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(NEO)MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE OF MADRID: BETWEEN FORM AND THEORY

Abstract: In the beginning of the 21st century, a number of buildings with neomodernist elements were erected in Madrid. Modernist theory of forms should be juxtaposed with such residential buildings as *Mirador* (2005) and *Celosia* (2009) in the district of Sanchinarro, which were designed by the renowned Dutch office MVRDV in collaboration with the Spanish architect Blanca Lleó. Equally notable are the achievements of the Madrid-based architectural office, A-Cero (Joaquín Torres and Rafael Llamazares). Its main activity focuses on designing residential buildings: both entire complexes and individual houses (*Vivienda 10*, *Moka House*). The paper will not only present some of such buildings, but also the context of their creation, both in the formal and ideological terms. It is also worth considering the theoretical reflection on architecture whose authors are the architects themselves. The most interesting of them not only design, but also seek to present their artistic philosophy, in which we can find many neomodernist threads.

Keywords: contemporary architecture, Madrid, modernism, neomodernism, postmodernism.

Modernism, late modernism and neomodernism in architecture

The term “modernism” can be used in different contexts, and has acquired various meanings. As pointed out by Charles Harrison,

the term acquires a different scope and penetration in each different academic discipline. The inception of modernism in music is typically located at the close of the nineteenth century, while to talk of modernism in English literature is to focus upon a relatively limited if highly influential body of work produced in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In the

history of art, on the other hand, the student of modernism can expect to run a gamut from the French painting of the 1860s to the American art of a century later a may even be directed as far back as the late eighteenth century¹.

We understand this term in yet another way in relation to architecture. The first period described as modernism was Art Nouveau, and in Spain the term *modernismo* is very often used in reference to this particular trend. The books by Óscar Rocha Muñoz (*El Modernismo de la arquitectura madrileña*)² and Ricardo Muñoz Fajard (*Modernismo ausente y olvidado de Madrid*)³ discuss Art Nouveau buildings.

However, according to the renowned theorist in the field of modern architecture, Charles Jencks, the modernist movement, or modernism, is usually associated with the functional, modern and purist architecture of 1920-1960⁴. Léon Krier points out the alternative and notionally confusing use of the terms “modernism” and “modernity”. In his opinion, the term “modernity” refers to a specific period, and thus has a purely chronological meaning, while the term “modernism” refers to a certain specific ideology⁵. Modernist architecture is characterized by universality and the lack of local varieties; it is devoid of historical, symbolic or metaphorical elements. The modernist style is utopian and idealistic, the forms of the objects are simple, determined by their function; the buildings are holistic projects (*Gesamkunstwerk*)⁶.

Other construction trends, which the author characterises in his publications from the 1980s, are the two dominant styles: late modernism and post-modernism. Late modernism is largely influenced (often not fully consciously) by the forms and ideas of modernism and is characterized by the use of the latest technologies and materials. The structure and design of the buildings are often emphasized in an extreme way, turning into ornament. Although we can notice the rejection of history and metaphorical meanings, the constructions often display unintentional symbolism and humour.

In contrast, postmodernism functions in opposition to the modernist assumptions. Therefore, we have to do with constructions of a semiotic character,

¹ Ch. Harrison, “Modernism”, in: *Critical Terms for Art. History*, ed. R. S. Nelson, R. Shift, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London 2003 [1996], p. 188.

² Ó. Rocha Muñoz, *El Modernismo de la arquitectura madrileña. Génesis y desarrollo de una opción ecléctica*, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid 2009.

³ R. Muñoz Fajardo, *Modernismo ausente y olvidado de Madrid. El Madrid que pudo ser y su arquitectura modernista*, Ricardo Muñoz Fajardo, Madrid 2014.

⁴ Ch. Jencks, *Late-Modern Architecture and Other Essays*, Academy Editions, London 1980, p. 32.

⁵ L. Krier, *The Architecture of Community*, Islandpress, Washington, Covelo, London 2009, p. 43.

