Controversies around the concept of "style" in the architecture of the 20th and 21st centuries

Cezary Wąs

University of Wrocław

1 **J. J. Winckelmann**, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, Dresden 1764. See also **L. Dittmann**, *Zur Entwicklung des Stilbe–griffs bis Winckelmann*, [in:] *Kunst und Kunsttheorie 1400-1900*, Ed. **P. F. Ganz**, [*et al.*], Wiesbaden 1991.

The concept of "style" was introduced into the history of art by Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), who tied it with the ideals of classicism and gave it normative values[1]. Winckelmann's concept contained a contradiction resulting from the recognition that the art of ancient Greece had timeless values and, at the same time, the assumption that the source of perfect art was specific geographic and political conditions. The value created in connection with a specific place could therefore not be universal and developed outside the circumstances of its occurrence. Meanwhile, Winckelmann assumed that art created under different conditions should imitate the Greek one and be judged according to it. A mistake of Winckelmann's theory was also to idealize ancient art without knowing it closely, including disregard for Doric buildings and praising the works of the Hellenistic period. Winckelmann's view that ancient works of art were kept in white when in fact were polychrome, also had a long-lasting influence. Winckelmann's special achievement, however, was the division of Greek art into four styles: archaic, tall, beautiful, and epigones. For the first time, divisions were introduced into the vast world of Greek culture, ordering its manifestations by defining the distinctive visual and content values of groups of works. Despite the passage of many centuries, some elements of the concept of style introduced by Winckelmann survived in later variants of understanding the concept of style, just as the predilection for whiteness and simplicity turned out to be permanent. Combining the formal features of art with the circumstances of its production turned out to be the most influential. The antiquating whiteness and simplicity returned in Le Corbusier's theories, especially in *Toward an Architecture* (1923).

The concept of style was associated with historical changes in the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), who assumed the existence of three periods in art: symbolic (the times of ancient East and Egyptian art), classical (ancient Greece) and romantic (lasting from early Christianity to the present day)[2]. Hegel's continuators in research into art were already historians in this field, especially Heinrich Gustav Hotho (1802–1873), editor of Hegel's lectures on aesthetics[3]. The influence of Hegelian historicism led to an increase in periodization and the introduction of many style names.

In the concept of Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945), a distinction was made between the artist's style, the national style and styles related to historical epochs[4]. The connection of art with the ideological content of the epoch was made thanks to Max Dvořák (1874–1921), who was most strongly influenced by Hegelian historiosophy[5]. The direct connection of artistic forms and ideas, however, aroused polemics. The history of the art of Aby Warburg (1866–1929) and Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) expressed the desire to point to specific philosophical sources of the content of works of art more precisely than Dvořák's, but at the same time ignored their formal values. Warburg's analyzes, especially the article *Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja in Ferrara* (1912/1922), focused on indicating selected contents of philosophical texts[6]. According to his theory, the works of art illustrated this content. Unlike Warburg, Panofsky also recommended taking into account the influence of more general ideological trends on works of art.

The dependence of research methods on Hegel's philosophy, characteristic of the history of art, was questioned in Lorenz Dittmann's (1928–2018) book *Stil, Symbol, Struktur*, published in 1967[7]. The decisive act of undermining historicism in art history, however, was Sir Ernst Gombrich's (1909–2001) publication *In Search of Cultural History* (1968)[8]. Gombrich based his critique of art history on the work of science methodologist Karl Raimund Popper (1902–1994), and in particular on the 1957 book *The Poverty of Historicism* (1945). Further criticism of historicism in art history focused on the negation of iconology and was presented in the article by Oskar Bätschmann (b. 1943) *Beiträge zu einem Übergang von der Ikonologie zur kunstgeschichtlichen Hermeneutik* (1979) and the book by the same author *Einführung in die kunstgeschichtliche Hermeneutik* (1984)[9]. The next stage in the development of art history became hermeneutics, abandoning the study of the relationship between art and the historical circumstances of its creation and based on a broader critique of scientific consciousness contained in the philosophy of Hans Georg Gadamer (1900–2002).

