

Myth of International Style: 20th-Century Architectural Modernism and Bauhaus Design in Modernisation of Urban Cities

Stephen T.F. Poon*

School of Media, Arts & Design, Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation, Malaysia

**Corresponding Author: Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation, Technology Park Malaysia, Bukit Jalil, Kuala Lumpur 57000, Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the key question of how modernist architectural principles behind Bauhaus, Le Corbusier and American International Style movements are viewed in the context of contemporary architectural designs. By examining literature and perspectives of scholars, the core principles of architectural modernism will be reframed in the context of 21st-century vernacularism approaches such as environmental sustainability. This problem statements if the aesthetics of formalism and rationality of classical International Style architecture can still be considered “style” for the 21st-century. To understand the subject with regards design structure, forms and materials, a case study is conducted to compare notable modernist works in urban styles of architecture found in Tel Aviv and North America. Additionally, the paper questions factors that led to International Style falling out with contemporary practitioners, and at the same time, how design minimalism enhances understanding of climate responsive and sustainable architecture. Overall, this analysis finds that 20th-century International Style, driven by socio-political change movements, machine aesthetics and mass production ethos, expressed through design movements such as Bauhaus, has started to lose its relevancy to urban architects facing social and environmental pressures of globalisation, although the universal values presented by Le Corbusier’s 5-Point Principles are still significant in studying the historical and evolutionary aspects of architectural design. Finally, research suggests that responsiveness to climate elements continue to signify the gainful lessons of modernist architecture in going forward into the 21st-century.

Keywords: *modernism, urbanisation, International Style, Bauhaus, Le Corbusier.*

INTRODUCTION

This paper devotes equal parts of criticism to fundamental questions on aspects of modernism theories as well as examining the aesthetic practicality of architectural modernist approaches of International Style for the contemporary and postmodernist eras. The paper also considers the significance of core principles of Bauhaus minimalism and modernist functionalism practiced by architects Edward Durrell Stone, Le Corbusier and those from the Bauhaus School of Architecture in Germany. The debate of whether an International Style was an apolitical response to the turbulence of socio-political chaos of the 20th-century will be examined through research and analysis using case studies to compare modernist architecture in the United States and Israel will be presented with regards the vernacular approaches of sustainability applied by architectural design in the 21st-century.

The research aims to answer several key questions:

- *Are contemporary urban designs shifting towards vernacularism in architectural*

vocabulary and adopting sustainability ethos in lieu of the formal aesthetics and rationality of International Style architects of the 20th-century?

- *What aspects of structural, forms and materials comprise the elements of modernist planned designs?*
- *Despite a fallout in favour in the 21st-century, how has International Style architectural inspirations enhanced practitioners’ understanding of climate responsive architecture and sustainability?*
- *What factors give International Style contemporary relevance in terms of aesthetics, principles and design thinking methods?*
- *Is 20th-century modernist “style” still significant to architectural design of the 21st-century facing global urbanisation challenges?*

By examining literature, the research will share a breadth of scholarly insights on Le Corbusier’s principles. Through a case study analysis of American International Style and Bauhaus built

heritage in Tel Aviv, the researcher's goal is to reframe the historic development of International Style architecture through the socio-political processes of urbanisation, and how this has contributed to the creative struggles among practitioners.

Significance of Bauhaus Movement

Following the Nazi shutdown of Bauhaus School of Art in 1933, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Herbert Bayer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and others, the leading German educators who brought fame to the eponymous art school, immigrated to United States and began practicing in earnest.

It was in the 1932 when the term "International Style" was born in design fields of architecture and various other disciplines [1]. From an historical perspective, the Bauhaus design and art school formation is often attributed to direct threats, suppressions of and encroachments to socio-political, religious, cultural and social freedoms instituted by Adolf Hitler's Nazi powers pre-World War I [2: 4].

Finding the heart of a 100-year old art movement in the 21st-century involves cross-disciplinary research to uncover fleeting glimpses of the muddled, evolutionary pathways of art history, art education, cultural and heritage preservation and socio-political reconstruction that, ironically, influenced the growth of anti-Semitism in United States [3]. In attempting to frame an apolitical cultural outlook towards Jews, curators at the New York *Museum of Modern Art* (MoMA) Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson published a book after MoMA's landmark exhibition *Modern Architecture* in 1932, acclaiming that 20th-century American International Style symbolised authentic modernism principles of *flexibility*, *regularity* and *volume* expression [4: 14]. Linear symmetry, minimal ornamentation and mass-produced industrial designs began shaping the era of commercial clustering business district skyscrapers of glass and steel up until World War II.

According to Northeastern University School of Architecture professor Mardges Bacon [5], the development of American International Style can be attributed to architects and industrial art practitioners' foremost admiration for its radical legitimacy from preceding 19th-century designs, but with removal of the European bias [6]. Through sociocultural movements as Bauhaus, the creative struggles to find a "voice" and "vocabulary" to describe the International Style started with removing spatial rigidity and

embellishments, in that sense, International Style was an appeasement of conservative and progressive value conflicts through bridging American vernacularism and European classical architecture [2; 6].

