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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## Abstract

*Reinvention and reinterpretation of the Modern Movement emerged in the middle of the 1990s. It was represented in buildings recalling the classical details of modernism and was distributed in the architectural media as well as by theoretical forums. The newly modern trend returned to pre-war modern architecture, which promised a new golden age of modernism by rejecting the compromised modernism of the socialist period, as a media tempestas. The newly modern managed to solve the identity crisis of modernism: the local tradition of Buda eventually legitimated modernist architecture throughout Hungary. However, among the restrictions on historical and stylistic issues, technology and modernization could not make way for a progressive architecture. The newly modern served mainly one class, the re-emerging Hungarian bourgeoisie. The economic crisis eventually marginalized the whole newly modern movement.*

## Keywords

*Hungarian, Architecture, 1990s, Tradition, Revival, Modern Movement*

*Absolute spirit, the third home of European moderns, is sensually dense; moreover, sensual density is one of its greatest attractions. Our remembrance of an encounter with this world always contains a grain of nostalgia. We desire to return. Modern nostalgia proper is, however, unlike the desire to return to the mother's womb; it wills to experience the same as different. The exact repetition of what one desires does not satisfy. Every repetition is to be unrepeatable. This is not simply a quest for novelty, but a quest for novelty within the familiar. This desire is one of the motivations that pushed moderns, in their quest for novelty, increasing into the past. (Heller, 2011:p.211)*

The Hungarian architectural profession – mostly beyond the social restructuring and the economic shock that followed the change of the political system – re-discovered modern architecture with all its inherent potential. The architectural press that had recovered its full strength by the middle of the decade, greatly contributed to the introduction and popularization of the new trend. Although there have been some attempts made to analyse this phenomenon since then, they – as often happens when the researcher surveys their own era – remained on the surface. Different naming of the trend also shows uncertainty. Reviewers who raised the issue usually simply mentioned modernization, modernity or modernism, but to make it clear which modern they were thinking about, they often referred to Bauhaus: Bauhaus 2000, Bauhaus-vademecum or revived Bauhaus. We also meet the expressions neo-modern, new-modern or new(ly) modern. The following study gives an overview of the less than ten years history of this phenomenon, which we summarise as newly modern. The paper focuses partly on an analysis of contemporary writings, and partly on the development of modernization, examining it in both and international and home context.

## 1 International background

In 1977, Charles Jencks announced that modern architecture had died, and we entered into the age of post-modern. Despite the gimmicky statement, perhaps he seriously believed that an era had ended (Jencks, 1977). Post-modern – sometimes only

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bizarre, but increasingly serious – historicism rapidly spread in architectural practice. It offered new, previously forbidden formal opportunities for the architects disappointed in technological development and in the great meta-narrative of progress. Furthermore, post-modern shapes were also familiar and attractive to the public. However, the name – post-modern – itself referred to the main weakness of the trend, namely it defined itself not as something new but as a trend opposed to a former one. It soon became clear that modern architecture could not be exceeded so easily. Charles Jencks, who celebrated post-modern classicism as a new synthesis in architecture in a special edition of *Architectural Design* in 1980, edited a book about late-modern in the same year. He recognized that modern architecture survived, even if it had been changed (Jencks, 1980a; Jencks, 1980b).

Jencks was not the only one who reported the survival even rebirth of modern architecture. In 1981, Ada Louis Huxtable, the famous architectural critic called a new building designed by Gwathmey-Siegel & Associates neo-modern, using this label for modern survival and revival both. “If there is post-modernism then neo-modernism must follow, for the work of those who are maintaining or reviving the modernist vocabulary rather than rushing to the history books” (Huxtable, 1981). Only a few years later, Elizabeth M. Farrelly made an already serious attack against post-modern architecture, when she devoted a whole issue of the *Architectural Review* to the introduction of the New Spirit – right after she had announced the death of post-modern (Farrelly, 1986). She recognised that the new spirit had many common features with the early modern movements – constructivism, futurism or dada – like striving for changes, the thrusting, dynamic imagery and the questioning of the existing rules. Illustrations confirmed her statement: the magazine started the issue with the images of experimental projects from the 1920s and 1960s as a “pictorial survey of sources” before the recent architectural designs of the new spirit. However, contrary to the obvious connection, Farrelly stressed that “the New Spirit is by no means a direct Modernist revival, since these preoccupations are combined with a freer use of geometry than the International Style was ever capable of and the absorption of a much broader range of influence than even Modernism could admit.” Nevertheless, New Spirit as a term could not take root in the professional media. The majority of the architects (Coop Himmelblau, Zaha Hadid, Frank O. Gehry, Daniel Libeskind), who Farrelly listed as the representatives of the new trend in her article, had already appeared under the label Deconstructivism created by Philip Johnson and Marc Wigley in 1988.<sup>1</sup> In the following years, the trend gained yet further names until Jencks labelled it as New Modernism, which he distinguished from Neo-Modernism and Late-Modernism

both (Jencks, 1992). New Modernism faces the failure of the Old Modernism, the lost innocence. Unlike the other two that try to avoid confrontation, the New Modern sobriety – Jencks states – “doesn’t allow the simple, straightforward Modernist approach to progress, the Enlightenment hope that progress is possible without destruction and catastrophe.”

