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# MONUMENTALISATION OF RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY\*

## MONUMENTALIZACJA ARCHITEKTURY MIESZKANIOWEJ W DRUGIEJ POŁOWIE XX WIEKU

### Abstract

The subject of this research is the monumentalisation of residential architecture between 1945 and 2000. Throughout history, monumentality has been a characteristic attributed exclusively to public buildings with prestigious functions. In the previous century, the importance and symbolic significance of residential buildings increased, contributing to their monumental forms. The aim of the research is to present examples and characterise this phenomenon. The research was based on an analysis of selected residential buildings representing various trends and tendencies. The results include the identification of common features of such buildings.

*Keywords: 20th-century architecture, monumentality, residential buildings*

### Streszczenie

Tematem badań jest monumentalizowanie architektury mieszkaniowej w latach 1945–2000. W epokach historycznych monumentalność była cechą przypisywaną wyłącznie budynkom publicznym o prestiżowych funkcjach. W zeszłym stuleciu wzrosły ranga i symboliczne znaczenie budynków mieszkalnych, co przyczyniło się do nadawania im monumentalnych form. Celem badań jest przedstawienie przykładów i charakterystyka tego zjawiska. Badania oparto na analizie wybranych budynków mieszkalnych reprezentujących różne nurty i tendencje. Wynikiem badań jest m.in. wskazanie wspólnych cech takich obiektów.

*Słowa kluczowe: architektura XX wieku, monumentalność, budynki mieszkalne*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the *Dictionary of the Polish Language*, edited by Witold Doroszewski, monumentality means “magnificence, grandeur, and durability”<sup>1</sup>. For centuries, the quality of monumentality was attributed to buildings with prestigious functions, such as temples, theatres,

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<sup>1</sup> W. Doroszewski (ed.), *Słownik języka polskiego*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1966.

libraries, and arenas<sup>2</sup>. In the 20th century, and especially in its second half, the importance and significance of residential buildings increased in the wave of humanism in architecture. The everyday lives of people, concentrated in such buildings, became a determinant of creative activities and acquired a symbolic status.

This work aims to present and characterise the phenomenon of monumentalisation of residential architecture. The research spans the period from the end of World War II to the end of the 20th century, encompassing the most significant architectural trends and tendencies of that era.

The research was based on the analysis of selected multi-family residential buildings representing various architectural trends and different countries, including Unité d'Habitation in Marseille, Lake Shore Drive in Chicago, Keeling House in London, Arènes de Picasso in Noisy-le-Grand, and Spittelau Viaducts Housing in Vienna.

The research undertaken in this work is primarily based on the characterisation of the concept of monumentality in architecture, as presented in the manifesto *Nine Points on Monumentality* published in 1943 by Josep Lluís Sert, Fernand Léger, and Siegfried Giedion. Leon Krier's assertions, antagonistic to the theory of modernism, as presented in his publications from the last quarter of the 20th century, serve as a point of reference.

## 2. MONUMENTALITY IN THE THEORY OF 20<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE

Architecture expresses various messages, and one of the most primal and powerful is the message of monumentality. Andrzej Basista believes this occurs “in various ways, through the shape of the building, its size, its décor, and through what these features symbolise”<sup>3</sup>. Tomasz Kozłowski and Marek Początko point to the attribute of sublimity inherent in architectural monuments, accompanied by such human emotions as “admiration, delight, pride, compassion, nostalgia, power, and awe”<sup>4</sup>. They emphasise that a monumental work, regardless of the period of its creation, is complex, multi-layered, and its form “has a deep meaning, a symbolism expressing specific aesthetic and ethical values through its physical shape”<sup>5</sup>.

Monumental architecture undoubtedly experienced a crisis at the beginning of the 20th century. Pseudo-historical buildings ceased to reflect the changing world and respond to social needs. In 1937, Lewis Mumford even declared the death of the monument<sup>6</sup>. He argued that buildings aspiring to the title of monumental demonstrated a fascination with the past rather than the new values of the era. He even advocated for cleansing cities of false monuments to create space for new ones, characterised by true monumentality.

