

RADICAL ARCHITECTURE

ARCHITEKTURA RADYKALNA

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to recall several phenomena in the 20th-century architecture. One can evoke the avant-garde achievements of the first half of the century and projects whose intention was to radically discard the past. Others refer to the phenomenon of creative changes in art in Italy at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. Yet another kind of radicalism in architecture was presented by Lebbeus Woods. He created a series of drawings proposing the restoration of places destroyed by war. His unreal creations were intended as versions of radical reconstruction. Another variant of radical architecture are contemporary avant-garde realizations. Research methods include long-term studies on the achievements of modern architecture, as a result of which an analysis and synthesis of selected issues is carried out allowing a more detailed presentation.

Keywords: architecture, radicalism, contemporary

Streszczenie

Celem jest przypomnienie kilku zjawisk w architekturze XX wieku. Można przywołać awangardowe dokonania z I połowy stulecia i projekty, których zamierzeniem było radykalne odcięcie się od przeszłości. Kolejne odnoszą się do fenomenu twórczych przemian w sztuce we Włoszech z przełomu lat 60. i 70. Jeszcze inny rodzaj radykalizmu w architekturze przedstawił L. Woods. Stworzył serie rysunków będących propozycją restauracji miejsc zniszczonych wojną. Jego odrealnione kreacje miały być wersją radykalnej odbudowy. Inny wariant architektury radykalnej to współczesne awangardowe realizacje. Metody badawcze obejmują wieloletnie studia nad dorobkiem współczesnej architektury, w rezultacie których dokonana została analiza i synteza wybranych zagadnień pozwalająca na uszczegółowioną prezentację wyników badań.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, radykalizm, współczesna

1. INTRODUCTION

It seems that everything has already been studied and described as regards the 20th-century architecture. Yet, the wealth of phenomena, radical changes, turbulent history and a great variety of concepts that characterized the past century still arouse the interest of scientists. In addition, the extensive celebration of the Bauhaus school centenary has reminded us of the role this institution played in creating new architecture for modern society.

That is why it is proper to recall the impact it has had on contemporary aesthetics, architectural thought, as well as education in the field of art, including architecture. It is worth mentioning the experimental system of education introduced by the school as many of its elements are still used in the modern practice of teaching architectural engineers. At the same time, new challenges

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have emerged in recent years regarding the preservation of the material heritage of the Bauhaus which is mainly modernist architecture. Once modern, radically meeting the housing needs, it is now abandoned due to low quality, bad connotations and unfashionable aesthetics.

At the same time, it is worth pointing out that avant-garde movements and revolutionary changes in the concept of design and architecture began in the early 1920s, when Russian artists created concepts of modernity by cutting off ties with the past.

It is also a significant fact that with the dissolution of the Bauhaus, the tendency to search for innovative plans and projects that meet current needs and fashions did not cease to exist. The post-war phenomena of the late 1960s and early 1970s are also noteworthy. The ensuing devaluation of modernism favored the emergence of more contemporary architectural concepts based on new, spectacular technologies, social changes taking place and innovative aesthetic ideas. This situation was conducive to the rise of artists interested in creating visionary projects for the modern world. Hence the emergence of creative groups operating in different parts of Europe, such as Archigram in the UK or many similar groups in Italy.

The Italian phenomenon of creative changes in art, the transformation of design and architecture from the late 1960s and early 1970s was influenced by the socio-cultural changes that were taking place at the time.

Many years on, the idea of radicalism in architecture has remained valid. Therefore, it is worth making a further review and noting other phenomena whose authors claim to create new values, so far non-existent. Sometimes these are achievements on the border of architecture, but the strength of their impact on recipients is also of some value.

2. BAUHAUS

Recently, the term radical architecture appeared in the title of the exhibition *Festival Architektur RADIKAL*² organized as part of the program of the celebration of the centenary of the Bauhaus school in Dessau.