⁶ Ch. Jencks, *Late-Modern...*, p. 32.

complexity of structures, variability of space and forms (both conventional and abstract ones). The buildings feature not only metaphorical references to history, but also symbolism and intentional humour. We can see an accumulation and combination of functions, frequent additivity of forms, as well as some visual strategies that can be described as mannerist and baroque. Postmodernist architecture is ambiguous and often surprises the viewer⁷. For Robert Harbison, one example of such “baroque” postmodernist solution is topping a 19th-century tenement house in Vienna with a metal and glass structure with very expressive forms by Coop Himmelb(l)au (Rooftop Remodeling, 1984-1988)⁸. In Madrid, this tendency is exemplified by the CaixaForum (2001-2005), designed by the Swiss architectural office founded in Basel in 1978 by Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron⁹. The removal of much of the base of the former power station from 1900 gives an impression of the building “levitating”. The brick body was also given a new finish – it was topped with a galvanized structure made of metal, covered with slabs of rusty iron. In the vicinity of the CaixaForum, a garden was placed on a vertical wall, complementing the project and introducing a colour element contrasting with the red-brick body of the building [Ill.1]. As observed by Charles Jencks, “this building summarises several post-modern themes with its contextual counterpoint and recycling of the older building, its stitching together of the urban fabric and expressing the green imperative, its appeal to history and the future, with its ironic signs dramatizing the old and new”¹⁰.

1984 was certainly a turning point for the theory of architecture. It was then that Jencks declared the “death of modernism”, assuming that the symbolic date was 15 July 1972, when the Pruitt-Igoe housing estate (or more precisely some of its panelák blocks) was blown up in St. Louis, Missouri. The estate, which had been built in accordance with the most progressive ideas of modernism, had failed to be a good solution in everyday life. The blocks were devastated and the constantly increasing crime rate proved to be the decisive factor in its downfall. It was blamed on anonymity, long, empty corridors, and inability to control the semi-private areas¹¹.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ R. Harbison, *Reflections on Baroque*, London: Reaktion Books, 2000, p. 232; C. Himmelblau, “The Dissipation of Our Bodies in the City”, in: *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture*, ed. Ch. Jencks, K. Kropf, Chichester: Acedemy Editions 1997, pp. 286–287.

⁹ Later, Christine Binswanger, Ascan Mergenthaler, and Stefan Marbach joined the team.

¹⁰ Ch. Jencks, *The Story of Post-Modernism. Five Decades of the Ironic, Iconic and Critical Architecture*, London: John Wiley & Sons, 2011, p. 18; see also: pp. 110–113.

¹¹ Ch. Jencks, *Architektura postmodernistyczna*, transl. B. Gadomska, Arkady, Warszawa 1986 [1984], p. 9.

At the end of the 1980s, Charles Jencks introduced the concept of neo-modernism into his reflections on architecture. He dates the beginning of neo-modernist architecture to 1976¹². In his view, this trend is closely related to deconstructionism and is something more than just the usual comfortable borrowing of philosophical concepts¹³. He describes the designers of neo-modernist structures in the following way: “the New-Moderns they say are no longer utopians who wish to change society but rather aesthetes who play with Modernist forms: their essential message is not ethical but stylistic, a new baroque elaboration of the language synthesised in the twenties”¹⁴. Neomodernism is quite hermetic, it should be formally placed somewhere “between styles”; the artists are autonomous in their choices and strive to achieve otherness. This architecture often becomes a record of individual codes and symbols¹⁵.

At this point, we can ask ourselves whether the architecture of the 21st century, which “draws” on modernism, should be still described as late modernism, neomodernism, or a completely different trend, for which modernism is just an inspiration. The distinctiveness of the neomodernist style seems indeterminate, and, in fact, architects and theoreticians of architecture often understand the concept quite differently. It is worth noting that neomodernist forms are fashionable among architects. A lot of contemporary architectural projects can be described as substantially modernist. Many architects admit to being fascinated by Le Corbusier (at least the early stage of his career), and they often point out that particular modernist buildings were a source of inspiration for their projects. But is that enough to define their architecture as neomodernist? Is there a clear, definite trend drawing on modernism and thus opposing the pluralistic post-modernity?

According to Antoni Taraszkiewicz,

neomodernists, like the creators of modernism, refer to universal values, striving in their works for the truth, sincerity and authenticity. In architecture, this translates into forms characterized by simplicity, purity and uniqueness. In its assumptions, neomodernism rejects local values, such as regionalism and historicism, recognizing them as transient, adhering to timeless and universal values, creating an «international style» oriented towards the future. This trend follows the pursuit of the latest trends in art and technology to express what at a particular time is considered to be the most avant-garde¹⁶.

¹² Ch. Jencks, *The New Moderns from Late to Neo-Modernism*, Academy Editions, London 1990, p. 27.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 9.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 17.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 27.