The authors of the manifesto *Nine Points on Monumentality* largely agreed with Mumford's theses<sup>7</sup>. Sert, Léger, and Giedion announced it in 1943, during World War II. They pre-

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<sup>2</sup> L. Krier, *Architektura – wybór czy przeznaczenie*, Arkady, Warszawa 2001, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> A. Basista, *Architektura i wartości*, Universitas, Kraków 2009, p. 249.

<sup>4</sup> T. Kozłowski, M. Początko, *O monumentalizmie – problem stylu i stylowości w architekturze*, “TeKa Komisji Urbanistyki i Architektury PAN Oddział w Krakowie” 20 21, vol. 49, p. 241.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> L. Mumford, *The death of the monument* [in:] J.L. Martin, B. Nicholson, N. Gabo (eds), *Circle: International survey of constructivist art*, Praeger, New York 1971, pp. 263–270.

<sup>7</sup> J.L. Sert, F. Léger, S. Giedion, *Nine points on monumentality* [in:] S. Giedion (ed.), *Architecture, you and me*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1958, pp. 48–51.

dicted that the postwar world would foster profound and radical changes in architecture and urban planning. They considered the creation of monuments to be one of the most important tasks of modern architecture, in which, in addition to architects, planners, painters, sculptors, and landscape designers were also to participate<sup>8</sup>.

The first two points of the manifesto essentially constitute the basis for the definition of monumentality in architecture. They read as follows:

1. Monuments are human landmarks which men have created as symbols for their ideals, for their aims, and for their actions. They are intended to outlive the period which originated them, and constitute a heritage for future generations. As such, they form a link between the past and the future.
2. Monuments are the expression of man's highest cultural needs. They have to satisfy the eternal demand of the people for translation of their collective force into symbols. The most vital monuments are those which express the feeling and thinking of this collective force – the people<sup>9</sup>.

The authors emphasise the symbolic significance of monuments, which are intended to reflect the aspirations of societies and build their moral and cultural identity. The essence of monumentality is durability, allowing buildings to represent the ethos of today's societies in the future. Monuments that convey a message that resonates with people's emotions and ideas are particularly important. However, for a building to be monumental, the intention of an architect collaborating with other designers, the work's high architectural value, and its symbolic message are not enough. Another condition is essential: acceptance – the recognition of the building's metaphorical significance by society. This follows from the seventh point of the manifesto, in which the authors write: "The people want the buildings that represent their social and community life to give more than functional fulfillment. They want their aspiration for monumentality, joy, pride, and excitement to be satisfied"<sup>10</sup>.

Sert, Léger, and Giedion emphasise that every era in which a genuine cultural life developed had the power and capacity to create monuments. Monuments are therefore possible only in periods where there is a unifying consciousness and a unifying culture. According to them, the postwar period will be characterised by this. Planning for monuments in cities should begin immediately, because "monumental buildings cannot be crowded"<sup>11</sup>. They should be constructed from modern materials and using new techniques. The manifesto's authors advocate a return to colour and the use of natural elements, such as plants and water.

The principles contained in *Nine Points on Monumentality* had a significant impact on the development of postwar architecture and urban planning. It was only postmodernist ideas that led to the rejection of some of them.

One of the leading representatives of postmodernism, or rather its conservative wing, was Leon Krier. He argued that only certain functions of buildings predisposed them to monumentality, and he did not include residential functions among them<sup>12</sup>. He emphasised that only building types that have developed over the years, evolved "until they have reached their proper (i.e. logical and rational) form"<sup>13</sup> can have symbolic meaning. He wrote that "for

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<sup>8</sup> I.B. Whyte (red.), *Modernism and the spirit of the city*, Routledge, London 2003, p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> J.L. Sert, F. Léger, S. Giedion, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> L. Krier, *Architektura – wybór czy przeznaczenie, op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> L. Krier, *Architektura wspólnoty*, Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz terytoria, Gdańsk 2011, p. 46.

traditional cultures, imitation is a way of producing objects that are unique, yet similar”<sup>14</sup>. He contrasted them with modernist cultures in which “invention, innovation, and discovery”<sup>15</sup> are the primary goals. He rejected the use of artificial materials and modern solutions, such as curtain walls, in monuments, as they deprive buildings of their authenticity. For this reason, he criticised both modernist and postmodernist buildings, calling them false.

