

## “Superstyles” and Problem of Periodization in Architecture

I.O.Bembel, Scientific Research Institute of Theory and History of Architecture and Urban Planning, Moscow

The author of the article pursues two goals. Goal One consists in the philosophical substantiation of S.O. Khan-Magomedov's idea of the two “super-styles” which the author considers as the two architectural interpretations of philosophical paradigms, including Traditions and Modernity. Goal Two is the overview of the history of architecture and its periodization in the context of the way the second “super-style” replaces the first one.

The author's mission is to consider S.O. Khan-Magomedov's idea of the two super-styles in the context of reconsidering periods in the history of architecture. The history of philosophy is another important issue. Super-styles are convertible into the architectural projections of the two philosophical paradigms: Tradition and Modernity, and each prescribes authentic principles of morphogenesis in the context of major ideological shifts from theism to deism and, ultimately, to atheism. The system of values is the core point: the first super-style, serving as the language of Tradition, is focused on the ideal super-sensual world (Plato's aesthetics, developed by Christianity); the second super-style, serving as the language of Modernity, is entirely focused on the sensual, earthly world which is closely associated with the idea of linear progress. The architectural history appears as a gradual and later as an abrupt replacement of the first super-style by the second one. These universal conclusions help to understand the logic of major processes in the history of architecture and explain the reasons for widespread conflicts between the old and new aesthetics in the historic environment, which are caused by their genetic heterogeneity.

*Key words:* architecture, philosophy, aesthetics, two “super-styles”, Tradition, Modernity, modernism, postmodernism, traditionalism.

Periodization is one of numerous problems arising at this fateful moment in the history of contemporary culture. The traditional timeline is being reconsidered in history, philosophy and other areas of knowledge against the background of global changes. Indeed, the history of painting, broken down into a consequence of styles, has adopted a new breakdown into longer fundamental periods labeled in Western Europe as “old art” (covering the period between ancient times and Impressionism), “modern art” (meaning the period between Post-impressionism and the 60ies of the 20th century), and “contemporary art” (the time frame between the 60ies of the 20th century and the present time) in the English-language

research community, and “l'art ancien”, “l'art moderne”, and “l'art contemporain” in the French-language research community. Their Russian language equivalents read as “traditsyonnoye iskusstvo” (or “traditional art”), “novoye iskusstvo” (“new art”) and “aktual'noye (noveysheye) iskusstvo” (or “newest art”). Evidently, the borderlines between these periods are to a substantial extent conditional and unclear; however, one way or the other, the first so-called “watershed” marks the arrival of modernism, while the second one welcomes post-modernism and the multiplicity of its movements.

Traditionalism is the philosophical school of thought that dates back to the 20th century. It was founded by René Jean-Marie-Joseph Guénon. This philosophical school outlined the major stages in the history of philosophy, which are different from the traditional timeline of names, schools and movements. The history of architecture is still dominated by the styles that consequently replace one another.

The reconsideration of periods in the history of architecture is closely related to the statement about the two “super-styles” in architecture made by S.O. Khan-Magomedov. Its meaning may be reduced to the statement that the history of architecture is not characterized by the uniform and continuous progressive development; rather, classics and modernism represent two heterogeneous “super-styles”. S.O. Khan-Magomedov made this statement, when he was an old man; it has not been elaborated on, and it needs to be proven. This “consolidated” periodization of architectural history may serve as a proof, as it can identify and explain the logic of major processes that underlie the history of styles.

The mission of this article is to superimpose the traditional architectural history upon the “consolidated” Western periodization of pictorial art. The latter can be correlated with periods in the history of philosophy offered by Traditionalism, as architecture has always expressed the ideas that dominate in the society.

Before we initiate our discourse, we'd like to focus our attention on the inconsistency between the way that the term “modern art” is construed in the Russian and Western history and theory of architecture, on the one hand, and in the architectural and philosophical periodizations, on the other hand. As known, the Russian modern art is the counterpart of Western “art nouveau”, “Secession”, etc., while the term “modern” stands for “contemporary” in the West. In Traditionalism, “modernity” means “contemporaneity” interpreted as a system of views or a paradigm, while its commencement is synchronistic

with the arrival of the New Time, brought by Renaissance. Similarly, no one should mix the notion of “postmodernism” in architecture, pictorial art, literature, etc. with the notion of “postmodernity” in architecture. In the first case, we deal with a stylistic movement, while the second one encompasses an epoch or a period that includes postmodernism, although this epoch or period cannot be reduced to it.

Indeed, if we superimpose the traditional architectural history upon the Western periodization, we'll find out that both registered the arrival of postmodernity at approximately the same time. Modernity arrived at approximately the same time for pictorial art and architecture, but it arrived at a different time for philosophy, as this period in the history of philosophy commenced simultaneously with the modern age, or Renaissance. Why did it happen this way?