As time approached the millennium – and as the post-modern shock was over – theoreticians concentrated on how to list and order the many emerging trends; attaching different attributes to Modern went out of fashion. Surveying the architectural texts from the last decade, we still meet – here and there – the name neo-modern, but without a uniform definition.<sup>2</sup> However, the re-evaluation of Modern Movement started around the millennium, which – with the post-modern pluralism in the background – led to the discovery and acceptance of complexity and divergent aspects of modernity. Architecture born in the spirit of modernity included a general drive to progress and the feeling of permanent transition, a simplifying determination to development and the uncertainty caused by inherent discrepancies (Heynen, 1999:pp.12-13). Researchers have realised that though the Modern Movement now belongs to the past, its legacy is rich enough to learn from and study. (Heynen, 2002:pp.397-398). The following research raises the question as to whether the re-interpretation of Modern Movement means the recalling of the original shapes, and dealing with spaces and masses, or it means the re-thinking of principles, social and cultural values and responsibility connected to modernity.

## 2 The age of transitions in Hungary

Reassessment of modernity became a key issue for Hungarian scholars of all disciplines in the 1990s. The phenomena of Modernity, Modernism and Modernisation are thoroughly inter-related as observed by Hilde Heynen: “The term *modernization* is used to describe the process of social development, the main features of which are technological advances and industrialization, urbanization and population explosions, [...] democratization, and an expanding (capitalist) world market. *Modernity* refers to the typical features of modern times and to the way that these features are experienced by the individual: modernity stands for the attitude toward life that is associated with a continuous process of evolution and transformation, with an orientation toward a future that will be different from the past and the present. The experience of modernity provokes responses in the form of cultural tendencies and artistic movements. Some of these that proclaim themselves as being in sympathy with the orientation toward the future and the desire for progress are specifically given the name *modernism*” (Heynen, 1999:p.10).

<sup>1</sup> The label Deconstructivism was introduced after the *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition organized at the MOMA (The Museum of Modern Art, New York) in June 23 – August 30, 1988.

<sup>2</sup> The authors equate neo-modern either with late-modern architecture or with the deconstructivist approach. (Two trends that emerged originally as the opposite of one another!) But we also find authors who list the 1990s minimalism under the label neo-modernism (Mallgrave and Goodman, 2011:p.205)

Ágnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér were the first to treat the historical background of modernity after postmodern. They share the main concept of westerners: postmodern is a part of modern. Thus, it does not surpass it but rather corrects it (Heller and Fehér, 1993:p.8, p.51). The critical approach of postmodernism and the following era is transforming the whole idea of modernity (pp.51-57). Their most important contribution to the dispute is the introduction of the Central and Eastern European transitions, and the collapse of the Soviet tyranny to the discourse on modernity (p.8, p.37). Heller sees the collapse of Soviet tyranny as the overture to universalism at the end of history as foretold by Hegel and Marx (p.17). Socialist regimes ceased to rival or offer alternatives to capitalism. Western modernity spreads without notable resistance throughout the world, and this advance is the swiftest in Central and Eastern Europe. Heller describes this moment of triumph as a standstill in history, suitable for the evaluation and reassessment of modernity (p.8). Hungary integrates or rather reintegrates with the West during the transformation of western modernity.

While Heller and Fehér deny any further force of a socialist interpretation of modernity, Péter György links the whole idea of modernism in Hungary to socialism. Delusion with socialism should discredit the whole idea of modernity (György and Durkó, 1993:p.22). He sees socialist dictatorial utopia implemented in the vast housing estates in the outskirts of almost all the cities in Hungary (p.45, pp.53-54, p.61). György evaluates them as deterrent and uninhabitable urban forms and describes their complete failure. He examines the last example in Káposztásmegyér, Budapest, already designed in a slight post-modern manner, as the ultimate chance for improvement. His analysis parallels the problems of earlier examples, briefly the vacuity and barbarity of geometry, with the postmodern answers given to them in Káposztásmegyér (p.50). In his view, the implemented postmodern tools were still insufficient to create a humane environment (pp.66-79).

According to Péter György, housing estates compromised modern ideas to the core, thus it seems impossible for modernity to become a positive model: "The high quality and sometimes even magnificent villas of the Hungarian members of the CIAM group is also compromised by the so called »modernism« of state socialism. Interwar villas, once fine structures, proved unsuitable to become part of a repertoire based on consent. These houses cannot become positive predecessors of the architecture of today due to their completely deteriorated state. On the other hand, commissioners detest the mood and marks that are familiar to them from housing estates" (p.94).

The re-evaluation of modernity and modernism in Hungary begins after the downfall of socialism. Hungary (re)accessed the western world, undergoing a transition itself. Hungarian scholars see modernity and modernism as a universal phenomenon, but clearly mark differences between Western and Eastern models, claiming that the latter one is outdated. This turning point

opens the way to the specific reassessment of modernity and modernism in Hungary that inevitably differs from the West.

### 3 The outset of newly modern in Hungary

Modernist architecture seemed obsolete in a country now democratic and capitalist due to its interpenetration with socialist modernity. Three independent events managed to evade the appalling prejudice. These altered the evaluation of modernist architecture significantly: the renovation of an original modernist villa dating from the 1930s, a topographical work on the interwar architecture of the capital and an architectural conference.

The first example of modernist resuscitation in the 1990s is a result of a design relatively contingent in historical terms. In 1994, Tamás Dévényi converted a private villa designed in the 1930s into a bank office and a flat. The estate stands in Pasarét, one of the most up-market areas in the Buda quarter, within Budapest.<sup>3</sup> The house has been circumspectly restored to a level of historical preservation. (Ferkai, 1995:pp.134-135). In this design, pre-war modern architecture as a tradition manifested itself for the first time.