### 3. MONUMENTALITY IN RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE

As Sert, Léger and Giedion predicted, after World War II, changes in the organisation of community life in the city became visible. In rapidly developing countries, comfortable living in impressive buildings became a social ideal. Thanks to the use of modern materials, such structures have become increasingly durable (especially compared to traditional residential buildings constructed from materials such as wood). The collective desire for an ever-higher standard of living and the emotions associated with it were reflected in residential buildings that had the features of architectural monuments. It is clear that they constituted a small part of all residential buildings, but their existence became a real cultural need that politicians, city authorities and investors tried to meet. According to the principles of *Nine Points on Monumentality*, monuments could not be purely utilitarian works, but they had to possess “lyrical values”<sup>16</sup>.

The next part of the article is devoted to the search for such values in residential buildings constructed between World War II and the beginning of the 21st century.

The first postwar residential building characterised by monumentality may be considered the Unité d’Habitation in Marseille, designed by Le Corbusier and built between 1947 and 1952. According to the architect, it was intended to symbolise a new era characterised by austerity and expressiveness. Architecture was meant to reflect people’s emotions, but also to evoke them. Christian Norberg-Schulz claims that: “In his postwar projects, he succeeded in creating true, modern monumentality; his buildings, through their plastic presence, symbolise a character that gives identity to the community for which they were built”<sup>17</sup>. The Brutalist Unité d’Habitation rejected the primacy of the machine and the uncritical fascination with technological progress, which, after all, contributed to the tragedy and destruction of war. It signalled a shift in architecture away from abstract aesthetics and toward realism, a trend continued by some designers. The monumentality of the building also resulted from its size and location. The high (56 metres) and long (165 meters) concrete colossus dominated its surroundings. Today, with the construction of numerous large-scale buildings nearby, this effect has diminished. Le Corbusier’s approach to the material remains fascinating. The concrete exposed in all elements of the building was treated as a natural material, without any meticulous processing, leaving all textural defects visible (Ill. 1). Le Corbusier also intended this to be a reference to monumental historical architecture, creating a link between the postwar era and the past: “Have you never noticed that the stones in the walls of cathedrals and palaces are irregular and crooked, that mistakes have been left out or even emphasised? Perhaps you don’t notice these things when you look at architecture?”<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> J.L. Sert, F. Léger, S. Giedion, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>17</sup> C. Norberg-Schulz, *Znaczenie w architekturze Zachodu*, Murator, Warszawa 1999, p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> Le Corbusier, W. Boesiger, *Le Corbusier. Oeuvre complète 1946–1952*, vol. 5, Les Editions d’Architecture, Zürich 1966, p. 195.



Ill. 1. Le Corbusier, Unité d'Habitation in Marseille, 1947–1952, photo by A. Basista

The building's large dimensions undoubtedly play a role in creating a sense of monumentality. The building's height is particularly significant in this respect, as is its vertical orientation, which also carries symbolic meaning<sup>19</sup>. These features characterise skyscrapers, including residential towers. Such buildings were constructed in earlier periods. One example is "Drapacz Chmur" in Katowice, built in 1934 according to the architectural design of Tadeusz Kozłowski and Henryk Griffel and the structural design of Stefan Bryła. However, it was only after World War II that skyscrapers achieved soaring proportions and impressive heights.

Archetypal forms for skyscrapers are presented by the Lake Shore Drive buildings in Chicago (1949–1951). In the first years after World War II, when Le Corbusier began monumentalising *unités d'habitation* and *béton brut*, Mies van Der Rohe moved toward monumentalisation of high-rise buildings and technology<sup>20</sup>. The buildings' rectangular shapes and the rectangular divisions of the glass façades, creating a monotonous rhythm, undoubtedly reflected the spirit of contemporary America. However, due to the spread of this type of aesthetic, they quickly became trivialised, and their symbolic impact diminished.