Let's consider this issue in the most consistent manner. As far as we know, in the course of Renaissance, research and creative efforts shifted from God to human beings. This shift in the human conscience formed the basis for a new philosophical paradigm, the paradigm of contemporaneity, marked by the turning point in the modern age. Obviously, this watershed is quite vague. Some researchers believe that the modern age started simultaneously with the French revolution. Therefore, these events are like links in a chain, one leading to another: they represent the outcome of the ideas that date back to Renaissance; they were intensively developed in the times of Enlightenment and their benefits were available during later periods in history.

Architecture (and, of course, its material stagnancy) was sensitive to these changes. This very moment was marked by the transition to historic styles. This shift in the artistic thought meant that the “world of ideas” (or the source of revelation to be inherited by further generations) was waning as a source of inspiration; this source was filled with prefabricated ideas generated in the past and adjusted to perform new secular and spiritual functions. Humans of the modern age assumed the idea of the rational calculation of beauty, as they had forgotten the Aristotle's idea of the whole being more than the sum of its parts. This change was marked by an important and symptomatic change that consisted in the abandonment of unity of structural and descriptive constituents: superimposed stylizations were mainly decorative.

The order turned out to be a much more universal and appropriate language in the context of rational ideas formulated by deism, than the Christian language of the Gothic architecture; order was successfully implemented both in secular and spiritual architecture and subsequently developed into a universal cultural emblem. Nonetheless, the idea of Christianity continued to nourish and fertilize the new aesthetic pattern. However, secularization was inevitable; it enjoyed explosive development in the days of Voltaire and it caused a succession of atheistic revolutions in the 20th century.

Therefore, the modern age is an extensive period of latent secularization accompanied by the formal preservation of the

old-time pattern of life and thought. It logically ended in the triumph of positivistic and atheistic ideas of the contemporary time. Architecture abandoned the dispassionate canons of academism to leapfrog into Modernism. Having deprived itself of the sacral content of Tradition, it finally shook off the empty moulds of its form.

This time, the history of philosophy fails to notice the change. The reason for this failure remains the same: a secular change in the human conscience turns material. In other words, while Renaissance and modern age were marked by “the mental revolution”, modernism and contemporary times were marked by tangible revolutions as their natural outcomes.

### **The Modern Architecture as the Inception of the Second “Super-style”**

The modernism in architecture is characterized by the backslide to the unity of structural and descriptive constituents within the framework of the new aesthetics, or anti-aesthetics, if it's compared to the way it was traditionally understood by Plato. The new aesthetics meant a horizontal or a provisional rather than a vertical orientation, the abandonment of hierarchical and symmetrical patterns, the empiristically interpreted functionality, the predominance of individuality over canons, etc. Such is the second “super-style”, and its geometry is based on the ideas and images which are completely different from those typical for Tradition. The founding idea consists in the theory of the linear progress: a better tomorrow as an alternative to the heavenly paradise has turned into the guiding benchmark that shapes the features of a formal language.

Another important regularity is worth mentioning: if pre-modernist styles of different periods co-existed in harmony and frequently stayed side by side in outstanding ensembles, in contemporary times, the co-existence of old and new architectural facilities is characterized by opposition and antagonism. It is noteworthy that the growing number of protective laws and authorities do not help the situation, as they produce a targeted impact within the framework of a completely different and antagonistic paradigm.

### **The Epoch of Postmodernism. Contemporary Architecture**

Postmodernism is another stage in the development of the Contemporaneity's paradigm. Initial theories of postmodernism were developed in the late 60ies of the 20th century, and by the 80ies they had dominated the worldview of the intellectual elite. According to the paradigm of postmodernism, the world has no objective systematicity. All our notions lack objectivity, and their content is completely determined by the context.

The postmodernism's paradigm is not less antagonistic to the paradigm of Tradition, than the paradigm of Modernity, and it represents the next step of its disintegration. Modernism rejected Tradition by virtue of its original understanding of truth, while postmodernism eliminated the issue of objective truth from the agenda. The ideological content of postmodernism is

determined by the philosophy of post-structuralism, including deconstruction, renunciation of meaning as a category (according to Yu. Kristeva, "meaning is totalitarianism") and renunciation of the idea of a consolidating centre, etc.