At this point, it should be mentioned that the Bauhaus Dessau foundation was established in 1994 by the state of Saxony-Anhalt, Federal Commissioner for Culture and Media (BKM) and the town Dessau-Roßlau³. Its statutory task is to protect the school's tangible and intangible heritage. In the years 1925–1932, Bauhaus functioned in Dessau and flourished there. On the one hand, it worked as a school, and on the other, thanks to the initiative of the teaching staff, it was a place where model architecture was created propagating new ways of life and creating appropriate conditions for people's lives through modern design. It is currently inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List and testifies to the history of the place: it is an example of transformations and restitution of the cultural heritage of this avant-garde school. As part of the extensive celebrations of the centenary, an exhibition (May 31 – June 2, 2019) was organized presenting the visionary and avant-garde architectural projects which at the time of their creation were utopian proposals in relation to the realities of everyday life then. Basing on experience and making reference to the international achievements of art, prosocial solutions were suggested that were adequate to the needs of society in the time of industrialization. They became prototypes of modern housing. The concepts that were considered radical at the time are largely standard procedures nowadays. Referring to those radical solutions, the school's jubilee hosts asked questions about the future

² <https://www.bauhaus-dessau.de/de/jubilaeum-2019/architektur-radikal.html>

³ <https://www.bauhaus-dessau.de/de/stiftung/organe.html>

of architecture and invited participants to make another attempt at defining the issue of social responsibility of architecture and its radical methods of experimental shaping of the built environment as a new approach meeting current social needs. To this end, under the slogan of *Festival Architektur RADIKAL*, student workshops of contemporary radical construction took place. 100 students accompanied by ten architects were active in workshops with lectures and conferences addressing the subject of the festival by designing utopian and visionary spaces.

3. ITALY

Another variant of “radical architecture” refers to radical creative changes in art taking place in Italy mainly at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s.⁴ The phenomenon of formal transformations of design occurred under the influence of historical processes and socio-cultural changes taking place in Italy at the time. The aesthetic metamorphosis concerned primarily design and interior decoration which was also due to an increase in consumption. In the field of architecture, the activities of radical groups of designers perceived as manifestations of the counterculture gained importance. This happened in the late 1960s. The radical design movement involved many design artists, including groups of architects from Florence: Superstudio (1967) and Gruppo 9999 (1968). Turin was the place of origin of the Sturm Group which included Giorgio Ceretti, Pietro Derossi and Riccardo Rosso, designers of the discotheques the Piper in Turin (1966) and L'Altro Mondo in Rimini (1967). Italian discos were called Pipers in reference to the first such place, which opened in Rome in 1965 and was designed by Manilo Cavalli and Francesco and Giancarlo Capolei. In Milan, Ugo La Pietra designed Bang Bang (1968), a boutique-like disco, while on the Tuscan coast Gruppo UFO designed Bamba Issa (1969), a disco inspired by the story of Mickey Mouse. These pioneering spaces combined innovations in art, architecture, music, theater and also in available technology.

During this period of change in Italy, socially oriented, politicized architects saw discos as a new kind of space for interdisciplinary activities and possibilities of unfettered creation. Artists dissatisfied with the state of modern design at the time sought, among other things, to redefine the nature of architecture, give importance to advanced technology, and also take into account the populist slogans of the consumer society⁵. These discos represent some realized examples of radical architecture. The phenomenon was short-lived and lasted only till the mid-1970s. Then most buildings were closed or transformed into other commercial spaces. Following the great MoMa exhibition in New York in 1972 titled: “Italy: the new domestic landscape achievements”⁶, radical architecture won worldwide recognition. Since then, many scientific papers and cultural events have been devoted to this topic. In 2016, London Institute of Contemporary Arts organized an exhibition “Radical Disco: Architecture and Nightlife in Italy”⁷. It showed the

⁴ <https://www.baumeister.de/radikale-architektur/>

⁵ Lunz K., *Response to Germano Celant's Essay "Radical Architecture"* [in] Ambasz E. (ed.), *Italy: the new domestic landscape achievements and problems of Italian design*, Museum of Modern Art, New York 1972, p. 380–387, <https://www.scribd.com/document/34603665/Response-to-Germano-Celant-s-Essay-Radical-Architecture>

⁶ *Ambasz E. (ed.), op. cit.*, https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_1783_300062429.pdf (access: 7.08.2019)

⁷ Radical Disco: Architecture and Nightlife in Italy, 1965–1975, London, 8 /12/2015–10/01/2016. Information from: <https://archive.ica.art/whats-on/radical-disco-architecture-and-nightlife-italy-1965-1975> Co-curators: dr Catharine Rossi (Kingston University London) and Sumitra Upham (ICA) (access: 7.08.2019).

connections between architecture and Italian nightlife at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s. The curators recalled the relatively unknown phenomenon by means of archival photos, architectural drawings, film, music and articles from international design magazines.

It is worth adding that retrospectives of visionary projects from the 1960s also apply to other creative groups operating in other parts of Europe. In 2016, Deutschen Architekturmuseum DAM in Frankfurt presented, among others, Archigram group projects which reveal interest in new technologies, social changes and spectacular shapes⁸.