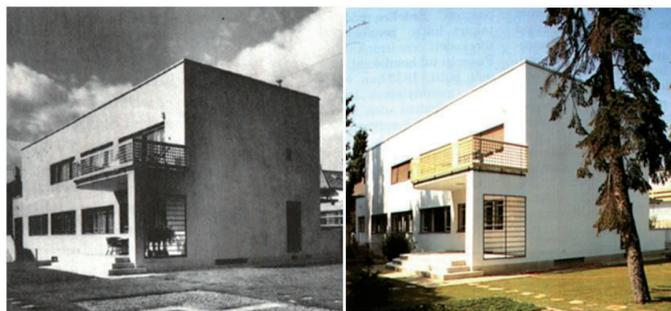


Fig. 1-2 The villa designed by Gyula Rimanóczy. (Ferkai, 1995:p.135) and renovated by Tamás Dévényi. (Dévényi, 1994:p.349)

The second step leading to the revival of modernism was a work on architectural history. In 1995, András Ferkai released his topographical work on the interwar architecture of Buda. The introductory study is followed by a list of all buildings originating from the era, including the restored villa of Dévényi. The book represents a decade of research; thus its initials date back way before the transition, but its publishing triggers the rediscovery of modern architecture.

The third important pillar of the reassessment of modernism was an event triggered by locals. In 1996, the Pasarét Citizens' Circle proposed a conference on modern architecture, which was definitive to the character and identity of the neighbourhood since its major development was linked with the interwar period. The head of the society, Lászlóné Rátai asked the Hungarian Museum of Architecture for help in the presentation of the topic. The main motivation behind their request was a simple interest

<sup>3</sup> Budapest, II. Pasaréti út 96.

in local architectural tradition, as the head of the museum lately recalled.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the atmosphere of modernism proved to be indelibly present behind the whole initiative.

The event became popular with architects and became the first of a decade-long series of annual conferences known as Architects' Conference of Pasarét (Pasaréti Építészalálkozó). The topic of the first conference was Hungarian modernism with the architecture of Pasarét presented in the context of the interwar period. Hundreds participated including locals, architects and students. (Hajdu and Ritoók, 1996)

The renovation of a villa, the topographical study and the conference became inevitable preliminaries to following designs. After unpublished and thus isolated examples<sup>5</sup>, the first new building applying modernist forms was the apartment building in Beregszászi út, Budapest by György Vadász, Miklós Miltenberger-Miltényi and László Váncza in 1997. The authors created the first emblematic work of the newly modern, but they were not the first to rediscover modernism in Hungary.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 3 The residential community of Beregszászi út.

New designs eventually entered journals. The large number of terms used to describe the phenomenon illustrates the magnitude of the attention. Already in 1997, Iván András Bojár had linked the functionalist architecture of his present to *Bauhaus* (Bojár, 1997), which proved to be an acceptable term by the public. The project at Beregszászi út was soon named *New Bauhaus* by the reviewers

and real-estate agencies (Somogyi, 2002), while in 2002, the design periodical *Octogon* launched a thematic issue under the title *New(ly) Bauhaus?*<sup>7</sup> Authors also endeavoured to grasp pre-war modernism as a whole. Csaba Masznyik was the first to introduce the term *New Modern* (Masznyik, 1998) while Andor Wesselényi-Garay preferred *Neomodern*.<sup>8</sup> Krisztina Somogyi advocated using *Contemporary Modern* (Somogyi, 1996). Even Bojár was not consistent in terminology, as he later also called the trend New Modern (Bojár, 2001).

The various labels led András Ferkai back to the theorists coining the international expressions, deeming all different from the widespread trend in Hungary. His article in *Octogon* intended to help orientation between the perturbing numbers of tags by introducing three new ones: *still-modern*, *newly-modern*, *other-modern* (Ferkai, 2002).

The independent sources of newly modern represent the rediscovery of modernism in different aspects. Dévényi restores an original modernist villa with sensitivity previously unknown to modernist buildings. Ferkai highlights the Modern Movement among the multi-stylistic confusion of the interwar period. The subject of the first conference in Pasarét is modernism. Critics and journalists, although using various labels, unanimously point out the trend's commitment to the heritage of modernism.

#### 4 Modernist tradition as a promise of a new Golden Age

The three triggering initiatives are not discredited by the previous dictatorship; later, Hungarian architectural scholars intentionally defined modernist tradition as something independent from state socialism. Theorists constructed a triptych of the past, where modernism of the 1930s represented the Golden Age, followed by a rejected decadence; our present is to be the renaissance of respectable ideas. The first to formulate it was András Ferkai. Research on modern architecture in Hungary has been conducted as early as the socialist era, but the work of Ferkai still holds freshness due to its topographical approach.<sup>9</sup> Since it was the first comprehensive research on the Modern Movement in Hungary in the 1990s, it had a significant impact on the posterior historiography of modernism.

##### 4.1 Evaluation of the 1930s

András Ferkai's book gives an objective register of interwar buildings and an introduction that portrays the urban development in Buda. "We may conceive the first half of the twentieth century as the struggle for diversifying the range of flats, and

<sup>4</sup> Pál Ritoók's kind communication, 3, March 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Tamás Tomay designed a house in 1992 that was later labelled newly modern. It remained unpublished until 2000 and thus it could not trigger the movement due to its obscurity. (Vargha, 2000:item 67)

<sup>6</sup> András Balázs Sütő sees the studio of Vadász György as pioneers of newly modern. (Sütő, 2002:p.83)

<sup>7</sup> A few examples of how this revival was named: neohaus, neobauhaus, post-neo-bauhaus, (re)Bauhaus.

<sup>8</sup> Neomodern was used as a general term for international but also for Hungarian trends. (Haba, 2000; Wesselényi-Garay, 2004)

<sup>9</sup> Ferkai highlights a book by Merényi, 1970 and a study written by Preisich and Benkhard, 1967. (Ferkai, 1995:p.7).

for modern urban planning to raise living standards for ever-more growing fragments of society on one hand, and architects, urban planners and social politicians on the other realizing the interests of the former” (Ferkai, 1995:p.15). The author introduces various concepts behind urban planning and the development of domestic architecture ongoing within their framework.