In his book "Anti-Architecture and Deconstruction", Nikos Salingaros, a famous theoretical architect, wrote about the multiplicity of dissimilar in appearance though conceptually close relevant schools that created the illusion of architecture's progressive development. Deconstructionism and postmodernism implemented the destruction of idealistically classical and modernly rational constituents of an outdated worldview in architecture. Both deconstructionism and postmodernism represented the styles of protest and rebellion; however, unlike historical avant-garde, new movements did not attack specific systems, but they opposed systematicity. They rebelled against the worldview that had commonsense and was comprehensible. Having destructed commonplace and canonic features, these styles swiftly did away with their mission which was to clean the place for a new architectural reality, similar to avant-garde, which was heading forward. However the model of a clear earthly future as an alternative to the heavenly paradise was subject to substantial transformations. Social objectives lost their importance, while the technological progress was the top priority. Innovative technologies substituted the goal, although they had initially served as the means for the universal welfare.

### Parametricism

Parametricism, which aspires to become a major new style, has embodied these trends in the most vivid manner. Parametricism is closely related to deconstructivism, and it merges with it in the artistic works of such prominent architects as Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind, Frank Gehry, and others. Indeed, parametricism is more about methods than styles, and it rests on the most advanced computer design technologies. These architects, whose work is often described as deconstructivism, employed computer as an instrument to express the nihilistic spirit of postmodernism.

Today ecological technologies and the imitation of natural structures have moved to the forefront, although computer technologies continue to act as the new form making laboratory. If functionalism was labeled a "machine-driven" style ("a residence machine") in terms of its ideology and implementation methods back in the 20th century, parametricism is a "machine-driven" style in terms of its origin, as it was born in the computer "brain". This method has converted into a style.

What makes it "machine-driven"? As the computer is a computational tool, it is unable to synthesize harmonious integrity in the sense of Aristotle (who believed that the whole is more than the sum of its parts). Its "ideas" and motives represent pre-set parameters and computational algorithms. Ultimately, mechanistic lines and contours, drawn by the

computer, represent the streamlined Biblical "clay", deprived of Spirit, or the triumph of logic and the pattern of death.

The processes associated with the way the man is ousted by machines, are underway in every area of human activities, although their pace varies. A principal step forward consists in the delegation of physical, mental and creative work to machines; transformation of brainwork, perception and creativity into computation. These trends are in line with the ideas formulated by René Jean-Marie-Joseph Guénon, the founder of Traditionalism, in his book "The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times" (1946): the ideas of "the qualitative diminishment that offers advantages to anything that is countable." When explaining the initial difference between the categories of quantity and quality (essence and substance, Spirit and matter), he remarked that the category of quality applied "to some extent to the very God, speaking about his attributes, whereas it would be impossible to apply any quantitative definitions to God." [3] Therefore, there remains one area of knowledge that cannot perceive these cognitive trends, that is, religion.

### The Antagonism of "Super-styles"

Here we address the essence of the two "super-styles". Religion, being the core of Tradition, focused architecture on the ideal images of paradise, the city of God, and heavenly Jerusalem as the symbols and synonyms of eternal life. This focus forced architecture to develop a surfeit of hierarchized and sustainable systems and sub-systems (extensive and local styles) that peacefully co-exist with one another due to their principal genetic kinship.

The essence of Contemporaneity (modernism, postmodernism) consists in the abandonment of these focuses and consecutive destruction of Tradition. Therefore, in terms of philosophy, Contemporaneity is not substantial, and this feature is in line with the focus on conceptual Nothing in philosophy, art and architecture. According to Jean Paul Sartre, the category of negation occupied the central position in the concept of Nothing. In the philosophy of Traditionalism, Nothing does not have anything to do with non-existence: non-existence is pre-existence, or initial chaos that God used to create the world. Nothing is post-existence, or the eternal death.

According to Nikos Salingaros, contemporary "conventional" architecture (which has merely changed its stylistic dressing, although it preserves its essence which is hostile towards humans) is built around the geometry of death. Its rules consist in "the absence of any organized complexity, typical for organisms and in the presence of the structural disorder which means death and decomposition." [7] Nikos Salingaros believes that this definition applies not only to the structures "that used to be alive, but primarily to those structures that could have never come to life; they are usually called "alien" forms." [7] They disturb, frighten and simultaneously attract in the same way as children and teenagers are attracted

by everything that frightens them. This outrageous way of teasing danger, death and Nothing explains the success of contemporary styles.

The second factor of success consists in the aforementioned multiplicity of conceptually close styles which look different. This multiplicity produces an illusion of progressive development.

Finally, the lobbying performed by the protagonists of contemporary architecture by means of hostile takeovers of research institutions, universities of architecture and influential media explains the monopolistic position of the "contemporary" architecture.