¹⁶ A. Taraszkiewicz, *Postawy twórcze architektów a wyraz przestrzenny współczesnej zabudowy mieszkaniowej wielorodzinnej na przykładzie Trójmiasta*, in: *Habitat trzeciej fali EXPO 2010 - Wrocław*, ed. Z. Bać, Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Wrocławskiej, Wrocław 2003, p. 135.

In fact, this definition does not make it any less difficult to grasp the difference between modernism and neomodernism; the only distinction seems to be the time when the described projects were created.

The definition which seems much more consistent and characterizes the problem better is the one proposed by Cezary Waś, who compares the features of the late modernism and neomodernism, concluding that these two trends are, to a great extent, variations of modernist historicism, in which the primary role is played by the reflective attitude towards the progenitors. In late modernism, turning to the past led most often to emphasizing the formal rules of the avant-garde modernism, which was manifested e.g. in the exaggerated emphasis on the structural or functional divisions of the buildings with an excessive display of the aesthetic values of the materials used (viz. the huge mirrored surfaces of the façades) or the multiplication of divisions (extremely isotropic space). Neomodernists returned to the sophisticated and delicate patterns of early modernist works, adding ornament, using traditional materials and expressive symbolism, rejected by the masters of modernism. In the area of ideology, they try to ignore a lot of existing contradictions and remain open to the traditional values of locality and customs.¹⁷

Neomodernism and Madrid

Despite the doubts about the existence of neomodernism as a separate current, neomodernist trends (as I would still like to call them) can be seen in many parts of the modern world. I have selected certain architectural realizations in modern Madrid to discuss in this article.

In the beginning of the 21st century, a number of modern buildings were erected in Madrid. The most famous ones, visible from afar and towering over the city, are certainly those making up the Cuatro Torres Business Area (CTBA) [Ill.2], located in the north of the city in the district of La Paz at Paseo de la Castellana. They are the tallest buildings in Madrid and in Spain: their height ranges from 225 m (the lowest one) to 250 m (the tallest one). Each of the skyscrapers has its own name: Torre Cespa, Torre de Cristal, Torre PwC, Torre Espacio.¹⁸ In accordance with the architects' intent, they were built at the highest point of the city, and their height enhances the impression of loftiness. According to Enrique Álvarez-Sala, despite the simple forms, modern materials

¹⁷ C. Waś, *Antynomie współczesnej architektury sakralnej*, Muzeum Architektury we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2008, p. 253.

¹⁸ M.C. Crosbie, *Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects*, Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag GmbH, 2013, p. 180; J. Barros Guerton, *About Urban Spain*, Lulu.com, London 2009, p. 82.

and design solutions, and dominance of glass, the architecture of the towers has a dynamic form, which varies depending on the viewpoint and creates a different view from every corner of the city.¹⁹ Such architectural dominants also appeared in the late modernism, e.g. in the form of the famous (though controversial)²⁰ Torre de Valencia in Madrid (1970-1973), a concrete structure aspiring to the monumentalisation of urban landscape elements [Ill. 3], designed by Javier Carvajal, erected opposite the Retiro Park²¹. Certain architectural dynamics was also no stranger to modernism. Already in the early period, Adolf Loos, building houses devoid of historicizing decorations and removing excessive symbolism from residential areas, created interiors that became dynamic through the use of light – thanks to the windows devoid of curtains, which perhaps added intimacy, but shaded the interior, interpenetrating spaces and levels, stairs which increased the need for mobility, and thus provoked the dynamic perception of architecture. “A building has turned into a theatre of multiplying and simultaneous scenery”²².

Besides the CTBA towers visible from anywhere in the city, many other modern constructions, and even entire districts, were erected in Madrid. In some cases, we can talk about the inspiration from modernist architecture. This is visible mainly in the forms: pure, simple, devoid of ornaments. The architects-designers themselves admit to their fascination with the old modernist architecture. Apart from describing the visual aspects of the presented realizations, it is worth considering the theoretical reflections on this architecture: contemporary architects (especially the renowned ones) not only design, but also try to present their artistic philosophy, in which we can detect many “neo-modernist threads”.

Somosaguas

In the 1960s, the housing estates designed for the representatives of the upper classes began to emerge in Madrid. This was associated with the population

¹⁹ C. Rubio Carvajal, Enrique Álvarez-Sala, *Las Cuatro Torres. Madrid Arquitectura*, (<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVYvm2ZQTeQ>>) (accessed 15 June 2016).