This reminder of the legacy of *Radical Design* is only an example of the renewed interest in radical architecture. As part of such nostalgic events, an exhibition *Superstudio 50*⁹ was prepared at the Maxxi Museum in Rome to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the group's foundation. From April to September 2016, this retrospective show recalled one of the most influential groups of Italian radical architecture established in 1966 by Adolfo Natalini and Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, joined by Gian Piero Frassinelli, the brothers Roberto and Alessandro Magris and Alessandro Poli.

The exhibition gathered over 200 exhibits, including the most important drawings, photo-montages and installations from the series *The Continuous Monument* (1969), *architectural Histograms* (1969–70) and *The Twelve Ideal Cities* (1971), which showed the evolution of the group and its spectacular actions. The projects were once considered critical of the reality at the time and their intention was to influence society through architecture. There were also attempts to show the relationship between life and creative, individual design of group members. The group was officially dissolved in the early 1980s.

It is also worth noting one aspect of the group's work which coincided with the nature of the works of other architects of the time such as: Gaetano Pesce and Ettore Sottsass. Like the constructivists before them, they also tried to argue that the actual completion of the building and implementation of the concept were not important. Architectural projects and urban planning together with object design policy mattered for the operation of the idea itself, the concept and existence of the project as well as for the approach to a new way of being and acting to meet new social needs.

That is why visionary architectural projects conveying selected ideas and messages gained much significance. Purely theoretical works illustrated the authors' convictions about the future of architecture. In the *Superstudio* collection there is a series *The Continuous Monument* (1969) showing utopian proposals for New York, St. Moritz and the architecture on a rocky coast or a river.

4. LEBBEUS WOODS

Yet another kind of radicalism in architecture was proposed by Lebbeus Woods. He was a visionary architect, artist and teacher. In his works, he created underground cities like Berlin and Paris arose, and the utopian images of cities and buildings were full of fantasy, sometimes poetry. He used drawing to present his own vision of the world with all its shortcomings, prob-

⁸ Sturm P., Schmal P. C., *Zukunft von gestern – Visionäre Entwürfe von Future Systems und Archigram. Yesterday's Future – Visionary Designs by Future Systems and Archigram*, DAM, Prestel, Munich 2016. http://www.philipp-sturm.de/zvg_publ_ps.pdf (access: 7.08.2019).

⁹ <https://www.maxxi.art/events/superstudio-50/> (access: 7.08.2019).

lems and needs. He tackled current topics often making reference to the most vital events such as wars, disasters. He drew buildings for seismic zones which could survive earthquakes and ones with insect-like shapes. He did not present the world as it was, true images of reality, but drew processed futuristic forms very distant from the authenticity and the tangible. He perceived the world as an area of ongoing processes which required permanent researching and inventing new values, challenges in an evolving space. He saw the world at war and drew devastated and enslaved cities, destroyed buildings and variants of their reconstruction. The gripping illustrations of constructions after a disaster conveyed the message about dangers and their consequences.

In 1993 he visited Sarajevo during the war and created his own concept of the city's reconstruction¹⁰. The unreal creations were to lead to a radical version of the city's *Radical Reconstruction* along with elements of its structure. He focused attention on the building of the parliament and the Electrical Management building as well as on some residential blocks damaged during shelling. In Woods' drawings, particular objects would, to a large extent, retain the imprint of destruction, and the missing parts would be filled with constructions from enlarged, stylized destroyed fragments. While creating the new rebuilt object, the architect preserved physical traces and remains of destruction that were significant for the author's entire composition and were a necessary determinant in such radically renewed architecture.

5. NOVELTIES IN ARCHITECTURE

Another variant of radical architecture are contemporary achievements that can be called avant-garde or rather bold creations in historic surroundings. Many years ago, examples of such architecture were Haas House in Vienna (Hans Hollain, 1990) and Kunsthaus in Graz (Peter Cook, Colin Fournier, 2003). It is worth adding that in Austria, modern architecture, even with a certain degree of extravagance, is valued. There are local initiatives which aim at promoting new architecture and young architects.

