singular ideology, a range of possibilities and truths were embraced. European architects such as Aldo van Eyck and Team X rebelled against the concept of 'unliveable' cities¹. They called for more coherence between people and things, leading to further emphasis on human scale and variety. In Anglo-Saxon countries, architects like James Stirling, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown adopted the visual language of archetypes, classicist architectural elements, popular taste, and symbolism. Referring to Charles Jencks, this pluralism was perceived as the Post-Modern ideology as there was no dominant cultural style or ethos².

However, both Modernism and its turn-away should not be reduced to visual language or style. At the planning and programmatic level, for example, separating functions as advocated by CIAM's functionalism was abandoned and the intergration of different programmes in urban plots and at building level was promoted. These multifunctional hybrid concepts could be inspired by traditional or indigenous towns or grow into high-tech superstructures. Various other post-CIAM emanations and terms can be found, like Metabolism, Critical Regionalism or Late Socialism. There seems to be no abrupt end to Modernism, but rather a transcendence, an influx of various influences and movements.

The legacy of post-modernism has recently sparked increased interest in architecture, heritage practice, and academic circles. Already in 2008, the DOCOPOSMO project endeavoured to document the Post-Modern architecture of the 1970s and 1980s in Chile. In the Netherlands, the Cultural Heritage Agency initiated a programme studying and ultimately listing 'Post 65' heritage built after 1965. Academic interest is evidenced by the growing number of conferences, such as the recent Young Heritage Symposium in Brussels³.

Despite this trend, buildings from the 1970s and 1980s are threatened with demolition or drastic transformation. Will they face the same issues as the Modern Movement legacy, being camouflaged at the risk of vanishing? In line with the goals of Docomomo, this paper aims to develop and share architecture dating from the decades after Modernism. Documentation of various cases and developments is considered a first step towards comparisons, evaluations, and, finally, informing decision-making in regard to conservation. It can give a broad insight into the characteristics of this transcendence from Modernism into other architectures across different countries and regions. Although this paper is written from a European perspective, influenced by the author's background, it seeks to provide themes and theories to promote the research in an international context. The three themes brought forward in this paper, pluralism, nostalgia, and futurism, do not provide a complete or comprehensive representation of the building stock under discussion. However, they are regarded as topical and relevant as a perspective for understanding the architecture 'Beyond Modernism'.

¹ W.J. Hevel, *Structuralisme en Nederlandse architectuur*. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 1992, 10, 12.

² Charles Jencks, and Maggie Kesler, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, (London: Academy Editions, 1991), 10.

³ Stephanie Parein, and Stephanie de Waard, eds., *International Symposium on Young Heritage (2023-2024) Book of Abstracts*. Brussels: VUB ARCH, 2024).

2. PLURALISM

As Charles Jencks wrote in 1977, while declaring the death of Modern architecture, "the present situation tolerates opposite approaches, and I hope that architecture doesn't prematurely crystallise around a single style and doctrinaire approach, as it has so many times in this century. I prefer (...) that it is pluralistic: the idea that an architect must master several styles and codes of communication and vary these to suit the particular culture for which he is designing"⁴. Did his wish come true, and did architecture become local and differentiated rather than an international style as promoted by the Modernists? Or can we also observe international similarities in the transcendence after Modernism? And is the architecture 'Beyond Modernism' understood as Late Modernism, Post-Modernism or any alternative -ism in different regions and countries?

2.1. SOCIO-POLITICAL PLURALITY

In Europe, Team X played a pivotal role in the transcendence of Modernism. Emerging from CIAM and Modernism, they declared CIAM dead as early as 1959 and advocated for 'The story of a different idea', focusing mainly on housing and habitat⁵. While many Western European countries followed the trend towards a more human architecture, there were also differences. From 1965-1985, new towns appeared in the UK, France and the Netherlands⁶. Although these national programmes shared the ambition to create a counterpart to the large-scale developments of the post-war years, they varied in their planning policies, cultures and the scale of the towns. This led to, for example, differences in the importance of the public domain and the separation of public and private space⁷.

Expanding the scope to Eastern Europe, the influence of political regimes and socio-economic contexts plays a role. While Western Europe had already abandoned the ideals of Modernism, behind the Iron Curtain, state socialist buildings remained the norm up into the 1990s. However, even during this socialist time, counter-movements, such as the 'improvisation' building culture in former Czechoslovakia, resulted in local versions of architectural diversity⁸.

Besides the political regimes at the time of their creation, later and current political developments also influence how buildings from the 1970s and 1980s are preserved and valued today. This applies, for instance, to the late modern building stock in post-Soviet countries. The German research project 'cities. building.culture' examined both the physical changes and attitudes towards the architecture after the Soviet period⁹. In addition to the bipolar post-war context, dictatorial regimes in several European countries determined the direction of architectural developments. These differentiations observed in become even more pronounced when considering global transcendence beyond Modernism.