The separation of the history of architecture from the area of art history shows a similar course of changes in this field. A role similar to Gombrich's lectures published as *In Search of Cultural History* was played in the history of architecture by David Watkin's (1941–2018) lectures published in the book *Morality and Architecture* (1977)[10].

[2] **G. W. F. Hegel**, *Philosophie der Kunst. Vorlesung von 1826*, Ed. **A. Gethmann–Siefert, J.–I. Kwon, K. Berr**, Frankfurt am Main 2004; ***idem,*** *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik. Nach Hegel. Im Sommer 1826*, Ed. **A. Gethmann–Siefert, B. Collenberg–Plotnikov**, Munich 2004.

[3] See **E. Ziemer**, *Heinrich Gustav Hotho, 1802–1873. Ein Berliner Kunsthistoriker, Kunstkritiker und Philosoph*, Hamburg 1993.

[4] **H. Wölfflin**, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*, München 1915.

[5] **M. Dvořák**, *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte. Studien zur abendländischen Kunstentwicklung*, München 1924, Vol. 1–3.

[6] **A. Warburg**, *Italienische Kunst und internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja in Ferrara*, [in:] *L'Italia e l'arte straniera. Atti del X Congresso Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte in Roma (1912)*, Ed. **A. Venturi**, Rom 1922.

[7] **L. Dittmann**, *Stil, Symbol, Struktur. Studien zu Kategorien der Kunstgeschichte*, München 1967.

[8] **E. H. Gombrich**, *In Search of Cultural History*, London 1969.

[9] **O. Bätschmann**, *Beiträge zu einem Übergang von der Ikonologie zur kunstgeschichtlichen Hermeneutik (1978)*, [in:] *Bildende Kunst als Zeichensystem. Ikonographie und Ikonologie*, Vol. 1: *Ikonographie und Ikonologie. Theorien–Entwicklung–Probleme*, Ed. **E. Kaemmerling**, Köln 1979; **O. Bätschmann**, *Einführung in die kunstgeschichtliche Hermeneutik. Die Auslegung von Bildern*, Darmstadt 1984.

[10] **D. Watkin**, *Morality and Architecture: The Development of Theme in Architectural History and Theory from the Gothic Revival to the Modern Movement*, Oxford 1977.

Watkin, too, wrote his work under the influence of Hegel's critique and historicism depicted in Popper's works. Watkin interpreted the views of Augustus Pugin (1812–1852), Eugène Viollet-le-Duc (1814–1879), William Lethaby (1857–1931), Le Corbusier (1887–1965), Sigfried Giedion (1888–1968) and Sir Nikolaus Pevsner (1902–1983) as wrongly assuming the existence of a transcendent source of changes in architecture.

Pugin decided that the aesthetic power of Gothic comes from God himself, whose will is included in the tradition of the Catholic Church. In his doctrine, creation in the gothic style gained the rank of the realization of God's will, and gothic was the result of learning principles based on divine necessity. The scheme assuming the metaphysical origin of the forms of architecture was secularized according to Hegel's philosophy. Absolute reason descended from God, which manifests itself in the ideological values of a given epoch. Absolute is immanently involved in the development of the world which takes place in stages. The stages of development can be defined as cultural ages or styles. Originally, the absolute spirit was revealed as a divine force organized by religion, but also gained visibility in the characteristics of works of art. In Hegel's time, philosophy was a representative form of the manifestation of universal reason, but art also displayed the rationality of a given epoch. This rationality could be read both in art forms, as Max Dvořák did, but also in the ideas behind the representations shown in works of art, as described by Erwin Panofsky in his works. The ideas of the epoch were also responsible for the subsequent stages of creating a perfect society, in which architecture played its part. In the 19th c., the features of an optimal society were the growth of rationality in its organization, getting rid of the remnants of religion, democratism, egalitarianism and communitarianism (focus on the common good). Architecture could maintain its rank only in harmony with the trends of its era, thus becoming more rational and rejecting old traditions based on the cult of individualism and aestheticism. Of the principles mentioned once by Marcus Vitruvius (1st c. BC) and later by Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472; *firmitas*, *utilitas*, *venustas*), the most important in the new era was to be the principle of utility.