²⁰ Controversies relate to the location of the tower in the centre of Madrid. The introduction of such dominant in the area of low architecture proved to be disastrous for the urban landscape. On the other hand, what should be appreciated is the purely architectural and functional value of the building; R. Guerra de la Vega, *Madrid 1920-1980. Guía de Arquitectura Contemporánea*, Ramón Guerra de la Vega, Madrid 1981, p. 95.

²¹ M.a D. Antigüedad del Castillo-Olivares, V. Nieto Alcaide, G. Tusell García, *El siglo XX: la vanguardia fragmentada*, Editorial Universitaria Ramón Areces, Madrid 2016, p. 249.

²² F. Espuelas, “Adolf Loos y el despertar”, *Rita*, 2014, no 2, pp. 102-105.

growth during this period and the rise of the standard of living. There was a growing group of residents who dreamed of a “mansion” outside the city.²³ The first suburban estates (*urbanizaciones*), created for the wealthy people, located around the city, were Somosaguas, Puerta de Hierro, and La Florida.²⁴ Until 1787, the town of Somosaguas functioned as a real estate (*finca*) and belonged to Count Clavijo; then it changed owners, until in the 1950s it became the property of the entrepreneurial group Banco Urquijo, which decided to create a luxurious residential district here.²⁵ It was then that the tradition of employing renowned architects to design the houses was established; until this day it remains one of the most characteristic features of this suburban district. One of the designers of the residential buildings was Javier Carvajal Ferrer. The best known constructions of the architect in Somosaguas include his own house, Casa Carvajal (1964-1965) and Casa García Valdecasas (1964-1965)²⁶ [Ill. 4].

Today Somosaguas consists of two parts. One of them is El Parque Empresarial La Finca - a complex of office buildings, housing the offices of Microsoft, Orange, Banco Santander, and other companies. It is a publicly available space, with modern glass structures, designed by Alberto Martín Caballero and José Antonio Factor. [Ills. 5-6] However, the dominant part of Somosaguas is the walled residential area designed for the upper class, those who are wealthy enough to settle in this area. The level of isolation and social segregation increases with the construction of more residential areas. The most luxurious one is the southern zone, and within it - the settlement of Los Lagos, a plot which had been planned in the 1980s to become a common park. However, the economic considerations and the lack of interest in a common space among the residents of the walled estates affected the decision to create a new, even more luxurious, estate. The architectural studio responsible for the project and the urban strategy was A-Cero, whose designers are referred to by the media as the “architects of the famous”²⁷. The estate of Los Lagos aspires

²³ Previously, summer houses were built in the villages at the foot of la Sierra de Guadarrama, the towns turned into summer centres. What became an important place was the Escorial, preferred due to the historical and symbolic reasons. Its former prestige worked, the town as a holiday destination attracted wealthy Madrid residents, especially those related to politics and finances; M. Gaviria, *Campo, urbe y espacio del ocio*, Siglo Veintiuno de España Editores, Madrid 1971, p. 222.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

²⁵ A. García Carballo, “Urbanizaciones de lujo y segregación residencial de las clases altas en Somosaguas, Pozuelo de Alarcón (Madrid)”, *Eria*, 2014, no 94, pp.125-144.

²⁶ Both houses, shortly after their erection, became the scenery for Carlos Saura’s film (*La Madriguera*, 1969); A. Espinosa García-Valdecasas, “La casa Carvajal en «la Madriguera»”, *Rita*, 2014, no 1, pp. 88-95. Also in the 1980s the architect made two designs for Somosaguas: Proyecto Casa Liñán. Somosaguas, Madrid (1981); Proyecto Casa Ojeda. Somosaguas. Madrid (1985).

²⁷ A. García Carballo, *Urbanizaciones de...*, p. 142.

to be “the safest estate”, not only in Spain, but also in Europe. It has three camera and infrared system circuits, two gates under constant supervision, private patrol cars: a protection system which operates 24 hours a day. Depending on the point of view, the estate is described as “a luxurious bunker” or a set of “twenty-first century palaces”²⁸. Unfortunately, the connoisseurs of architecture who would like to see the famous buildings today must laboriously try to obtain an appropriate permission. An “ordinary person” must limit their sightseeing to glances from behind the fence.

