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# Modernity and Architecture: The Evolution of Thought, Innovation, and Urbanism from the Renaissance to the Present

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***Abstract –*** The paper examines the evolution of modernity concepts starting from the Renaissance to the present day, emphasizing the impact on architecture and urbanism. During the period of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, people framed an evolutionary notion of history and the concept of the modern associated with the contemporary, the new, and the fleeting emerged. This period connected modernity with the idea of relativity of truth as opposed to the absolute truth of the Middle Ages.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, modernity clashed with tradition. This led to economic and political modernization. It also influenced artistic movements and cultural trends. The Industrial Revolution epitomized this period. It was driven by scientific and technological advancements.

The paper discusses the objective and subjective perspectives of modernity, highlighting its dual nature in socioeconomic processes and personal experiences. Key thinkers like Habermas Weber and Baudelaire provide frameworks for understanding modernity's developments in science, art, and morality.

The avant-garde movements influenced by Bauhaus, emphasized functionality. They also focused on rationality in architecture. However, critiques emerged, advocating the concept of unitary urbanism. This vision includes adaptable living spaces. It promotes an ever-changing urban environment, as exemplified by Constant's New Babylon.

The Adorno's aesthetic theory criticized the industry's commodification of art and emphasizes art's utopian potential. Adorno's concept of mimesis and his critique of rationality and instrumental reason are explored reflecting the paradoxical nature of modernity.

Finally, the paper contrasts the views of architects like Mies van der Rohe, Norberg-Schulz, and Eisenman. It concludes by reflecting on architecture's ongoing interaction with modernity. It emphasizes a balance between innovation tradition and the dynamic nature of human experience and social development.

*Keywords – Modernity, Architecture, Urbanism, Enlightenment, Aesthetic Theory*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The term "modern" has three primary meanings: it signifies the present, the new in contrast to the old, and the transient nature of things. These meanings emphasize the significance of the present moment in the concept of modernity, which distinguishes it from the past and guides future directions [1].

During the Renaissance, a shift occurred in the perception of history, moving from a cyclical to a progressive model, viewing each age as unique. This idea was further developed during the Enlightenment, linking modernity with critical reason and the notion that truth is subject to change rather than eternal [2].

In the 18th and 19th centuries, modernity clashed with tradition, leading to modernization in economic and political fields. This process, known as modernization, encompassed various aspects of social

development, urbanization, and cultural changes, influencing artistic movements and cultural tendencies [3].

Modernity can be understood from objective and subjective perspectives, relating to socioeconomic processes and personal experiences. The Industrial Revolution was a product of modernity, driven by scientific and technological advancements, shaping capitalist civilization and modernist culture [4].

Tony Garnier (the French Architect) as the main actor of the Industrial Revolution, considers all parts of a city, including governmental, residential, manufacturing, and agricultural processes. The city's functions were segregated by location and pattern. The core of the city (public area) was divided into assembly halls, administrative services, museum collections, and sporting facilities [5].

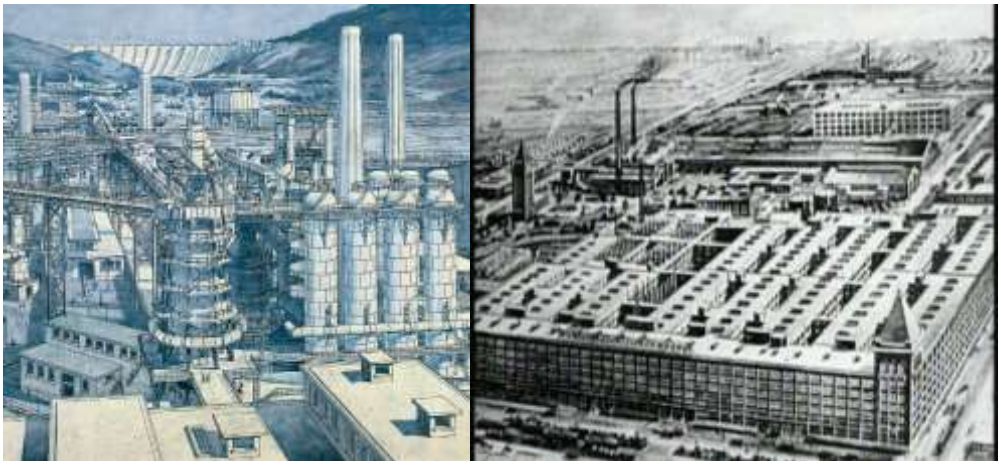

Fig. 1 Industrial Revolution, Tony Garnier [5].