First, he names three successful city planning efforts in Buda. Kelenföld gave a home to the first perimeter development lining the street-front in Hungary, but its reach was limited to just one block. The author praises the architect behind the concept of Irinyi József út, Buda, for its grandiosity, alas, it remained unfinished, and the remaining work was designed by architects of modest talent. He also highlights the fine proportions of the reconstruction in Óbuda-Újtlak. (1995:p.11) Varied urban plans incorporate diverse new domestic spaces and previously existing types are transformed into healthy, modern habitats (1995:pp.15-22). The principles of the thirties offered more possibilities than was constructed of them. After a promising period of unravelling, the development halted due to the war. Instead of continuing the practice following peace, deterioration took its place: failure was followed by misunderstanding and deception of the modernist traditions.

#### 4.2 Deviation from the tradition in the 1960s

Ferkai sees advanced urban planning concepts as prerequisites of modern architecture. The master plan of Víziváros, central Buda, was “another step ahead”, where development continued even after the war, but with an attitude of uncertainty. “Unfortunately the reconstruction of the Víziváros remained but a fragment due to the war, and the later buildings did not adapt to the scale and atmosphere of the 1930s” (Ferkai, 1995:p.12).

Marginalisation was the fate of interwar architects; József Fischer, former member of CIAM gradually lost his governmental influence after the downfall of the short post-war democratic period between 1945 and 1948 (Apáti-Nagy, 2001). The progressive structural ideas of Béla Sámsondi Kiss were also ignored due to the pernicious attitude of the Soviet-modelled, strictly centralised system (Sámsondi Kiss, 1998). Alfréd Hajós also witnessed the difference between the pre- and post-war possibilities for an architect: he previously won a silver medal in the art competition at the 1928 Olympic Games in Paris and was a successful architect of several sports facilities; however, he did not receive any grand works after returning from his involuntary exile (Hargrave, 1998).

The fading of the ideas of the 1930s and the isolation of the leading characters of the age eventually perished the standard of architecture. This happened with the ongoing urban development of Óbuda-Újtlak where the “plans for a proportionate urban environment was abandoned in the sixties’ in order to make way for a housing estate project the size of a town, which is probably the worst of all examples”

(Ferkai, 1995:p.12). Abuse of interwar modernist buildings was common in this age. The distortion of the villa finally renovated by Tamás Dévényi began in the 1960s. The noxious approach to the architectural practice of the 1960s and 1970s is caused by the negligent practice embodied in the work of “mediocre architects” who “discredited modernism by the unimaginative application of forms” (Somogyi, 1996:p.22).

#### 4.3 The dawn of the New Golden Age

The deterioration of Hungarian architecture was not necessary. The careers of emigrants represent alternatives to the homeland practice after the Soviet takeover. The failure of domestic Hungarian modernism is overshadowed by the success of Marcel Breuer and Ernő Goldfinger (Balogh, 2002; Ernyey, 2002).

Journalists highlight the difference in architectural practice between the interwar and post-war period, just as Ferkai did in his study. Short biographies of Hungarian architects published in reviews suggest that the decay of architectural standards is a result of increasing governmental suppression rather than the growing incompetence of architects, since conservation of the original ideas was possible outside the Eastern Block. The career of Oscar Niemeyer testifies to the possibility of preservation, as he managed “to preserve the social sensitivity of the Bauhaus School to the second half of the twentieth century, and created buildings that commemorate the rise and fall of an era of abundant utopias” (Nagy, 2002). His works give hope to new designs in the West following the misinterpreted and compromised principles of the Modern Movement. In order to differentiate these works from the twilight of intervening ages, they are called Contemporary or Contemporary Modern in the West – states a reviewer. (Somogyi, 1996). On the other side of the gap lies “the quality architecture of the thirties, which is the last in history to be proud of.”<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.4 The historical canon of newly modern

Iván András Bojár describes the 1930s as the source of newly modern architecture: “the modernists rely on the heritage of functionalism of the interwar period” (Bojár, 1997). Acceptance of the thirties is parallel to the rejection of the sixties: “the housing estates of the sixties and seventies had a devastating effect on spirit [...] Buildings did not respect the individual needs of their inhabitants. This attitude is directly opposed by the residential communities of the nineties, which offer homes more differentiated and emotionally richer” (Jankovich, 2001). New architecture finds its predecessors in the thirties and rejects the age of architecture that “echoes the worthlessness of human life” (György and Durkó, 1993:p.75). György predicted quite accurately that the frightening barbarism of the sixties is unacceptable; although, it was the modernism of the thirties, praised even by him, that eventually fuelled a renaissance of modernist forms.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Nóra Döbrentei (Farkas, 2002)

The newly modern sought positive tradition and recognized its immediate historical predecessor in the modernism of the thirties, with the guidance of Ferkai. Everything that happened in the meantime condemned – including, of course, the immediate predecessor postmodern. The work of Péter György is a most comprehensive manifesto against the compromising housing estates, and interestingly enough, it was reviewed by Ferkai. Journalists adapted to the canon, and their articles suggested a new golden age of modernism by rejecting the *media tempestas* in between. Historicist reasoning eventually yielded in the revival of heritage.

## 5 Implementing tradition

Revival is an attitude in design where a direct reference is made to a previous age. Authors of the newly modern strictly marked the boundaries of their canonized era. Journals carefully detailed all the layers within the spirit of the previous age that were or could have been re-enacted.