In line with the views on increasing the role of rationality in society and architecture, Violett-le-Duc interpreted Gothic architecture as a manifestation of the activity of new groups of city dwellers who were precursors of scientists and sought to gain power in the new society. Their works were the result of growing architectural knowledge and discoveries in the field of mathematics, geometry and statics. For Violet-le-Duc, the cathedrals were a triumph of rationalism and the work of freemasons seeking to seize power in society, and therefore also architects of a new society. The view about the rationality of the cathedral and its dependence on scholastic philosophy was maintained in his lectures by Panofsky (1948; previously Georg Dehio), while the idea of architecture as a form of political action appeared in Le Corbusier's essayist book *Toward an Architecture*.

The continuation of the doctrines of Pugin and Viollet-le-Duc was contained in the writings of the English architect and critic William Richard Lethaby (1857–1931), the content of which was later developed by architects, theorists and promoters of modernist architecture. In Lethaby's opinion, Gothic was the result of the development of technology and team activities. As a consequence, he assumed that architecture, like shipbuilding, should get rid of individualism, references to art and become the result of collective work and an emanation of collective wisdom. This direction of thinking appeared in the theories of Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. The aesthetic value of the works of these architects was concealed by the claim that the role of function and meeting the needs of users is the most important. Each of them introduced effective forms into architecture resulting from their personal talents, but at the same time they proclaimed that they create works resulting from the objective values of the development of civilization, as if from the manifestations of absolute reason manifested by the development of science and technology. The aspirations to build collective societies were also treated as a historical necessity, which should be taken into account in the organization of architectural work. Architects were to support the rational tendencies of their era and enable the emergence of a brave new world. Such a vision of architecture resulted from texts written by supporters of modernist architects who hid behind the rhetoric of objectivism and scientific values: Nicolaus Pevsner, Emil Kaufmann (1891–1953, Sir Sigfried Giedion and Henry-Russell Hitchcock (1903–1987).

The problem with the historiography of modernist architecture is the fact that in its mainstream it did not take into account the rank of modernist architecture of a non-avant-garde character, including expressionism (in several versions), art deco architecture (also in several versions) and a long list of classicisms in the 20th c. (such as the so-called Style of the year 1937). Expressionism of Max Berg (1870–1947), Erich Mendelsohn (1887–1953) or the masters of the so-called *Backsteinexpresionismus* should also be included in the trend of modernist architecture, but their works did not represent theories and aspirations typical of revolutionary architects of the avant-garde trend. Similar statements can also be made of the works of art deco architecture and classicism: they were therefore works of modernism, but not of the avant-garde.

The second problem in the historiography of modernism is the occurrence of descriptions that differ in detail. It is therefore characteristic that avant-garde modernism cannot be clearly defined, and its characteristics depend on the value systems represented by historians. Modernism in the descriptions of researchers related to the avant-garde architects community is therefore the product of gifted scientific writers rather than a reflection of actual architecture. Despite attempts to verify these traditional opinions about avant-garde modernism, they are still popular. Scientific literature strongly influ-

11 See **P. Tournikiotis**, *The Historiography of Modern Architecture*, Cambridge [Massachusetts] 1999.

12 See *ibidem*.

enced, above all, the behavior of architects who followed the visions created by historians.

The strongest suggestions came from the works of Pevsner, Kaufmann, Giedion and Hitchcock, who, although they declared a scientific and objective position, were closely associated with representatives of avant-garde modernism. Giedion was the influential secretary general of the CIAM, and Hitchcock the organizer of the propaganda exhibition in 1932[11]. The involvement of these historians in the development of modern architecture is revealed by the terms they use, especially those characterized by rhetorical pathos. For Pevsner, modernist architecture was supposed to be: healthy, sincere and honest, in contrast to 19th c. architecture being decorative, boastful and dishonest. Similarly, Hitchcock wrote about the architecture he promoted, who claimed that it is: wonderful, amazing and full of splendor. It was also characteristic of this group of historians to focus their attention on the appearance of buildings. In their descriptions, modernist architecture was elegant, characterized by simplicity, reduced to geometric forms and composing sets of solids into regular groups, but without the use of symmetry. Each of them saw some peculiarities, but all individual observations only supplemented the basic catalog of aesthetic values. Kaufman noticed the use of smooth walls and placing windows directly in the cut-out of the façade or the use of flat roofs, but this was only a confirmation of the aesthetics based on geometric simplicity and lack of ornaments.