Modernity, as defined by Habermas and Weber, is the rise of autonomy in morals, science, and arts, every area of which must progress by their inherent logic. Baudelaire describes modernity as transitory, fugitive, and contingent, contrasting it with tradition [6], [7], [8].

The discussion between modernism and postmodernism highlights the evolving nature of modernity, with the postmodern era considered more current than the modern. This discussion introduces a new layer of complexity to the concept of modernity [9].

Different views on modernity, such as pastoral and counter-pastoral, reflect contrasting perspectives on progress and cultural discrepancies. Berman defines modernity as an environment promising adventure and transformation, yet threatening destruction [10].

## II. Avant-Garde versus Modernism

The new school was created to meet the demands of industry and can be seen as an extension of the Bauhaus. Max Bill, a former Bauhaus student, became its director and emphasized functionality and rationality in construction, downplaying the role of imagination. However, for Jorn, innovation and experimentation, driven by imagination, were paramount in design, with function and rationality seen as secondary. Jorn found like-minded individuals and groups who considered themselves the rightful successors of the pre-war avant-garde movements [11], [12].

## III. Unitary Urbanism and the Critique of Functionalism

Nowadays some critiques prevail over boredom and utilitarianism in standard urbanism, advocating for a new architecture that would eliminate monotony. It calls for an architecture that is not cold and functional, but rather flexible and ever-changing. Houses should be adaptable, with adjustable walls, and incorporate vegetation. The future is envisioned as one of constant change, where architectural complexes are modifiable, changing entirely or partially based on the inhabitants' desires [13].

Future cities will be constantly experimenting with novel behavioral patterns, with emotionally charged architectural forms. The idea suggests that a relief map of the city may be made, highlighting the

permanent spots, vortices, and ongoing currents that affect how locals and tourists feel. Constant, the city planner, focused on developing New Babylon as a concrete model of how the world would look under unitary urbanism. However, Debord and his group felt Constant was too preoccupied with the "structural problems of urbanism." They shared their opinion that the focus needs to be on activities that emphasize "the content, the notion of play, the free creation of everyday life." Debord experienced unitary urbanism as only the beginning of the whole social upheaval that he thought was going to happen. Constant, on the other hand, did not anticipate this revolution happening soon [13], [14].

Fig. 2 New Babilon, Constant (Photo Coll Tony) [13].

But as opposed to Constant, the other situationists conducted their investigation of unitary urbanism in distinct ways. Instead of making models, sketches, or paintings, they published papers criticizing how capitalism's ideological goals are being served by contemporary urban planning. They saw contemporary urbanism as organizing life in a way that discourages people from contributing anything of their own. Urbanism separates individuals by prioritizing transportation, which discourages real engagement and energy use [15].

Thus, unitary urbanism and the revolution in daily life are closely related. Unitary urbanism seeks to topple the social structure that reduces individuals to passive consumers who are cut off from their demands and aspirations.

Considering "The Society of the Spectacle", Debord expanded on this theory by analyzing society through the lenses of Hegel, Marx, Lukács, and the Socialisme ou Barbarie group. He argued that capitalist society had fundamentally changed from the 19th century, with representation dominating the entire social system. This retreat into representation, he believed, was a source of the universal alienation typical of capitalism [14].

In his influential 1947 book, Lefebvre argued that life was no longer experienced holistically but fragmented into disconnected moments, leading to alienation from one's desires. He proposed that creativity, love, and play were as essential to life as nourishment and shelter were to survival [16].