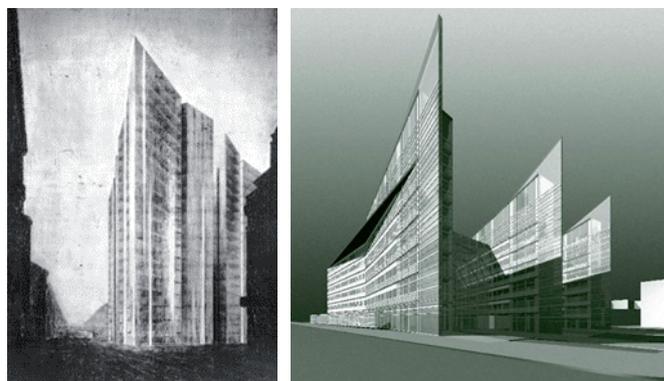
The foremost description comes from Tamás Dévényi presenting his own work, the renovation of the villa from the 1930s. Original photography was used to support a complete reconstruction down to the smallest detail, even the mud scraper. Genuine plans were used where possible during the refurbishment of the interior. Any new arrangements needed were either made in the spirit of the great modernists like Le Corbusier or using new designs from Sir Norman Foster attempting to align with the atmosphere. Dévényi also added new developments such as insulated glass panes. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the whole morphologic repertoire of modern architecture was implemented here when the exterior was restored with such historical fidelity, while the interior design followed the spirit of the style (Dévényi, 1994).



**Fig. 4-5** The interior of Theo van Doesburg and its remake in the villa renovated by Tamás Dévényi. ([http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e6/Cin%C3%A9-dancing\\_Strasbourg\\_-\\_Theo\\_van\\_Doesburg060611\\_006.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e6/Cin%C3%A9-dancing_Strasbourg_-_Theo_van_Doesburg060611_006.jpg), retrieved on 24th April 2014, and Dévényi 1994:p.344).

**11** The fall of socialism weakened the state in its role as a real-estate developer, therefore, by 2000, there was no player who could possibly fund a project of a scale similar to housing estates.

Primer modernist forms appearing on new buildings represent a basic level of evocation. For example, the radical shape of the plan for a skyscraper on Friedrichstraße by Mies van der Rohe stands as a model to the sharp disposition of Alkotás Point Office Building by Építész Stúdió (Szentpéteri, 2002a).



**Fig. 6-7** Plan for a skyscraper in Friedrichstraße by Mies van der Rohe and the Alkotás Point Office. ([upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/aa/FriedrichStrasse.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/aa/FriedrichStrasse.jpg) and [www.budapestiepitestkamara.hu/files/ko\\_Alkoatas\\_Point%2062i.jpg](http://www.budapestiepitestkamara.hu/files/ko_Alkoatas_Point%2062i.jpg), retrieved on 24th April 2014)

Another scheme, followed by many architects was an implementation of a perfectly circumscribable modernist toolkit. Márton Szentpéteri names tube railing, strip windows, pergola and large surfaces without windows as standardized elements of the new Bauhaus style (Szentpéteri, 2002b), and in the words of József Martinkó (Martinkó, 2002) we might as well add whitewashed walls, projecting slabs and circular windows. All houses published under various terms earn their reputation by applying a discretionary number of the above elements.



**Fig. 8** Építész Stúdió: Skanska Office.

The characteristics of the ‘other modern’ also appear beside the International Style.<sup>12</sup> Critics admire the work of János Kóris for following the original intentions in the extension of the council building, that is, the design principles of the Amsterdam School (Szegő, 2002).



Fig. 9 The Council of Angyalföld District, Budapest.

Homage to great masters may exceed forms. The *Gesamtkunstwerk* attitude of the schools of pre-war modern can also be traced in Hungarian architecture. Architectural predecessors originate mostly from Bauhaus, Le Corbusier and de Stijl, while the sources for fine arts are mostly neoplasticist painters. Andor Wesselényi-Garay discovers traces of the neoplasticity of de Stijl on the buildings of Graphisoft Park by Ferenc Cságoly (Wesselényi-Garay, 2002b). De Stijl was also a source of the Austrian School in Budapest: “Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg would surely be glad to sign these facades as their compositions in two dimensions” (Muzsai, 2001). Interchangeability of media shows a similarly close relation between fine arts and architecture as seen in the Modern Movement, since this “façade a la Mondrian” can only be built as an “independent elevation invented by Le Corbusier” (Wesselényi-Garay, 2002a). Regrettably the architectural quality here derives from almost perfect remakes of original modernist ideas.

Grasping thorough aesthetic intentions should have been the next level of understanding modern principles, but the universal evocation of modernism seemed impossible without direct formal references. “György Vadász, Miklós



Fig. 10 Georg Driendl and András Bordás, Austrian School in Budapest

Miltenberger-Miltényi and László Váncza evoked an age, applied its system of aesthetic norms” but could not escape the “application of external formal language” (Bojár, 1998). It seems that the curious void of “unexplainable artistic surplus” attributed to the Skanska Office by Szentpéteri should only cast a shadow on evident copying (Szentpéteri, 2002b).

There were also initiatives to overcome, even the aesthetic questions of pre-war modernism – at least in journals: Balázs Balogh attributes a certain “timelessness” to the sports facility by Bence Vadász, which “has an overall impression that resembles the National Swimming Hall of Alfréd Hajós” (Balogh, 2003). This predecessor is built of brick, but the new design also relates to Piet Mondrian by its “wooden boxes coated in primary colours.” The striking heterogeneity of sources becomes visible in the bluntness of materials: instead of a universal approach, the building is an elaborate mixture of almost contradictory styles.



Fig. 11 Hajós Alfréd National Swimming Hall



Fig. 12 The Láng Sports Facility by Vadász Bence.

<sup>12</sup> Colin St John Wilson’s book “The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture” was edited in 1995. In 1997, the meeting of Architects’ Conference of Pasarét was organised under the title “The other modern”.