A significant portion of US society expected more expressive forms with an individual character. The answer came from Frank Lloyd Wright, already a symbolic figure in American architecture. The Price Tower was constructed in 1956 and immediately became one of the most important landmarks in the small town of Bartlesville, Oklahoma. The skyscraper still towers over the city and the surrounding prairie, inspiring pride among its citizens. One of Wright's concerns at the time was high-rise buildings and their role in the urban landscape<sup>21</sup>. The building's diagonal plan is reflected in the twisted planes that create an excep-

<sup>19</sup> A.M. Niezabitowski, *O strukturze przestrzennej obiektów architektonicznych*, Śląsk Sp. z o.o. Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Katowice 2017, pp. 208–209.

<sup>20</sup> K. Frampton, *Modern architecture – a critical history*, Thames and Hudson, London 1980, pp. 231–237.

<sup>21</sup> H. French, *Key urban housing of the twentieth century*, Laurence King Publishing, London 2008, p. 98.

tionally slender, complex form. The façades also feature a rich array of details, including vertical louvres shading the glass walls.

European architects also experimented with the internal structure and form of residential skyscrapers. Denys Lasdun called his type of high-rise building the cluster block. The most famous structure of this type was built in London's Bethnal Green, dominated by traditional low-rise brick buildings. Keeling House (1958) consisted of a main circulation core and three short residential wings facing at an angle. The building's concept was based on a (far-reaching) transformation of the traditional estate layout into a vertical structure. A staircase served as a vertical urban street, with residents' meeting areas located on every other floor, while the multi-storey residential wings were conceived as stacked segments of a typical London terraced house. Even though the references to the historic surroundings are not directly visible, Lasdun managed to preserve the spirit of the place and breathe new value into it, which contributed to the perception of the cluster block as creating the identity of the local community.

Other London skyscrapers built at a slightly later period include the works of Ernő Goldfinger. With their expressive forms, massive aesthetics, and considerable height (at the time of their completion, they were considered the tallest residential buildings in Europe), Balfron Tower (1965–1967) and Trellick Tower (1966–1972) continue to evoke emotion and are symbols of the Brutalist era that left a profound mark on the British capital. The skyscrapers were conceived as dominants of residential complexes composed primarily of lower-rise buildings. A particularly striking feature of both buildings are the service towers, separated from the main block. They are remarkably slender, contrasting with the heavy, brutalist aesthetic of the entire complex (Ill. 2). They are topped by an overhanging solid that, symbolically and surprisingly, houses the boiler room. Almost all of the skyscrapers' edges are rounded, giving them a plastic and sculptural character.

The potential of arched, circular geometry has been further explored by other residential skyscraper designers. The Marina City twin towers in Chicago (1964) do not compete but complement each other, creating a monumental composition composed of both cylindrical volumes and the void between them. As a result, they remain the strongest aesthetic element of the area, despite the proximity of numerous (even taller) skyscrapers. Apartments occupy the majority of each tower, ranging from floors 21 to 60, radiating from the inner, circular service core. At the time of their construction, the buildings were the world's tallest reinforced concrete structures<sup>22</sup>. Besides the ubiquitous rounded shapes visible in both the main solid and smaller details (such as balconies), Marina City's location is distinctive. As the name suggests, the skyscrapers are situated in the harbour, adjacent to the water. Architect Bertrand Goldberg emphasised his "city within a city" concept, which opposed urban zoning and combined residential and other functions<sup>23</sup>.

In the last decades of the 20th century, with the spread of postmodern and traditionalist ideas about housing, the fascination with skyscrapers waned somewhat. However, at the turn of the century, a resurgence was observed. An example is the Turning Torso in Malmö (1999–2005), designed by Santiago Calatrava. As with Marina City, the skyscraper is situated on the waterfront. It was intended to be a symbol with multiple meanings: first, the transformation of Malmö's Western Harbour; second, the rapid development of the city and the country; and third, the unity of all of Scandinavia, as it was located near the modern Oresund Bridge

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 122.