These ideas were influential in the revolutionary movements of the 1968 student uprising, where "alienation" was a central theme in social criticism. It was believed that urban planning and architecture were essential to individual development, rejecting functionalism for its perceived reinforcement of alienation and nonparticipation, catering to abstract needs rather than the concrete inner experiences of individuals [17].

## IV. Adorno's Theory

In his Aesthetic Theory, Adorno argues that art's commitment to utopia presents a central antinomy in its current state. He posits that art must be and desires to be a utopia, particularly as utopia is obstructed by the prevailing functional order. However, art must also avoid being a utopia to prevent betraying it by offering mere semblance and consolation [18].

Adorno sees modernization as resulting in repression and manipulation rather than liberation. He questions why and how this transformation occurred. These themes are prominently featured in his works, including the influential Dialectic of Enlightenment, co-authored with Max Horkheimer during the war. Adorno's other major works, such as Negative Dialectics and Aesthetic Theory, also delve into the paradoxical and contradictory nature of modernity [19], [20].

Martin Jay presents Adorno's thought as a constellation of five primary aspects.

- The first is his nonorthodox, non-aligned neo-Marxism, which includes a negative view of political action and a refusal to recognize the proletariat as represented by "the Party."
- The second aspect is Adorno's interest in aesthetic modernism, particularly modern music, stemming from his early years and his study under Alban Berg in Vienna [21].
- The third aspect is described as Adorno's Mandarin cultural conservatism, reflecting his approach to culture.
- The fourth aspect is his Jewish identity, which influenced his life and relationships.
- Lastly, Jay identifies Adorno's anticipation of deconstructionism as the fifth aspect, suggesting a complexity and uniqueness to Adorno's work [21].

Adorno's work is marked by constant conflicts and paradoxes, particularly his opposition to "identity thinking," which sees reality as nonidentical and continually referring to something beyond itself. Language plays a crucial role in Adorno's thought, allowing for moments of escape from totalitarian thought through its use of constellations [18].

The dialectic of Enlightenment, as discussed by Adorno and Horkheimer, involves the reduction of critical rationality to instrumental rationality, leading to a perversion of culture in the form of the culture industry. This industry turns culture into a manipulated, uniform commodity, distinct from the works of the avant-garde, which serves truth [19].

Adorno and Horkheimer connect Enlightenment with a tendency to dominate both external and internal nature, yet they do not reject Enlightenment entirely, seeing social freedom as inseparable from enlightened thought. The culture industry, according to them, operates by bringing leisure time under the same rules as working time, leading to passive consumption [19].

Authors like Lyotard expand on this critique, highlighting the tension between the belief in Enlightenment and its inherent distorting mechanisms. Adorno acknowledges the allure of the new and modernity as a rebellion against the absence of genuine novelty, recognizing that even the new can become a false semblance hiding the eternal return of the old [9].

In Adorno's Aesthetic Theory, the concept of mimesis, heavily influenced by Walter Benjamin's mimetic theory of language, is central. Adorno, along with Horkheimer, criticizes the separation of sign and image as a disastrous development, leading to inadequate depictions that fail to offer genuine knowledge of reality. This separation, they argue, is irreparable [18].

Adorno expands on this concept in Aesthetic Theory, defining mimesis as an affinity between things and persons that transcends rational knowledge and the subject-object dichotomy. He emphasizes that mimesis is more than a visual similarity between art and its subject.

However, rationality and mimesis are presented as antithetical and paradoxical, making it difficult to reconcile them. Art is more than just a mediator between reason and mimesis; reason and mimesis are incompatible. The value of art, then, depends on the balance between rationality and mimesis.

From an artistic perspective, modern art must employ advanced techniques and incorporate contemporary experiences, while also critiquing the existing system. Adorno argues that art must maintain its difference from society to remain true art [18].

Adorno's approach is likened to the medical principle of inoculation by Cahn: art should be "infected" with the reification it opposes but in a controlled manner. Reason serves as the control organ, transforming art into a controlled form of mimesis.