Journalists unanimously name the masters and schools of pre-war modernism as the sources of newly modern buildings. Their legacy succeeds through their forms; the application of previous forms is the sole way of implementing legacy. Critiques outline the application of more abstract ideas, but buildings do not adjust to this suggestion. Each form can be traced back to its origin, with a morphology of different initiatives from a single age appearing simultaneously. Quoted forms appear free from context, and their rearrangement forms the newly modern architecture. Critiques describe the phenomenon as something even closer to pre-war modernism than its own age (Haba, 2003a). Modernism is present as a historical style. The unexplainable abundance of quotations seems autotelic to Tamás Tomay, and this leads him to draw a direct relationship between newly modern and the dreaded Post Modern.<sup>13</sup>

Journals sought the old style – and usually found what they wanted. The value of newly modern is not restricted to a simple copy of the old; it has qualities that make it perfectly unique in the history of architecture.

## 6 Novelties of newly modern

The source of tradition and its implementation by the newly modern is the rediscovery of modernism through the mere dimension of aesthetics. Pre-war modernism is clearly a pristine element of the newly modern architecture for it is located in a remote age. The development achieved in terms of style may as well be considered humble (Sütő, 2002), but the true merit of newly modern lies in the unique interpretation of the ancient, which helped to reopen the fountain of the past.

### 6.1 Modernity and modernization

The forms of newly modern can be traced back to the masters of pre-war modernism, but the toolkit originating from classical works also has improved elements. “Fastidious technology”, new curtain walls, thermal bridge-free concrete cantilevers and proper sealants enable architects to realize the formal ideals of the thirties “in a perfect shape”.<sup>14</sup> The broadening of this kit is made possible through technical development,<sup>15</sup> and technology counts as one of the most important logics of modernity (Heller and Fehér 1993:p.29). Modernization and the new modernity of Hungary stretch far beyond the realm of architecture. Katalin Baranyai sees the whole era as a period of post-socialist modernization (Baranyai, 2002).

The sociologist Erzsébet Szalai claims that the rise of New Capitalism was the most important social-economic development in the modernity of the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> Not only had western

capitalism returned after the transition, but with it, a dual system of society where a progressive and pro-European half opposes a pre-modern and feudal one. The division between west and east is common from “the outset of capitalism in Hungary in the second half of the nineteenth century, and its presence has been continuous ever since” (Szalai, 2001:p.242). Overcoming duality became a central issue in Hungarian politics. The most important issue is to stop the contraction of the middle class, and support its reconstruction and reorganization. Not only is architecture similar to the 1930s, but even the whole structure of society is an heir to this decade.

Erzsébet Szalai highlights the ethos of citizenry. The interwar period became inseparable from the civilian milieu, managing to become an independent standard of value. Articles of Iván András Bojár and József Martinkó suggest that the whole of the thirties is re-enacted in architecture. Even the fairly early table of Georg von Hapsburg from 1996 was named parallel modern and civilian. Tamás János Szabó sees a similar historical background behind the original and the new Bauhaus. Newly modern is propagated by the new economic elite, a new bourgeoisie in search of its identity. (Szabó, 2002)

Modernization in the 1990-2000s formed the base of the newly modern in Hungary. There was a strong similarity or rather a strong sympathy towards the thirties, and sympathy led the new elite to form an identity by following old patterns.

### 6.2 Foreignness and identity

Modernism had a highly disputed capability of forging an identity from its origin. Sigfried Giedion refused the term International Style for implying rootlessness (Giedion, 1965:p.22). Interwar Hungary also received modernism as a foreigner. Aversion became visible in the critics of the Church of Pasarét by Gyula Rimanóczy. It was a building designed in the spirit of the School of Rome but was condemned for its Soviet style, (Hadik, 1994:pp.131-135), meaning that the public deemed it a foreigner.

The socialist regime did not leave judgment to individuals. It declared its distrust by officially rejecting Modernism, due to its western cosmopolitanism, through the governmental participants in the Great Architectural Dispute of 1951. This made way for the short period of socialist realist architecture in Hungary. Accusations followed the end of the short excommunication. Journals of the sixties always pointed out every foreign source that might have involved Hungarian architects. Critics rightly discovered Finnish and English impact on those who spent their scholarships in these countries, but this eventually encouraged a drive for it. At one point, it seemed that architectural mentality in Hungary consisted mainly of imports. Echoes of these critiques are still audible in the age of newly modern: in the Contemporary Hungarian Architectural Guide of 2001, Rudolf Klein stated that the works of Károly Jurcsik and Levente Varga from the 1960s and of their disciples show foreign origin (Klein et al., 2001:p.43).

<sup>13</sup> Tamás Tomay (Farkas, 2002)

<sup>14</sup> Nóra Döbrentei (Farkas, 2002)

<sup>15</sup> Zoltán Tima (Farkas, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> The term New Capitalism was coined by the aesthete Miklós Almási. Erzsébet Szalai adopted it in 2001 and eventually she explored the new aspects of the revert on capitalism. (Szalai, 2006:p.7 and pp.11-31)

The newly modern could not escape accusations of foreignness. Iván András Bojár was one of the firsts in 1997 to draw attention to the fact that some new houses tend to be designed in a modern manner. He distinguished these new houses according to their supposed national origin by stating that these show, for example, German, or Scandinavian characteristics: only to name their identity inextricable. He reformulated this in the thematic issue of Octogon in 2002 on newly modern: “the value of these works descends primarily not from [...] architectural quality but from the success of identifying itself with a certain cultural code. When deriving mass forms from, for example, Tange [...] is the main worth of a house, camouflage is more important than constituting an own character” (Bojár, 2002). István Janáky also named a foreign source, Swiss Minimalism as the base of the new trend.<sup>17</sup>

Foreign national identity was also a threatening bias, just as socialism, but newly modern also managed to escape. The authentic renovation by Dévényi took place in a genuine modernist environment, followed by similar developments. Ferkaei researched the origins of modernist architecture in Buda, and the authority of his statements was essentially local. The Architects’ Conference of Pasarét devoted itself to discover its own neighbourhood. The issue of national identity or rather the accusation of anti national attitude submerged. Péter Haba also pointed out the supremacy of location in retrospect: “Hungarian Modernist architecture descends from the villas that still stand on the hillsides of Buda and Pasarét” (Haba, 2003b). Prevalent authenticity given by the location at the outset of newly modern helped to surpass all preconceptions against modernism throughout its history.