For the next group of historians, Reyner Banham (1922–1988) or Bruno Zevi (1918–2000), early modernism represented simplified classicism, and the works of Adolf Loos (1870–1933), Peter Behrens (1868–1940), Walter Gropius (1883–1969), Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) contained numerous elements modeled on ancient architecture[12]. Le Corbusier's *Villa Savoye* (1930) or Mies van der Rohe's *Barcelona Pavilion* (1929), as well as a long series of further buildings by the above-mentioned architects, were considered transformations of ancient temples. However, Peter Collins (1920–1981) did not support the criticism of the classicism themes in contemporary architecture, who believed that the new architecture is a summary of the best achievements of the former, thus a variant of classicism of principles. It should be remembered that for Bruno Zevi all references to classicism were associated with the fascism he condemned, or more generally with authoritarianism. The aforementioned group of historians discovered the lack of radical innovation previously assumed in modernist architecture. The use of classical architecture was assessed both negatively and positively.

The lack of agreement in defining avant-garde modernism also concerned the social sources of style. For Pevsner, modernism was part of a new, collective society, while Hitchcock believed that changes in architecture resulted from the autonomous development of artistic values. For Leonardo Benevolo (1923–2017), the changes in the

appearance of the works did not matter, but he suggested that architects consciously participate in political life and that their activities were aimed at solving social problems and creating a new society. Collins, as a representative of the second generation of historians, objected and argued that modernism cannot be defined by a set of formal features, because they are the result of social change.

Contradictions in the descriptions of modernism have already appeared in the first group of historians (in Pevsner, Kaufmann, Giedion and Hitchcock). The next generation (Bruno Zevi, Leonardo Benevolo, Rayner Banham, Peter Collins) criticized the narratives of their predecessors in many details. From the end of the 1960s, a period of strong criticism of modernism in architecture began. Books *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) by Jane Jacobs (1916–2006)[13], *Form Follows Fiasco* (1974) by Peter Blake (1910–2006)[14], *From Bauhaus to Our House* (1981) by Tom Wolfe (1930–2018)[15], and *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (1979) by Roger Scruton (1944–2020)[16] temporarily changed the positive assessment of style in the general perception. The criticism resulted in the rise of neo-modernism, in which the perceived shortcomings of the style were removed. An alternative form of reaction was postmodernism, which was a different type of response to the errors pointed out by critics. The theory of postmodernism was shaped mainly by Charles Jencks (1939–2019)[17], although alternative versions of the main distinguishing features of the style were also formulated by Peter Blake and Heinrich Klotz (1935–1999)[18]. Postmodernism was greeted with enthusiasm and hope by a wide audience and supported by conservative theorists such as Rob Krier (b. 1938) and Nikos Salingaros (b. 1952). Attempts to maintain decorativism using quotations from ancient architecture, as well as other features of postmodern architecture, have shown its weakness and after two decades it has lost its attractiveness. Currently, only versions of neoclassicism are eagerly used by authoritarian, nationalist and populist governments, as shown by the example of the reconstruction of Skopje.

The solution to the problem of the further development of architecture at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries is included in the considerations on postmodernism by Heinrich Klotz. Klotz saw a poetic value in postmodernism, but he interpreted the concept of poetry in a specific sense[19]. Poetry has been identified with the metaphysics of architecture, with its original foundations. Contemporary architecture is therefore characterized by a critical reflection not only on history (old in postmodernism and new in neo-modernism), but above all on its original principles. Therefore, if we are dealing with postmodernism and neo-modernism at the same time, they are linked by reaching beyond all past, which is clearly present in the architecture of deconstructivism. The architecture of Bernard Tschumi (b. 1944) or Peter Eisenman (b. 1932) can be classified as neo-modernism, but it is represented by historicism reaching primordiality. The study of

[13] **J. Jacobs**, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, New York 1961.