Adorno emphasizes the importance of negativity in art, as it is through negation that one can appeal to the utopian. He believes that modern art's role is to reveal the terrifying nature of everyday reality, keeping the utopian idea alive. The utopian element in Adorno's work remains negative, referring to another that must not be named to avoid assimilation into the mainstream [18].

In modern art, Adorno argues, dissonance replaces harmony as the appropriate depiction of reality, as only dissonance can accurately reflect an unharmonious reality.

In Adorno's Aesthetic Theory, the notion of mimesis is essential, drawing heavily from Walter Benjamin's mimetic theory of language. Adorno views art as both socially determined and autonomous,

following its own stylistic principles. He believes that in order to engage in meaningful critique and maintain the possibility of anything different, art must be true to itself [22], [23].

Adorno disagrees with Benjamin's view that autonomous art has little potential for revolutionary social change. He criticizes Benjamin for condemning high culture while uncritically praising low culture, stating that both bear capitalist stigmas but also contain elements of change. Adorno and Benjamin share the belief that history is embedded in artistic materials and techniques, with modern art aiming to concretely embody utopia while remaining distinct from actual utopia to avoid becoming empty consolation [23].

Adorno emphasizes the critical potential of art, particularly in music and literature, and its ability to highlight contradictions in society. While architecture is often seen as socially determined, Adorno argues that it, too, contains autonomous moments where architects focus solely on architectural form. He sees architecture as a product of the Enlightenment's dialectics, where functionality and rationality can be in tension with artistic expression [19].

The concept of mimesis is also discussed in contemporary theory, with Lacoue-Labarthe highlighting its undecidability and Plato cautioning against the dangers of storytelling and art in diverting from the truth [24], [25]. Derrida explores the role of metaphor in exposing hidden resemblances between different entities, suggesting that architecture, too, can be seen as a mimetic discipline [26]. Xhexhi, K (2020), explore also the role of metaphor as a tool implemented into design reflecting either positive or negative reactions. According to him metaphor helps to perceive things from a different point of view that can be new to us, sketching, modifying and changing architectural functionality [27].

Mimesis in architecture is best illustrated by Libeskind's design for the Jewish Museum addition to the Berlin Museum, which aims to depict the strained relationship between German and Jewish culture. The design's complexity and ambiguity prevent it from being a simple monument, instead offering a space for multiple interpretations and reflections on history and culture [28].

Fig. 3 Libeskind's concept for the Jewish Museum's addition to the Berlin Museum [29].

In conclusion, Adorno's view of art and mimesis emphasizes their critical potential and their ability to expose contradictions in society. Architecture, while socially determined, can also contain autonomous moments of artistic expression, contributing to the ongoing dialogue between art and society [18].

The 1989 Sea Terminal proposal in Zeebrugge by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) looks like an enormous space helmet from an old science fiction cartoon. It embodies an ambiguity that operates on multiple levels. Acting as a sorting mechanism appropriate for its function as a hub for traffic, the initiative advances the trend of spatial homogeneity generated by networks' growing supremacy [30].

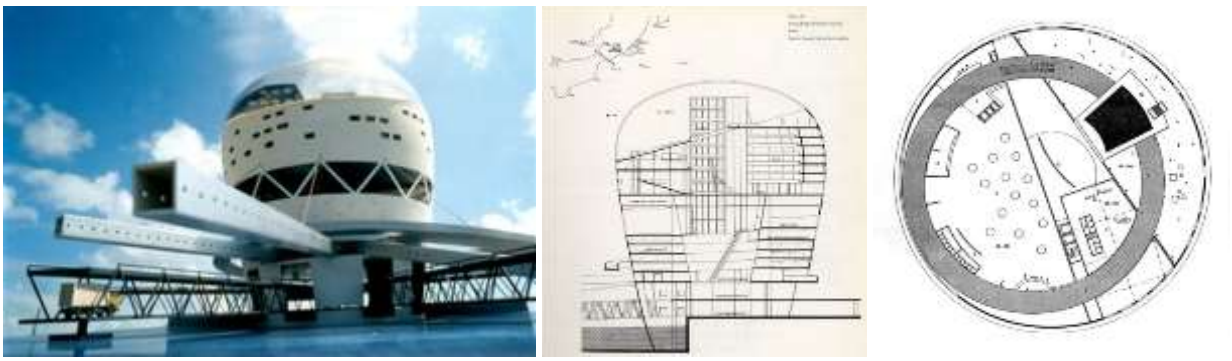

Fig. 4 Sea Terminal in Zeebrugge, 1989, Rem Koolhaas, OMA [31].