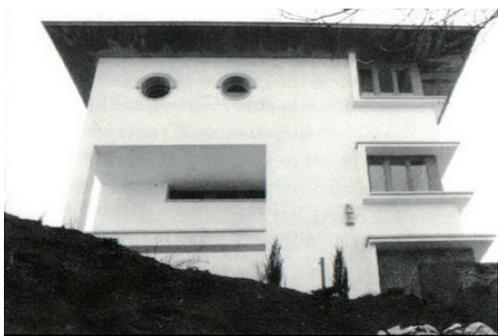


Fig. 13 House in Kavics utca by Tamás Tomay. (Baranyai, 2002)

Literature describes the advance of the newly modern as an issue of technical development; architectural development is based on new materials and constructions. Today, the general idea of progress backs modernization ongoing in all segments of society, and the architecture related to it is the newly modern.

A unique trait of the newly modern is a new identity defining the force of modernism. Identity is based primarily on a local

tradition, the interwar architecture of Buda. Thus, newly modern managed to solve the identity crisis of modernism: the local tradition of Buda eventually legitimated modernist architecture throughout Hungary.

## 7 History meets itself

### 7.1 The newly modern view on history

Application of the old modernism was conceived feasible and even appropriate by domestic and foreign literature. Hungarian theorists defined a specific interval period that is unknown in the West: socialism. The total exclusion of all achievements of socialism was the key that led Hungarian architects to the realization of a direct revival and the casting aside of everything in between.

Hungarian theory developed a carefully considered historical narrative; however, it lacked the passion of the apologists of the Modern Movement. Elimination of the recent past in favour of a distant one is a regular instrument in historiography, but this revival does not result in any historical mission. The newly modern architecture did not place itself in a celebrated position as the Modern Movement did. It renounces teleological interpretation of history and does not assert anything instead.

### 7.2 Stylistic concepts

With neither a positive concept for the future nor a definite message for the present, the newly modern eventually turns to the past. Literature describes modernism as a style, but it does not depart from the original ideas of the Modern Movement (Giedion, 1965:pp.205-226). Claiming that modernism is something straightforward sounds more of a quote than an original statement. The repetition of previous recognitions in texts shows the total acceptance of modernist forms without any critical approach; the Modern Movement grew perfect in the eyes of the posterity.<sup>18</sup>

Direct orientation to the past, newly modern architecture seems to exceed even the frames of modernity. Conservative attitude surpasses progressive drive. The dispute between the old and the new, the *Querelle des Anciennes et des Modernes* is re-enacted by the newly modern. There it was stated that the aim of art should be the perfect form, and paths of an eternal striving and the copying of the works of respectable old masters were diametrically opposed to each other. (Habermas, 1998:p.11). The choice of the newly modern falls on the latter. Critics and designers maintain the possibility of the former but devote themselves to the latter. Perfection for newly modern is re-enacting the old as a historical style. Modern design grows to a level of classical perfection. The *ancienne* attitude is a source of the revival of the Modern Movement, and the realm of revival solely remains the form.

<sup>17</sup> István Janáky (Farkas, 2002)

<sup>18</sup> Lajos Fekete, István Lukács, György Vadász (Farkas, 2002)

### 7.3 Limits of social modernization

Modern Movement placed a strong emphasis on theoretical issues among all questions of form. This included interpreting the relationship between art and society. Apologists of the Modern Movement named English Romantic Architectural Theory as their main source as they were the first to realize the social role of art. Modernists see architecture as an instrument to transform society (Watkin, 1977:p.1). The newly modern somehow forgot about this. Social issues remained marginal without any progressive notion to the future.

Perception of the social role was hindered by its historical canon. The architecture of state socialism was simply condemned and remained only partially evaluated. Some architectural lessons were drawn, the aesthetic quality of domestic housing in the nineties is far superior to the age of socialism, although some significant traces of modern ideas implemented in housing estates for tens of thousands were not acknowledged.

Newly modern architecture was predefined by the fact that mass housing, a crucial issue of the Modern Movement, did not occur at all. Moreover, we may assume that this is because that it was solved by endless rows of otherwise horrifying concrete houses on the outskirts of cities. In spite of its slovenly aesthetics, socialist architecture solved the question of social housing in Hungary for good. Socialism was as preoccupied with social questions at least as much as the newly modern was with the aesthetic. The role of architecture in society and the firm ethical conviction of apologists of the Modern Movements were generously disregarded in Hungary in the nineties. Only foreign theorists realized social commitment as one of the most important elements of the legacy of the Modern Movement (Foster, 2002).

The architecture of the newly modern sought transformation in neither society nor living standards. Building technology and the mechanisation of domestic housing did not alter architecture nor did it help its reassessment (Réz, 2002). Technology was only applied to refine the old forms in order to improve the aesthetic and energetic qualities of architecture.