2.2. ARCHITECTURAL PLURALITY

Pluralism is present in the wide collection of projects beyond Modernism, as well as in the visual language and spatial ideas of a single architectural

4. Jencks and Keswick, *The Language of Post-Modern architecture*, 7.

5. Heuvel, *Structuralisme in de Nederlandse architectuur*, 12.

6. Pascaline Gaborit, *European New Towns, Image, Identities and Future Perspective* (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2010), 34.

7. Ivan Nio, *Moderniteit en suburbaniteit in nieuwe stad Almere, Cergy-Pontoise, Milton Keynes* (Amsterdam: Faculteit der Maatschappijen Gedragwetenschappen, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2016), 11, 289.

8. Petr Vorlík, "Transien - the Principle of Making a Silk Purse Out of a Sow's Ear," in *Improvisation*, ed. Petr Vorlík (Prague: Faculty of Architecture of the Czech Technical University in Prague, 2021), 67, 72.

9. "cities. building.culture - built heritage in post-soviet urban development," cities. building.culture, 2021-2024, <https://cities-building-culture.com>.

10. Wille Heynen et al. *Dat is de toekomst*: sleutelteksten uit de twintigste eeuw (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 2001), 767.

11. W. Fred van Raaij, "Postmodern consumption," *Journal of Economic Psychology* 14, September 1993: 547.

12. Lathine Spoomans, A. Peters Roders, W. de Jonge, J. Janssen, "The Groeikern Policy - Housing typologies in Dutch New Towns," in *The 19th International Docomomo Conference Tokyo Japan 2020+1 Proceedings: Inheritable Architecture: Sharing Values of Global Modernities*, eds. Ana Tardes and Yoshiyuki Yamana, Tokyo: Echelle-1, 2021).

13. Lathine Spoomans, W. de Jonge, D. Czirschke, A. Peters Roders, "Exploring visual language and typologies in Dutch midrise residential neighbourhoods," in *Proceedings of the International Docomomo Conference: Modern Design: Social Commitment and Quality of Life*, eds. Carmen Jordá Such, Ana Palomares Figueres, Ana Tardes and Uta Pottgiesser, Valencia: Docomomo International, tirant lo blanch, 2022).

14. Jennifer Bloomer, "The Matter of Matter: A Longing for Gravity," in *The Sex of Architecture*, ed. D. Agrest, P. Conway and L. Kanes Weisman (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1996), 161-162.

15. Lathine Spoomans, W. de Jonge, D. Czirschke, A. Peters Roders, "Exploring visual language and typologies in Dutch midrise residential neighbourhoods," in *Proceedings of the International Docomomo Conference: Modern Design: Social Commitment and Quality of Life*, eds. Carmen Jordá Such, Ana Palomares Figueres, Ana Tardes and Uta Pottgiesser, Valencia: Docomomo International, tirant lo blanch, 2022).

building or urban ensemble. The decline of modernist ideology gave freedom to create various styles and genres in architecture and arts. Post-Modernism, in all its guises, has also been referred to as 'the circus of prefixes'¹⁰. While Post-Modernism encompasses several movements, the term is often narrowed down to popular, historicising or symbolic formal language characterised by double coding, irony, parody, pastiche, hyperreality and hybrid language. Double coding seeks to make connections between the present and the past, between new techniques and old patterns, and between the elite and the people (Raaij 1993, 547).

This architectural plurality, both in the collection of neighbourhoods and in individual projects, is exemplified by Dutch residential neighbourhoods constructed between 1965 and 1985. These everyday living environments adopt characteristics of, on the one hand, a humanist approach of organic forms and diversity and, on the other hand, a rationalist approach of pragmatism and formal architecture¹² (Fig. 1). The mixing of different spatial typologies and visual styles, showcasing pluralism, may occur on various levels. On an urban level, the neighbourhoods are planned as 'a city within a city', combining various functions and facilities. The public space is often designed as a sequence of enclosed spaces like squares, alleys, stairs and courtyards. On an architectural level, the complexes mix housing types to accommodate a variety of households and architectural archetypes such as gates, colonnades and towers to provide a familiar image and identity¹³ (Fig. 2). Expanding the scope to include other countries and regions, functional programs and timelines could either confirm or contradict the architectural plurality or add nuance to it.

3. NOSTALGIA

Jennifer Bloomer discusses the place of nostalgia and longing in contemporary Western architecture¹⁴. She writes that the desire for the new is a longing for something one cannot have because as soon as the new is materialised, it ceases to be new. Our persistent desire for the new is in itself a nostalgic longing. This circle of nostalgia and newness relates to the architecture after Modernism in its longing to break with 'old' Modernism that aimed for the 'new', while the 'new' Post-Modernism aimed for nostalgic identities.