A-Cero

One-family houses erected inside the walled estates of Somosaguas have been designed by renowned architects and architectural firms; one of the authors of the luxurious residences is the abovementioned Alberto Martín Caballero.²⁹ [Ill. 7] However, the best known and most admired constructions have been designed by the A-Cero architectural office, based in Coruña and Madrid, currently a large company presided over by two architects: Joaquín Torres and Rafael Llamazares.³⁰ Although the architects would like to “avoid being pigeonholed”, the most famous designs of their firm are those of residential architecture. Their portfolio includes both whole apartment complexes, multifamily, and one-family houses. A separate section of the office’s business is interior decorating and furniture design. One of the most famous realizations of the A-Cero office is Moka House. [Ill. 8]

The houses of la Finca in Somosaguas are characterized by the simplicity of form, functionality, and lack of decoration or ornament. These are, undoubtedly, the qualities that anyone writing about architecture associates with the modernist movement, but in this case we would probably talk about some neomodernist features. The founders of the A-Cero architectural office write openly on their website about their fascination with the classics, such as Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. However, their inspirations and fascinations have been changing with time: “A-Cero architectural geometries recreate a long evolution over a relatively short period of time, which has led them from the purism of Le Corbusier to the last glimpses of objectual clear curvilinearity of Zaha Hadid. Extreme curves and angles characterize the most recent works of A-Cero, both architectural structures and the interior and furniture design”.³¹

²⁸ *El Confidencial*, 02.04.2011 and *El País*, 18.04.2010; after: *Ibid.*

²⁹ <http://www.estudiomartincaballero.com/arquitectura/residencial/casa130/index.html> (accessed 20 June 2016).

³⁰ J. Armesto, “A-Cero. El estudio de moda”, *La voz de Galicia*, 22 de septiembre, 2002, p. 5.

³¹ A-Cero, “El estudio”; <http://www.a-cero.com/index.php/es/origen-acero/estudio-arquitectura> (accessed 20 June 2016).

La Finca in Somosaguas remains a very important project of the office: “the construction of about 180 large houses, La Finca is to A-Cero what Oak Park was to Frank Lloyd Wright. The houses created by the studio are unique in their forms, even if they display a family resemblance or some seriality. They are based on Torre's and Llamazare's belief that in architecture function is as important as form.” It is a conviction worthy of neomodernists.³²

Joaquín Torres, characterizing the artistic philosophy of the studio, says that each design is a unique project. Thus the starting point is always a concept, an idea; it is important to be careful and not to deprive it of “freshness”; and although there are always a lot of alternatives, again in line with the modernist movement, “the simplest solution is always the best”. The belief that it is the architect (or rather Architect with the capital A, thus undoubtedly an Artist) who shapes the tastes and needs of the consumers derives from the ideas of the avant-garde. As Torres says: “I think that people will buy what they are offered”.³³

Living in the houses created by great designers at the estate of Los Lagos is certainly safe, but it is difficult to say whether it is convenient and comfortable, since the prestige of the place does not allow criticism.

Mirador and Celosia

Let us now move north of Madrid, where new suburbs started to be established in the 1960s. One of them was Sanchinarro, which is interesting to us.³⁴ In the 1990s, due to the steady increase of the population of Madrid, the authorities drew up a program of urban transformations, assuming the expansion of several estates, including Sanchinarro. Two unique residential buildings were then erected in this area of the city: El Mirador (2001-2005)³⁵ and Celosia (2001-2009)³⁶, both designed by the renowned Dutch company MVRDV³⁷ in collaboration with the Spanish architect Blanca Lleó.³⁸ The designers' objectives were clear, they have often spoken about them in inter-

³² A-Cero, “El estudio”; <http://www.a-cero.com/index.php/es/origen-acero/estudio-arquitectura> (accessed 20 June 2016).

³³ A-Cero, “Filosofía: entrevista a Joaquín Torres”; <http://www.a-cero.com/index.php/es/origen-acero/filosofia> (accessed 20 June 2016).

³⁴ M. Gaviria, *Campo...*, p. 223.

³⁵ <https://www.mvrdv.nl/projects/mirador> (access date: 24.07.2016).

³⁶ <https://www.mvrdv.nl/projects/celosia> (access date: 24.07.2016).

³⁷ The MvRdV architectural office was established in 1991 in Rotterdam by Winy Maas, Jacob van Rijs and Nathalie de Vries.