Among the restriction to historical and stylistic issues, technology and modernization could not make way to a progressive architecture. Or at least not to one that is in trifling contact

with its own age. The newly modern served mainly one class, the re-emerging Hungarian bourgeoisie, previously known from the thirties for its progressivity. Buildings using ancient forms hence created a curious alloy of development and restoration in society. This made the newly modern architecture incapable of adaptability and the undermining of modernization in Hungary led to its decline. The economic crisis eventually marginalized the whole, newly modern movement.

### 8 Summary

The most appropriate summary of the age of the newly modern is a small booklet. The Pasarét Citizens' Circle published *Pasarét és környéke (Pasarét and its Vicinity)* in 2000 presenting local buildings. Imagery originates from the Hungarian Museum of Architecture, and texts are based on the descriptions of the interwar architecture of Buda by András Ferkai. The historical narrative is clearly recognizable since only two eras are presented. All but four buildings were built between 1927 and 1942, including the one renovated by Tamás Dévényi. The rest represent the newly modern architecture through the designs of Tamás Tomay from the 1990s. The map included depicts, not surprisingly, Pasarét. Only a new design by Tomay is off the map, showing the first however isolated spread of modernist forms outside Pasarét in the nineties. The book is a result of a cooperation of the advocates of newly modern architecture: historians of architecture, a civil initiative, and, of course, architects. Based on its historical precedents, the main value of newly modern is this identity constituting power.

The booklet is also an example of the main contradiction in newly modern: it is the same problem described in *Back from Utopia* by Hilde Heynen. The proposed historic preservation of the Sanitarium Zonnenstrahl sparked debate about the original intentions of the designer, since it was deliberately conceived as an ephemeral building to last only for a few decades, and by becoming heritage, modern ceases to be modern (Heynen, 2002:p.396). New transforms to old and the role of cultural tradition exceeds its novelty and transience; new and old complementing each other is outside the strict definition of avant-garde art (Heynen, 1999:p.67).

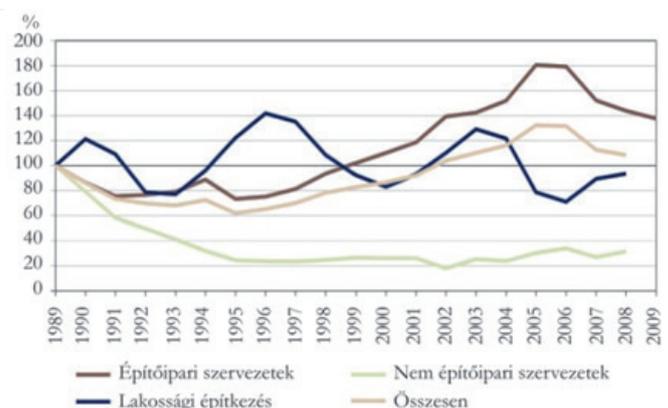
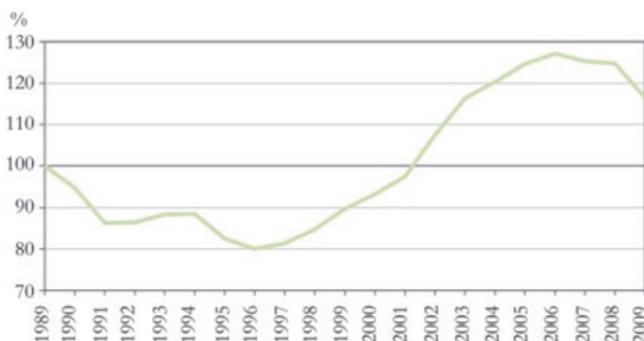


Fig. 14-15 Conjuncture coincides with the era of newly modern: consumption and the expansion of the building industry. (Magyarország, 2010:p.15 and 42).

One source of newly modern in Hungary is the historically impartial renovation; here, the newly modern adheres to the ancient by means of renewal. Modernism is revived as a style, and its sources are quite diverse. Nonetheless, the social principles are considered the real ones and there is a conspicuous distance between the aesthetic continuation of the old and the original intentions. Such an oversight results from the absence of a proper critique on modernism, which would have been vital to the newly modern according to Ágnes Heller. This limiting aspect eventually leads to a stiffening and crystallization in modernism (Habermas, 1998:p.9). The lack of adaptability led to a downfall when circumstances took an unfortunate turn.

Two paths of departure seemed feasible. Critiques on some later works from 2005-2006 point out the role of individual interpretation and sees these works as virtuoso reinterpretations of the Modern Movement (Farsang, 2008; Martinkó, 2009). Fragmentation of the trend becomes obvious as the role of personal tone increases since it is a common process at the end of stylistic periods and is often referred to as mannerism.<sup>19</sup> The second possibility is the submerging of the modern ideas after their spectacular parade. Newly modern architecture has already been described as part of the Third Path Architecture in Hungary by Rudolf Klein in 2001, besides high-tech and organic. This ever-popular and fairly positive denotation in Hungary was a collective term applied to trends such as conceptualism, regionalism and minimalism, and these thriving trends all share the remote legacy of the Modern Movement (Klein et al., 2001:pp.39-49).



**Fig. 16** Family house in Óbuda by Tamás Tomaj from 2014. (<http://meonline.hu/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/felheviz1.jpg>, retrieved on 24th April 2014)

The survival of modernism is certain. The newly modern trend in architecture is probably never going to return, and only individual paths can follow its ideas, but the Modern Movement, re-enacted by it, indisputably prevails in its numerous heirs.

<sup>19</sup> Newly modern had been accused early on of the excessiveness of individual forms. Janáky only saw isolated ambitions and Andor Wesselényi-Garay already saw a widespread practice of Mannerism in newly modern in 2003 (Wesselényi-Garay, 2003). Nevertheless, the importance of individual forms grew far greater within few years, since the dominance of canonised modern forms lasted until at least 2006.

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