Furthermore, from the current perspective on this architectural legacy, Bloom's 'new nor old' plays a role. While Modernist buildings in many countries have entered the heritage domain, such recognition continues to be very rare for younger buildings. Yet, we have seen nostalgic revivals of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s in music, fashion, and other areas of design. Could we anticipate that each new era of architecture will eventually be considered as heritage?

3.1. NOSTALGIA LOOPS

A closer look at the aforementioned pluralism in Dutch 1965-1985 residential neighbourhoods in the Netherlands, reveals a complexity of -isms and ideologies¹⁵. The humanist approach of small scale, organic growth

and mixed functions was inspired by traditionalism and 1930s Amsterdam School. The movement of structuralism (with Herman Hertzberger as its protagonist), aiming for adaptability based on highly systemised patterns, referred to post-WWII functionalism. The rationalist approach of pragmatism and formal cube-like architecture related to Modernism. And finally, the Post-Modernism of archetypes, as a symbolic formal language, relates to neo-classicism. Although the materialisation of these previous codes and symbols is referential rather than reconstructive, the longing for familiar historically based images is evident. In the book 'The Past is a Foreign Country', David Lowenthal warns against 'nostalgia for nostalgia' and notes that nostalgia is often for past thoughts, recalling a memory, rather than past things¹⁶.

Besides referring to previous architectural movements in new constructions, the appreciation of heritage also grew after the Modernist era. The year 1975 was declared the European Architectural Heritage Year, which launched new ideas for the rehabilitation of monuments and cultural heritage in urban planning across Europe¹⁷.

3.2. CURRENT NOSTALGIA

Generally, 1970s and 1980s buildings are beyond the status of 'new' but are not yet considered heritage. As stated by Kevin Lynch in 'What Time is this Place', "Preservation is fine for the past that is long past, but yesterday is thought of as something to dump"¹⁸. Does the growing interest in this stock, which is now half a century old, indicate a shift in our perspective, the beginning of longing for this recent past? Results of participatory research from Dutch neighbourhoods from 1965-1985 show that attributes inspired by tradition such as multifunctional city centres and masonry facades, are predominantly viewed positively by residents and professional stakeholders. However, then innovative attributes (e.g. separated infrastructure systems or elevated residential decks) are more contested¹⁹. Further research is required to confirm whether this phenomenon is widespread or not and how it will be affected by the passage of time.

4. FUTURISM

"How to build a city that can adapt to unknown information of the near future? How to build a city that is capable of accommodating the traffic of future times? (...) The scholar of tomorrow will find a solution that will further simplify the lives of the people of tomorrow"²⁰. Although Friedman implied that the architect would become redundant in that process, constructing the future living environment is a task faced by every generation of designers.

Our contemporary challenges share striking similarities with those of the 1970s and 1980s. The 1972 report 'The Limits to Growth' by the Club of Rome already addressed the relationship between economic growth and its impact on the environment and the global challenge this implies. Today once again, affordable housing, land use, and collectivity are the main societal

16. Lidwine Spormans, W. de Jonge, D. Czeschke, A. Penna Roders. 2022. "Exploring visual language and typologies in Dutch midrise residential neighbourhoods." In *Proceedings 17th International Docomomo Conference: Modern Design, Social Commitment and Quality of Life*, eds. Carmen Jordá Sack, Maite Palomares Figueres, Ana Tostões, and Uta Pottgiesser. (Valencia: Docomomo international, tirant lo blanch. 2022).

17. David Lowenthal, *The past is a foreign country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1985), 8, 12.

18. Miles Glendinning, *The conservation movement: a history of architectural preservation: antiquity to modernity* (London: Routledge, 2013), 405.

19. Kevin Lynch, *What time is this place?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 42.

20. Lidwine Spormans. "Everyday Heritage - Identifying attributes of 1965-1985 residential neighbourhoods by involved stakeholders." (PhD diss., Delft University of Technology, 2022).

issues. How can we continue to build the city of tomorrow? And what can we learn from the futurist ideas of the past?

4.1. UTOPIA

The utopia of absolute mobility and interchangeability of constructions and functions was an appealing futurist vision whose origins lay in Modernism but which later found clear expression in built form. The metabolism movement, akin to the aforementioned structuralism, proposed new systems and technology to create a society for free individual movement and development. While previously, the built city and architecture regulated human existence in public spaces with social norms, architecture was now to become a means by which people could control technology and machinery²¹. These ideas from Kisho Kurokawa's Capsule Declaration were realised in, for instance, the Nakagin Capsule Tower (Fig. 3), an icon completed in 1972 and demolished in 2022. Moveable and adaptable individual units with minimal footprint were one ingredient to create a future of high mobility. An elevated three-dimensional structure would be the integrating system, bundling traffic, services and public functions, providing citizen pedestrians with protection from pollution and allowing free movement²².