<sup>23</sup> W. Förster, *Housing in the 20th and 21st centuries*, Prestel, München 2006, p. 106.



Ill. 2. Ernő Goldfinger, Balfour Tower in London, 1965–1967, photo by Wojciech Niebrzydowski

connecting Sweden and Denmark. The skyscraper’s metaphorical form (inspired by one of the architect’s sculptures) consists of nine cube-like volumes arranged in a spiral rhythm around an internal core. Apartments are located within most of the cubes. The building evokes associations with high-tech and deconstructivism.

One might wonder whether vertical orientation and significant height are essential to being considered a monument. It seems that this is not necessary. Even Krier distinguishes between the vertical “sky-scraper” and the horizontal “earth-scraper”, though he does so with sarcasm<sup>24</sup>. Thus, there are also architectural monuments with a horizontal orientation. An example is the main building of the Pedregulho Estate in Rio de Janeiro (1950–1952). For this project, its designer, Afonso Eduardo Reidy, received an award from a jury chaired

<sup>24</sup> L. Krier, *Architektura wspólnoty, op. cit.*, p. 61.

(significantly) by Giedion<sup>25</sup>. The long, horizontal residential building towers over the other buildings not because of its height but rather because of its hilltop location. The formal strength of the structure, essential to its monumental character, comes from its shape, which resembles a ribbon winding in accordance with the topography of the terrain.

Although Krier criticised the pursuit of discovery and innovation, for much of the 20th century it was, in fact, one of humanity's most important collective goals. As a result, architectural works inspired by this pursuit often became monuments. Many avant-garde architectural ideas remained solely in the theoretical or design phase. To a large extent, this also applies to Japanese metabolism, but in the case of this movement we can also talk about completed buildings. This was possible because metabolism, perceived as an endemic trend, responded to the cultural need of the Japanese to forge an individual identity distinct from Western societies and to present themselves as an inventive, modern nation. One such metabolist monument is the Nagakin Capsule Tower in Tokyo (1971–1972), designed by Kisho Kurokawa. The potential for change and development inherent in this work was also intended to symbolise the potential of society. Prefabricated metal modules housing miniature apartments could be freely attached to or removed from reinforced concrete communication cores.

Habitat 67 in Montreal (1967) was also the result of an (unfinished) experiment (Ill. 3). Moshe Safdie designed a structure that combined architectural and urban scale, consistent with the message of *Nine Points on Monumentality*. Furthermore, this residential megastructure, sprawling along the St. Lawrence River, was intended to symbolise the World Expo and Canada's dynamic development.



Ill. 3. Moshe Safdie, Habitat 67 in Montreal, 1967, photo by A. Basista

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<sup>25</sup> H. French, *op. cit.*, p. 86.



III. 4. Manuel Núñez Yanowsky, Arènes de Picasso in Noisy-le-Grand, 1980–1984, photo by Wojciech Niebrzydowski

The idea of an uncompromising pursuit of innovation waned with the emergence of post-modernism, which responded to the social need for a return to tradition and pluralism. Designers proposed references to historical and vernacular architecture, a return to human scale and intimacy. This doesn't mean that the concept of monumental residential buildings was abandoned. In the early 1980s, two housing complexes that demonstrate this were built on the outskirts of Paris. In the Espaces d'AbraXas in Noisy-le-Grand (1978–1983), designed by Ricardo Bofill, the accumulation of references to ancient architecture is overwhelming. From the axial compositional principles to the details, we feel a palpable connection to the past. However, all the elements are transformed, resized, cracked, with surprising proportions. The architect divided the monumental structure into three parts: the Palace, the Theatre, and the Arch. The symbolic name AbraXas in ancient times meant magical logic.