Being is denied by non-being and life is denied by death – these are the fundamentals of the Contemporaneity's paradigm that have laid the basis for the genesis of the second "super-style". We emphasize that it is the genesis rather than the ideological programme of specific architects, although most radical adherents of deconstructivism persuade of the opposite. Indeed, in his book that has a self-explanatory title of "Architecture and Separation" (1994), Bernard Tschumi makes a praiseful reference to Marquis de Sade and openly speaks about violence and sex as the impulses underlying the shape formation. Daniel Libeskind calls sacred items "nothing but a senseless ritual, a formality... a harmful consequence of senseless traditions whose mission is to condemn reality in order to please formality." [7]

### Conclusion

The evolution of architecture, when considered in the context of philosophical traditionalism, makes us understand that the conflict between the two "super-styles" is driven by the antagonism of Tradition and Contemporaneity as the two philosophical paradigms. Traditional architecture is the first "super-style" (Khan-Magomedov interprets it in a narrower sense, he considers it as "classics"); it is focused on the ideal super-sensual world in the same way as the culture of Tradition, and this process generated particular aesthetics and formulated respective form making principles, thus, making all pre-modernist styles look more or less similar. Starting from Renaissance, "the prenatal development" of the second "super-style" was initiated against the background of a new system of values and the introduction of secular consciousness. This process caused a modernist revolution in architecture.

In the contest of the above reasoning, the history of architecture can be represented as the transition from the first "super-style" to the second one. This process comprised several stages, and it was immediately related to the evolution of philosophical ideas. The periodization, describing the philosophy of Traditionalism, helps to understand the logic of these major processes. It substantiates the "consolidated" periodization of the history of visual arts in the West so that it could be applied to the history of architecture.

Therefore, the state of affairs can be described in the following manner.

"Old architecture" or "traditional architecture" corresponds to the period of the first "super-style", whose aesthetics is based on the Plato's statement about the worldly beauty as the reflection of the heavenly beauty, including images of paradise, heavenly Jerusalem, and the city of God. Despite the fact that traditional architecture varied in different time periods and areas, it retains particular similar features (vertical orientation symbolizing a spiritual axis, orientation towards cardinal directions, hierarchical arrangement, symmetry, centripetence, structural clarity, etc.), that enable us to make a conclusion about their genetic kinship.

The period of historicism that coincided with Modern Age, separates the first "super-style" from the second one. It is the time when Tradition was deprived of its spirit and essence, when new ideas emerged although old forms were preserved. Opinions differ in respect of the timeline of historicism; however, we share the opinions expressed by A.V. Ikonnikov, S.P. Zavarikhin, V.S. Goryunov and other researchers, who believe that historicism appealing to the styles of the past, dates back to Renaissance. Architectural historicism degenerated and replicated through the early 20th century, and its extreme movements lasted longer. This period is characterized by the predominantly ornamental architecture that had nothing to do with the evolution of structures. As for the latter, the 19th century was a breakthrough, and the invention of a steel framework and concrete served as the technology behind the ideas of Contemporaneity and the second "super-style".

"Modern architecture" and "contemporary architecture" represent the two consecutive steps in the evolution of the second "super-style" whose aesthetics is closely related to the idea of linear progress and materialistic philosophy. Its aesthetics is also oriented towards the image of a "better future" as an alternative to the heavenly paradise. Modern architecture means the advent of Contemporary times. It is characterized by horizontal orientation, asymmetry, absence of any compositional hierarchy, pragmatically interpreted functionalism, which contemplates the absence of any ornamental patterns, and the dominance of an individual design. Modern architecture is equal to anti-aesthetics, as far as traditional aesthetics is concerned.

"Contemporary architecture" coincides with the era of post-modernism, and it rests on the philosophy of post-structuralism. Its most important distinctive features include extreme individualism and the growing importance of digital technologies.

The philosophical substantiation of antagonism between the two "super-styles" enables us to understand the major processes that underlie the history of architecture and to explain the conflict between the old aesthetics and the new one in the context of the history of architecture. Nonetheless, the escape from formal problems into the realm of essence may set the stage for the resolution of a formal conflict between "modernism" and "classics" and for the evolution of modern architecture within the framework of Tradition. However, this is a different story.

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**Irina Olegovna Bembel**, Candidate of Art History, Senior Researcher, Scientific Research Institute of Theory and History of Architecture and Urban Planning (branch of Federal State budgetary Institution "Central Research and Design Institute of the RF Ministry of Construction"), Editor-in-chief Kapitel Journal. Author of over 40 journal publications. Major research interests: contemporary architecture of St. Petersburg, Russia, Poland; the phenomenon of tradition in architecture; contemporary church (Orthodox) architecture. Phone: +7 (962) 681-23-34. Email: [ibembel@yandex.ru](mailto:ibembel@yandex.ru)