[14] **P. Blake**, *Form Follows Fiasco: Why Modern Architecture Hasn't Worked*, Boston 1974.

[15] **T. Wolfe**, *From Bauhaus to Our House*, New York 1981.

[16] **R. Scruton**, *The Aesthetics of Architecture*, London 1979.

[17] **Ch. Jencks**, *The Language of Post–Modern Architecture*, New York 1977. See also **E. G. Haddad**, *Charles Jencks and the historiography of Post–Modernism*, "The Journal of Architecture" 2009, No. 4.

[18] **H. Klotz**, *Postmoderne Architektur – ein Resümee*, "Merkur" 1998, No. 594–598.

[19] *Ibidem*, pp. 789–790, 792.

the metaphysics of architecture is a philosophical activity, but philosophy is created not within the discourse contained in the texts, but in buildings which, only secondary, in the process of interpretation, can be transformed into narrative with the use of writing. The work is therefore not an illustration of the text, but the text brings the work to meaning and intelligibility.

Since the 1990s, neo-modernism has dominated the field of architecture, but it has done so in a radically pluralistic way. Only the essential values hold this style together, which currently cannot be defined as a style because it has no common visual distinguishing features. The trends of neo-modernism are linked by a critical reflection on the entire tradition of architecture, including its primary and transcendental principles, and are characterized by a personal responsibility for solving artistic and social problems. What neo-modernism has in common with early modernism is the pursuit of a better, more democratic society.

Słowa kluczowe

styl, historia architektury XX w., modernizm, postmodernizm, neomodernizm

Keywords

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Dr. habil. Cezary Was, Prof. at UWr, wascezar@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-5163-9248
Professor at the Institute of Art History, University of Wrocław. Curator of the Museum of Architecture (1986–2021). Author of the books: *Antynomie współczesnej architektury sakralnej* (Antinomies of the Contemporary Sacred Architecture, 2008), *Architektura a dekonstrukcja. Przypadek Petera Eisenmana i Bernarda Tschumiego* (Architecture and Deconstruction. The Case of Peter Eisenman and Bernard Tschumi, 2015), *Cień Boga w ogrodzie filozofa. Parc de La Villette w Paryżu w kontekście filozofii chôry* (The Shadow of God in the Philosopher's Garden. The Parc de La Villette in Paris in the context of the philosophy of chôra, 2021) and dozens of articles on phenomena of the ancient and modern culture.

Summary
CEZARY WAS (University of Wroclaw) / Controversies around the concept of "style" in the architecture of the 20th and 21st centuries
The term "style" was associated with the periodization of art and architecture in Johann Joachim Winckelmann's work *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764). Despite the passage of time, many elements of Winckelmann's theory in hidden form remained valid in the following epochs. The influence of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophy led to the belief that the circumstances of the creation of a work of art affect its forms and contents. This view was argued by art historians in the late 1960s. Criticism of historicism in humanistic research was initially carried out under the influence of the philosophy of science of Karl Raimund Popper. At that time, the beliefs about the existence of ideological values of subsequent epochs that determine the forms and content of works of art were rejected. Another form of criticism of historicism stemmed from the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who recognized that a work of art actualizes the message of tradition in contact with the viewer. A critique of historicism in architecture, based on Popper, can be found in the work of David Watkin. The errors in the historiography of modernist architecture were characterized by Panayotis Tournikiotis. He showed contradictions in the definition of avant-garde modernism that occurred in the first two generations of his historians. Today, however, the concepts of styles still contain threads of thought reaching back to Winckelmann and Hegel. The basic feature of the functioning of contemporary styles in architecture is their historicism reaching beyond history, and therefore not so much imitation of old forms, but rather a critical examination of the intellectual foundations of architecture.