This trend includes the architecture of the Landesgalerie Niederösterreich gallery (2019) in Krems located in the immediate vicinity of historic buildings, reminiscent of times past, but with great sensitivity fitted into such an urban landscape. It connects the historic city center with the Danube embankment. The wide arches of the gallery building invite the visitor to the interior of the museum, a four-storey building with an exhibition area of 3,000 m². The museum is connected by an underground passage with another significant conservation project the Kunsthalle Krems.¹¹

The gallery was designed by the marte.marte architects from Vorarlberg. The building's expressive form and its importance for contemporary architecture was commented on in the following way by Kristin Feireiss, co-founder of Architecture Forum Aedes, the Berlin exhibition centre for contemporary architecture and urban planning: 'the buildings by marte.marte are minimalist and yet full of sensual and haptic emotions; they are monolithic and yet

¹⁰ Woods L., *War and Architecture: Three Principles*, Pamphlet Architecture 15, Princeton Architectural Press 2011, <https://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2011/12/15/war-and-architecture-three-principles/> (access: 7.08.2019).

¹¹ Former tobacco factory (1852) was repurposed for use as an exhibition centre Kunsthalle (1995). Adolfa Krischanitz's projects joins the historic factory building with the new exhibition hall and a lecture room. Both the old and new buildings create an object in the early industrial style. All the new additions are easy to identify. Information from: <https://www.kunsthalle.at/de/institution/architektur>

they demonstrate great spatial richness. They are radical in their architectural language and yet merge harmoniously with the urban and rural context, with the adjacent traditional buildings and the surrounding landscape. A significant aspect that distinguishes the architecture of the gallery Landesgalerie Niederösterreich is the opening of the historical city center to the Danube¹².

6. CONCLUSION

The idea of radicalism in architecture seems to live on. It is, in fact, transcending traditions, creating original aesthetic and functional qualities. Their determinants are technological innovations, increasingly advanced building materials and social demand. Great breakthroughs made in the architecture of the last century will probably not occur quickly on such a scale or over such a range as in the early days of modernism. Nevertheless, the changing world and the pace at which inventions are made, technical achievements and challenges related to the possibilities of developing yet unknown areas, provide architects with opportunities to act and to create new radical projects.

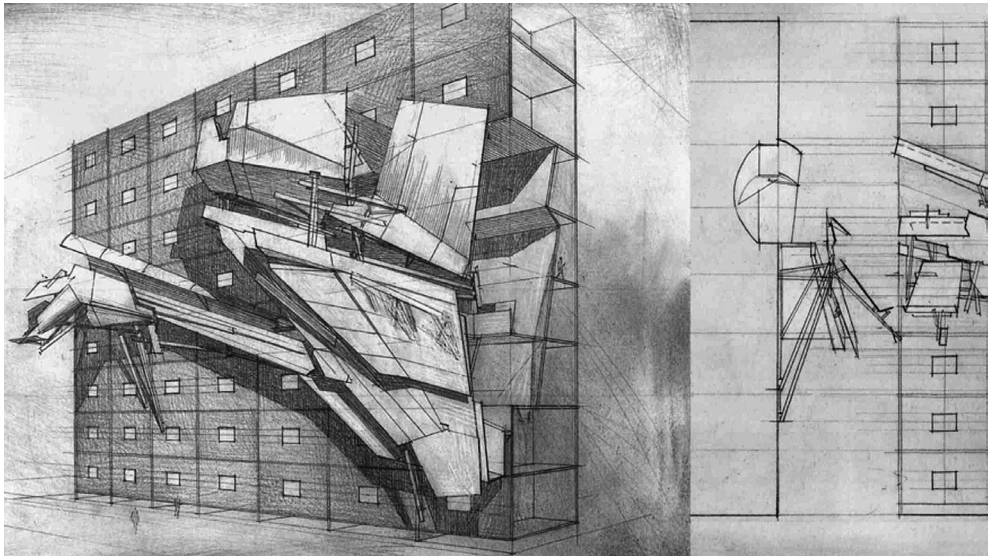


Ill. 1. Program flyer of Festival Architektur Radikal, <https://www.bauhaus-dessau.de/architecture-radikal.html> (access: 7.08.2019)

¹² <https://www.lgnoe.at/de/museum/news/das-war-der-architektur-talk>



III. 2. The stage and audio-visual system inside Piper, Turin, designed by Pietro Derossi, Giorgio Ceretti and Riccardo Rosso, 1966. © Pietro Derossi. <https://archive.ica.art/whats-on/radical-disco-architecture-and-nightlife-italy-1965-1975> (access: 7.08.2019)



III. 3. A block of flats damaged during artillery fire and a proposal for *Radical reconstruction* <https://lebbeuswoods.wordpress.com/2011/12/15/war-and-architecture-three-principles/> (access: 7.08.2019)



Ill. 4. Galeria Landesgalerie Niederösterreich (2019) in Krems designed by architects from Marte. Marte Architects. <https://www.lgnoe.at/en/museum/architecture> (access: 7.08.2019)

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