The technological visions and innovations applied in superstructures with hybrid programs have various forms and identities. Raised megastructures can be identified as 'bridge-buildings', but extensive ground-bound structures as 'neighbourhood schemes' share the same concept of multifunctional programs in a utopian urban structure²³. Their visual language can be brutalist, as in Japanese metabolism examples, or explicitly high-tech, as exemplified by the 1977 icon Centre Pompidou (Fig. 4).

4.2. CURRENT FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

As addressed in the previous paragraphs, the legacy after Modernism contains a multitude of spatial concepts and visual styles, harking back to previous elements, symbols and styles as well as utopian ideas, new systems and technologies. How should we consider this pluralism, in an already multi-layered built environment? According to Kevin Lynch, "the best environment for human growth is one in which there are both new stimuli and familiar reassurances, the chance to explore and the ability to return"²⁴. Faced with the many contemporary challenges in our living environment, such as sustainability, climate adaptation, densification, equality and affordability, we cannot afford to disregard the present stock. Lynch offers design directions to unite the old, the nostalgic, the new, and the future. Accepting and juxtaposing a plurality of histories, structures, and formal languages into a 'temporal collage' is a model we can adopt and continue in current times.²⁵

5. DOCUMENT TO DISCUSS

This paper has emphasised the need to shift focus to the architectural legacy 'Beyond Modernism' because, despite the recent surge in interest, these buildings are now threatened with demolition or drastic transformation. To



Figure 1. Piet Blom, Neighbourhood Kasbah, Groot Driene, Hengelo, The Netherlands. Completed in 1973. Photo © Lidwine Spoormans

Figure 2. Kees Rijboort and Sjoerd Soeters, Neighbourhood Hoptille, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Completed in 1981. Photo © Lidwine Spoormans

Figure 3. Kisho Kurokawa, Nakagin Capsule Tower Building, Tokyo, Japan. Completed in 1973 and demolished in 2022. Photo © Dick Thomas Johnson (2021) via Wikimedia

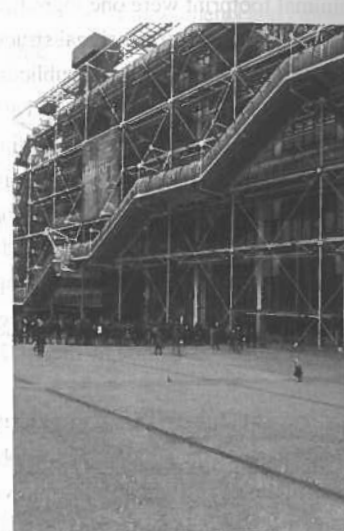
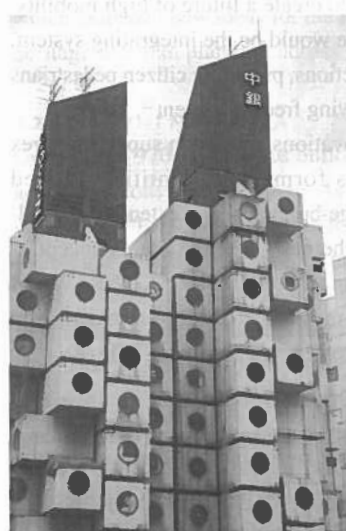


Figure 4. Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano, Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou (Centre Pompidou), Paris, France. Completed in 1977. Photo © bynalcin (2013) via Wikimedia

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prevent facing the same issues as the Modern Movement legacy, which is camouflaged at the risk of vanishing, the first step is documentation of international cases, movements, and developments. The themes and theories discussed in this paper aim to explore a framework for identifying and discussing similarities and differences in their underlying ideologies and contexts. This paper is also a call for action, inviting academics and practitioners to join the network and contribute to this urgent topic. ■

BIOGRAPHY

Lidwine Spoormans is a researcher and lecturer of Heritage & Design at TU Delft since 2011 and has a background in architecture practice. Her research fields include housing renovation, intervention methods, and young heritage. She organized a series of graduation studios on the topic of housing transformation. She is a board member of Docomomo international and MC member of the COST Action European Middle-Class Mass Housing. In 2017, she launched the digital platform www.love80sarchitecture.nl. Her PhD thesis titled "Everyday Heritage - Identifying attributes of 1965-1985 residential neighbourhoods by involved stakeholders" aims to bridge the gap between listed heritage and everyday architecture.

ABSTRACT

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