Unlike Constant's work, where the conflict between utopia and reality is primarily expressed in graphic sketches and paintings, the OMA project manifests this tension through architectural articulation. This initiative varies from the general tendency of deterritorialization, which seeks to homogenize geography and erase distinctions between locations. Instead, it creates a unique nod in the network. A mimetic operation is used: on the local network intersection, a form (typos) is etched, grafted, and printed. It is this form that allows for a caesura to be created, indicating a break or interruption in the network's continuity [30].

## V. Challenges of Dwelling in Modernity: Perspectives from Berger, Heidegger, Cacciari, and Adorno

According to Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, modernity is characterized by technological development and bureaucratic organization, emphasizing rationality and abstraction in social relations. Modernity frees individuals from familial or clan limitations, yet poses challenges to dwelling.

Heidegger's concept of dwelling emphasizes preservation and care, highlighting the relationship between heaven and earth, divinities, and mortals. He links dwelling with poetry, suggesting an authentic way of existing [32].

Cacciari argues against poetic dwelling, claiming that modern civilization has made the world uninhabitable [33]. Adorno suggests that true dwelling is now impossible, as modern life no longer aligns with Heidegger's concept [18].

## VI. The Dilemmas of Architecture

Architecture plays a crucial role in designing dwelling spaces and materializing the world in which we live. Norberg-Schulz distinguishes between natural, collective, public, and private dwellings, suggesting that architecture can help humans dwell poetically [34].

Fig. 5 MAYOR'S OFFICE OF BOGOTÁ. (1973), Norberg-Schulz [35]

Cacciari disagrees, claiming that true poetic dwelling is no longer possible due to modern civilization's developments [33]. He sees reflective architecture in the work of Mies van der Rohe as a concrete negation of dwelling [36].

The contrasting views of Mies, Norberg-Schulz, Alexander, and Eisenman on architecture's purpose reflect differing approaches to modernity. While Alexander emphasizes harmony and human feelings, Eisenman highlights reason and imperfection as more relevant expressions of the modern condition [37], [38].

Fig. 6 The Spanish city of culture in Galicia. Peter Eiseman [39].

According to Adolf Loos, a house is an ever-present setting for daily living rather than a piece of art [40]. The lack of a theory on the ambivalence of modernity in the writings of Norberg-Schulz, Cacciari, Eisenman, and Alexander suggests that modernity and architecture have a complex connection.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Architecture's relationship with the old and the new makes it challenging to determine its natural tendency. Modernity and architecture are in a continuous state of evolution, with the meaning of modernity changing over time.

Dwellings are poetically related to humans and are also influenced by reason, making them an integral part of our reality. Understanding beauty requires an understanding of ugliness, echoing Eisenman's idea of perfect and imperfect expressions.

In conclusion architecture's interaction with modernity is complex and multifaceted. It reflects the ever-changing nature of human experience and societal development. After the Bauhaus era, architecture was propelled in two imaginative directions. One emphasized innovation and experimentation. In this context function and rationality took a back seat. New Babylon epitomized a rejection of all norms. It envisioned a world of collective creation and absolute transparency. Unitary urbanism heralded a future of constant change. Architectural complexes would be entirely modifiable. They adapt to the inhabitants' will. This flexibility is crucial. Rather than a rigid science or art, architecture should be seen as a flexible endeavor. New Babylon served as a tangible model for the realization of unitary urbanism. The distinction between the situationists and Constant lay in focus. One focused on theory the other on maquettes. Both were valid in their own right. Lefebvre beautifully expressed the importance of creativity, love, and play in life. They are akin to the fundamental needs for nourishment and shelter.

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