

Kuewu Pamela

Professor Linda Liu

History of Architecture 201: The Modern Era

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Movement Toward Modernism

Modern architecture, or modernist architecture, as it is sometimes called, is part of the larger modernist movement that first made itself known around the turn of the twentieth century. Architecture scholars debate the exact starting point for architectural modernism, but they all agree that Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, Otto Wagner, and Antoni Gaudi were some of its early practitioners. The lavish styles of the earlier, Victorian style of architecture prompted these revolutionary thinkers to strip away unnecessary details and focus on a building's essential function.

Driven by social and political changes, as well as innovations in technology and engineering, modernist architecture continues to shape our built environment. In this paper, I hope to describe some trends in modernist architecture, starting with the work of Frank Lloyd Wright in the United States, and moving on through the Bauhaus and International Styles, as well as later developments.

Frank Lloyd Wright

Considered the most important American architect of all time, Frank Lloyd Wright developed a type of design he called organic architecture, in which harmony between humanity and its environment was given the highest priority. As Thomas Cohn has demonstrated, the horizontal lines of his mature style have their roots in the Wisconsin landscape of his youth. He created many types of buildings, including churches, private homes, schools, hotels, and museums. He was also known for designing his buildings' interiors, including furniture, stained glass, carpeting, and, in a few cases, the clothing he thought the buildings' inhabitants should wear. (Cohn 123)

Bauhaus Style

The Bauhaus style was developed in the 1920s at a German art school of the same name. Its signature designs, stripped of ornamentation, eventually led to some of the most important architectural trends of the modernist era. More than anything else, Bauhaus architects focused on establishing harmony between a building's form and function. This was similar to Frank Lloyd Wright's approach. They sought to combine old traditions of European craftsmanship with modern, artistic sensibilities. According to Haley Bowerman, they argued that building was the ultimate goal of all creative endeavors. (Bowerman 140)

International Style

The International style of architecture emerged as a major force in the 1920s and 1930s. Perhaps more than its precursors, it emphasized designs for urban life. International style buildings tend to be rectangular, with glass, concrete, and steel surfaces that are completely devoid of ornamentation. In some cases, the use of cantilever construction makes International style buildings look as if they are floating above their foundations. Interiors are typically open and filled with light. Architects working in

this style were enthusiastic about the possibilities of machine work in the creative process and took pains to make a building's structure an important part of the building's overall aesthetic statement.

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, who went by the pseudonym Le Corbusier, was a leading proponent of the International style (Wesley). He devoted much of his professional career to creating livable en

Works Cited

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