³⁸ *Entrevista: Blanca Lleó*; “La vivienda para toda la vida ya no existe”, “El País”, 01.12.2006; http://elpais.com/diario/2006/12/01/cultura/1164927610_850215.html (access date: 24.07.2016).

views. The architects tried to give identity to modern and utilitarian forms and to break the overwhelming homogeneity of Madrid's residential suburbs. In the new housing estates on the outskirts of Madrid, newly built houses occupied entire quarters; they usually surrounded an inner courtyard. The architects decided to break with the principle of closed space and the structure of a built-up quarter.

El Mirador and Celosia, as social housing, were intended for the middle class, with affordable apartments of different structure, so that everyone could choose something for themselves, the space that best suited the customers' expectations, so that they could avoid unnecessary alterations.³⁹ El Mirador towers over a sprawling roundabout (Plaza Alcalde Moreno Torres) and the surrounding buildings.⁴⁰ It was designed in a vertical layout, and an "inner courtyard" was suspended at high altitude. The block is a reflection of a densely built-up quarter, but in a vertical layout. The individual residential areas were marked with white and grey, and the communication areas were painted red. This creates an interesting composition in neoplastic style [Iills. 9, 13].⁴¹ The architects attached great importance to the design of the common spaces, such as a terrace, staircases, elevators, corridors and walkways, sometimes located on several levels.⁴² As described by the architects themselves, the building was inspired by the modernist tradition; its direct inspirations include the Ministry of Transport building in Tbilisi (Georgia), designed by George Chakhava and Zurab Jalaghania and completed in 1975. [Ill. 12]. Although the overall structure of the buildings is different, the common elements are the viewing platforms [Iills. 10-11] and the additivity of the buildings' bodies, visible in Tbilisi in the accumulation of cubic forms placed so that they intersect at right angles, marked in Madrid with a different colour and texture of their façades.⁴³ El Mirador has become a showcase of the district. Its name in English means "a turret designed to command an extensive outlook"⁴⁴, and in fact its function as a landmark and viewpoint is emphasized. The tower's observation deck offers

³⁹ M. Lubelska, *Mirador i celosia - różne formy tej samej idei*, "Czasopismo Techniczne. Architektura", vol. 107, 2010, p. 221-222.

⁴⁰ E. Canoso Zamora, *El espacio público abierto y el paisaje urbano de Madrid*, in: *El paisaje: valores e identidades*, ed. E. Martínez, N. Ortega Cantero, Ediciones de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid 2010, p. 158.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴² M. Lubelska, *Mirador...*, p. 221-222.

⁴³ <https://archidialog.com/tag/inspiration/page/4/> (access date: 24.07.2016).

⁴⁴ Spanish „corredor, galería o pabellón situados generalmente en la parte superior de un edificio, desde los que puede contemplarse el exterior; balcón cubierto y cerrado con cristales; construcción o lugar natural, generalmente elevados, desde los que se puede contemplar una vista o un paisaje" *Diccionario de uso del español actual*, ed. N. Almarza Acedo, Ediciones SM, Madrid 2002 [1997], p. 1309.

a wonderful view of both the city and the business district of the Cuatro Torres and Sierra de Guadarrama.⁴⁵ The building won the XX Premio de Urbanismo, Arquitectura y Obra Pública del Ayuntamiento de Madrid in 2005. It was a finalist of FAD (el Fomento de las Artes Decorativas) in 2006, and it was shown at the exhibition at MOMA in New York, “On-Site New Architecture in Spain” (12 February – 1 May 2006).⁴⁶

The architectural concept of Celosía also stands in opposition to the idea of quarter architecture. This time its height is no different from that of the surrounding buildings. At first glance, the structure is traditional – an inner courtyard is surrounded by apartment blocks on all four sides. The buildings have an openwork form, which is alluded to in the name Celosía (“lattice strips, usually made of wood or iron, especially those installed in the windows or other similar openings to make it possible to look through them without being seen from the outside”).⁴⁷ The modular elements are held together with terraces, which are semi-private spaces. The terrace roofing on the top floor was covered with flat slabs of concrete with openwork clearances with ordered geometric structures, whose form also refers to traditional Spanish bars – celosia. This construction was also noticed and nominated for Mies van der Rohe Award for Contemporary European Architecture 2011 (Barcelona, Spain).⁴⁸

In both designs, the architects took care of the common space, regarding close neighbourly relations as improving the comfort of living. The aim of combining different types of apartments around the semi-private common spaces was to provide integration with other residents, a potential source of pleasurable experiences. The designers emphasized the positive aspects of encountering different people and different lifestyles.