Nearby, the Arènes de Picasso complex (1980–1984) was designed by Manuel Núñez Yanowsky. The precast concrete elements used in its construction, like the buildings themselves,

have unusual shapes. Here, the references to historical styles become almost unrecognisable. The aesthetics seem otherworldly, which certainly fascinated the society of the science fiction era. The most monumental space of the estate is a large octagonal courtyard, the axis of which runs from east to west and is closed on both sides by buildings in the form of vertical discs with a diameter of 43 metres, placed on arcades (Ill. 4).

Another version of the postmodern monument was presented by American architects from *Arquitectonica*. The Atlantis Condominium is, in a sense, a joke on the typical modernist slab-block. (Does a monument always have to be serious?) The enormous glass cuboid is rounded on one side. At the opposite end, a red triangle is placed on the roof, symbolising the traditional roof shape<sup>26</sup>. In the centre of the building, a square hole gapes, framed in yellow and containing a palm tree. It is simply a monument worthy of Miami in the crazy eighties.

Formal craziness is a fundamental attribute of the deconstructivist movement, which reached its apogee in the late 20th century. Its two most important representatives have designed monumental residential complexes. Both are located near the water, which provides ample exposure. A slightly earlier is *Neue Zollhof* in Düsseldorf, completed in 1998 according to a design by Frank Gehry. The group of buildings appears very complex, but in reality, it consists of only three objects. Their forms are so highly sculpted, undulating, and vary in height that they give the impression of an extremely rich composition. Only upon closer inspection do we notice that each building was articulated by its façade material (sheet



Ill. 5. Zaha Hadid, Spittelau Viaducts Housing in Vienna, 1994–2006, photo by Wojciech Niebrzydowski

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 172.

metal, brick, white plaster) and differences in the geometry of its form. These inconsistencies and confusions are not only a feature of Gehry's work, but also to some extent a reflection of the times.

A later work, completed only in the 21st century, is the Spittelau Viaducts Housing complex in Vienna (1994–2006). Built over a historic city railway viaduct, it consists of three sections. Their shapes are sharply angular, stretched, and broken, characteristic of Zaha Hadid's designs from this period (Ill. 5). The architect herself called her aesthetic a "frozen explosion". The individual parts of the composition are united by the white colour and ribbon windows. Hadid's work has become a symbol of the revitalisation of the Spittelau district, but it is not a well-regarded place to live due to its troublesome neighbourhood.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on analyses of residential architecture from 1945 to 2000, we can conclude that monumental buildings can be found in all trends and tendencies. The first decades after the end of World War II, when the ideas of modernism continued, monuments symbolised the rebirth of societies and their aspirations for modern development. Monumental Brutalist buildings reflected the austerity of the times, as well as the emotions and strength of a community based on sincerity and truth. Residential towers were a type of building particularly suited to the role of monument. Their continuous evolution, albeit with varying intensity, was evident throughout the second half of the 20th century. Experiments were conducted not only with high-rise buildings but also with other types of residential structures, such as cluster blocks, Metabolist buildings, and large-scale megastructures. The era of postmodernism brought monuments whose forms were often derived from the transformation of historical architecture. Buildings also appeared that responded to the social need for joy and carefreeness, a reaction to years of seriousness. By the end of the century, the rejection of rigour and simplicity in favour of freedom and extreme complexity resulted in the monuments of deconstructivism.

The research findings contradict Krier's assertion that monumentality is exclusively attributed to buildings with public, prestigious functions. However, it must be admitted that many of the analysed buildings served other functions besides residential use: services, retail, and offices. They also featured communal spaces for social interaction. When it comes to the durability of the buildings, it must be emphasised that it was ensured by modern techniques and construction solutions, as well as high-quality materials.

The monumental forms of residential buildings share many common features. Their significant size is characteristic, which generally leads to the exclusion of single-family houses from this group. The vertical orientation of the form fosters the impression of monumentality, although other orientations (horizontal, diagonal, neutral) are also possible. The building should be exposed in space, and therefore free-standing rather than placed in a frontage. Expressive, strong, memorable forms that affect the emotions of the observers are preferred. The form should be original and individual, as uniformity and repetition weaken the monumentality of the building.

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