Today, a few years later, we can already begin to see how this rather utopian vision, which classical modernists would not be ashamed of, functions in everyday life. Both buildings were made of cheap, commonly used materials, as befitted social housing. However, the choice did not turn out to be entirely correct. Already in 2007, the press pointed out some technical deficiencies, which the residents of Mirador complained about (“from avant-garde to trash”).⁴⁹ The common spaces of Mirador were even less satisfactory. The

⁴⁵ M. Lubelska, *Przełamanie zamkniętego kwartału. Nowe formy architektury mieszkaniowej w mieście na przykładzie realizacji w Madrycie*, “Środowisko Mieszkaniowe”, no 8, 2010, p. 57.

⁴⁶ E. Canoso Zamora, *El espacio...*, p. 171; *Edificio Mirador*, in: *On-Site: New Architecture in Spain*, ed. Terence Riley, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 2006, p. 270–271.

⁴⁷ “Celosia” meaning “enrejado de listones, generalmente de madera o de Hierro, especialmente el que se pone en ventanas o en otros huecos semejantes para poder ver a través de él el exterior sin ser vistos.”, *Diccionario de uso...*, p. 399.

⁴⁸ <https://www.mvrdiv.nl/projects/celosia> (access date: 24.07.2016).

⁴⁹ *Deficiencias de construcción en el Mirador de Sancharro. De vanguardia a chapuza*, “El Mundo”, 26.09.2007; as cited in: E. Canosa Zamora, *El espacio...*, p. 172.

building had been conceived as “a metaphor of a city with its streets, squares and districts”, a transformation of a traditional city quarter into a vertical form. The terrace on top was to serve the function of a common garden. In December 2008, a survey was conducted among the residents on the quality of life in this modern building. It turned out that they complained about the lack of privacy and the inability to isolate themselves from the rest of the residents, the high cost of living, the lack of the communicative functionality of the building and, ultimately, the dysfunctionality of the observation deck, which did not provide a sense of security and was used, as an empty isolated space, for the purposes other than recreation, becoming a dangerous place, avoided by most residents, which led to its closure.⁵⁰ Again, this brings to mind the modernist habitats of the blown-up blocks of the Pruitt-Igoe estate in St. Louis.

Conclusion

Today, in the era of relativism, it is easier to describe and characterize than clearly segregate entities on the basis of a definition. Therefore, in my opinion, it is worth looking at them, thinking, searching for the inspirations, references and the widest possible contexts, but it is definitely not worth defining them and pigeonholing. Neomodernism does not seem to me to be a clear and recognizable trend with specific characteristics (despite the efforts of the theoreticians of architecture), though one can certainly perceive many inspirations of modernism and its new understanding in recent architectural projects. Thus neomodernist features – yes, a trend – no. As observed by Leon Krier:

in fact, we can affirm that a diversity of urban and architectural visions is a natural illustration of the diversity of political opinions. Modernity in architecture can no longer be conceived as a unitary and invisible phenomenon; it is irreversible plural, embracing widely divergent and even contradictory conceptions⁵¹.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 171.

⁵¹ L. Krier, *The Architecture ...*, p. 13.

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(NEO)MODERNISTYCZNA ARCHITEKTURA MADRYTU: POMIĘDZY FORMĄ I TEORIĄ (streszczenie)

Na początku XXI wieku w Madrycie powstało wiele obiektów architektonicznych, w których można odnaleźć elementy neomodernistyczne. Warto do teorii i form modernistycznych odnieść chociażby słynne budynki mieszkalne *Mirador* (2005) i *Celosía* (2009) w dzielnicy Sanchinarro, które zostały zaprojektowane przez znaną holenderską firmę MVRDV we współpracy z hiszpańską architektką Blanką Lleó. W Madrycie działa także biuro architektoniczne *A-Cero* (Joaquín Torres i Rafael Llamazares). Jego główna działalność koncentruje się na projektowaniu budynków mieszkalnych - zarówno całych zespołów, jak i indywidualnych domów jednorodzinnych (*Vivienda 10*, *Moka House*). Poza zaprezentowaniem opisywanych obiektów ważny jest także kontekst ich powstania, zarówno w aspekcie formalnym jak i ideowym. Istotną wydaje się również teoretyczna refleksja na temat architektury, której autorami są sami architekci. Najsłynniejsi nie tylko projektują, ale starają się także przedstawić swoją filozofię artystyczną, w której możemy doszukać się wielu neomodernistycznych wątków.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura współczesna, Madryt, modernizm, neomodernizm, postmodernizm.



- III. 1. CaixaForum, arch. Jacques'a Herzoga i Pierre'a de Meuron, Madrid (phot. E.Kubiak, 2015)
- III. 2. Cuatro Torres (from the left: Torre Espacio, Torre de Cristal, Torre PwC y Torre Cepsa), Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak 2016)



III. 3. Torre de Valencia (1970–1973), arch. Javier Carvajal Ferrer, (phot. E. Kubiak 2016)



III. 4. Casa García Valdecasas (1964–65), arch. Javier Carvajal Ferrer



III. 5. El Parque empresarial La Finca, arch. Alberto Martín Caballero and José Antonio Factor, Somosaguas, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)



III. 6. El Parque empresarial La Finca, arch. Alberto Martín Caballero i José Antonio Factor, Somosaguas, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)



III. 7. Casa 130, La Finca, arch. Alberto Martín Caballero, Somosaguas, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)



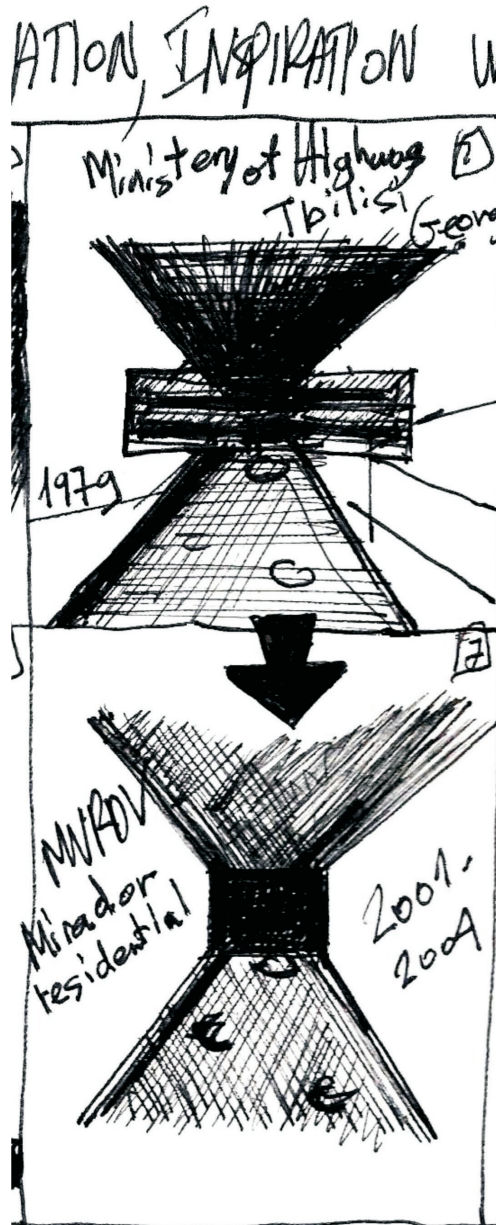
III. 8. Moka House, La Finca, A-Cero, Somosaguas, Madrid
(<http://www.archello.com/en/project/moka-house>, (accessed 20 July 2016))



III. 9. El Mirador, MvRdV and Blanca Lleó, Sanchinarro, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)



Ill. 10. El Mirador, MvRdV and Blanca Lleó, Sanchinarro, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak 2016),
Ministerstwo Transportu, George Chakhava and Zurab Jalaghania, Tbilisi, Georgia,
1975



Ill. 11. Ministertwo Transportu, George Chakhava and Zurab Jalaghania Tbilisi, Gruzja; El Mirador, MvRdV and Blanca Lleó, Sanchinarro, Madrid, (<https://archidialog.com/tag/inspiration/page/4/>, (accessed 24 July 2016).



- III. 12. Ministersto Transportu, George Chakhava, Zurab Jalaghania. Tbilisi, Georgia, 1975, (<http://architectuul.com/architecture/ministry-of-transportation-in-tbilisi>, accessed 20 July 2016)
- III. 13. El Mirador, MvRdV and Blanca Lleó, Sanchinarro, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)



III. 14. Celosia, MVRdV and Blanca Lleó, Sanchinarro, Madrid (phot. E. Kubiak, 2016)