In modernist visions, geometrical layouts of housing townships manifest from strict land use planning regulations. Flat uniformity, seen in the example of the Buffalo News media office in New York and the International Trade Mart (*World Trade Center*) in New Orleans, was designed by preservation-minded architect Edward Durell Stone in the style of New Formalism, to disassociate from metal-and-glass works of towering mainstream skyscrapers, aiming instead for a more "palatable", eclectic dream of modernist aesthetics [7; 8]. International Style further promoted expressiveness of patented structures by demonstrating reductive material aesthetics, supporting the exploration of newer, lighter, cheaper, pragmatic, less cumbersome construction materials, innovative industrial and automated techniques [6]. Through the quintessential lens of major proponents such as MoMA curator (1937-1941) John McAndrew, the influence of 20th-century International Style grew into a populist movement in the United States, a begotten triumph for the "New Formalism" approach sans evoking the historicity and socio-politics of traditional European architecture, expressing in particular the political activism of German artists [2; 9; 10].

McComas [2] asserts that the conscious adoption of an "apolitical soul" in International Style art and architecture helped foster German-American relations pre-World War 2 until mid-1950s. In effect, this became an enabler for large-scale industrial growth globally. In other North European regions, International Style bore Fascist expressions through the works of Italy's Giuseppe Terragni [10; 11]. Architect and modernism advocate from the 'New York Five' Peter Eisenman wrote a substantial treatise essaying on Terragni, including Casa del Fascio in the historic border town of Como, the headquarters of the Fascist Party built in between 1932-1936. For some critics, Eisenman proved the wrongful effects of New Formalism when elements of history are removed or disregarded by newer architectural methodology:

(Casa del Fascio is comprised of) dried up compartments, piazzas and ceremonial sites dated to their architectural elements ... ignorant of the fact that in Como, three monuments, the

Tower, the Broletto, the Duomo: three periods, three revolutionary facts, flank one another and form the northern side of the Piazza del Duomo in a superb ensemble [11: 476].

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Perhaps due to the redolence Mediterranean associations it evoked, modernism as a radical cultural zeitgeist is sometimes given a reframing treatment as a “superficial” form of style by progressive architectural history critics such as University of Virginia architectural professor John V. Maciuka [12].

In an earlier review, Maciuka [13] had theorised on the rationalist approaches of pre-Bauhaus architects like Hermann Muthesius, whose architectural perspectives coincided with the period of the Third Reich, where Nazi political interventions hindered social reformations and building designs were treated as showcases of nationalistic pride and German engineering excellence even as social class struggles against imperialism grew. Maciuka claims that modernist aesthetics, unlike the purity of vernacularism, may even be the “imitation of artistic sensibilities” [13: 89], rather than actual art itself, historians, acting as guardians of architecture’s evolution and heritage, ask if architecture’s end purpose is to contest dominant authoritative views, rather than to promote masterful technical competence and material knowledge and application to improve human connections and relationships through expositions on functionality, practicality and aesthetics [4; 9; 14].

Le Corbusier’s Five Points of Modern Architecture

In post-Bauhaus era, Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris) and painter Amédée Ozenfant, assembled their thoughts and responses to vernacularism, promoting the concept of *utopia on earth* through “restoration of the living environment”, in the 28-volume magazine *L’Esprit Nouveau* published between 1920-1925 in France, which had then not encountered the phenomenal effects of the modernisation revolution, nor found aesthetic styles responding to the rapid development of industrial cities and planned townships [15; 16: 11].

Le Corbusier’s design principles were theoretically significant for practitioners working in the 20th-century modernist traditions for its attention to the spirit of human-nature interactions, synthesising industrial materials with authentic, vernacular elements of organic forms and stripped-down

architectural styles [5]. His design inspirations are still exemplary studies of environmental sustainability characteristics and cultural interpretations of the commonplace aesthetics found in the vernacular arts (same as other performance arts like music, dance and drama), rather than discourses on technical innovation and the value of built installations.

Le Corbusier distilled his personal conceptual manifesto in the celebrated essay, “Les Cinq Points de l’architecture moderne” (*5 Points of New Architecture*), through these principles:

- Use of reinforced concrete columns (“les pilotis”) to uplift and bear the load of walls;
- Free and unrestrained flow of interior space for ground plan (“les toits-jardins”) through column-and-slab rather than partitioning;
- Separation of exterior from interior façade (“le plan libre”) providing unencumbered panoramic aesthetics of the surroundings;
- Horizontal lighting through opening strips or ribbon windows (“la fenetre en longueur”) providing equal lighting while enhancing landscape visuality; and
- Roof gardens or terrace (“la facade libre”) in flat structures, as protection, promenades, offering light and spatial ventilation to replace a building’s occupied space.

The basis of functionalism, according to Le Corbusier, was to ennoble human relationships through spaces: “A house is a machine for living in” [17]. Beatriz Colomina [18] in her narrative criticism, *Privacy and Publicity*, notes how Le Corbusier used architecture as image perspectives to produce “mediated”, subverted cultural forms by portraying *seamless spaces where man, material and machine achieve their highest potential for social progress*. By capturing modernity as juxtaposed through photographic (mechanistic) vision, rather than images derived purely from human eyesight and vision, transient emotions and the dialectics of time would emerge, as such:

Architecture (could be defined) the “masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light” [19; 20: 4].

International Style: Philosophy, Form, History and Legacy

In unifying craftsmanship with various branches of the arts to serve architecture, the industrialisation of developed northern Europe and North America was factored into modernist architectural radicalism throughout early to mid-

20th-century, through a diversity of dialogues, pioneering architects looking for qualitative style expressions to reconcile public taste with sustainable building performance while seeking to prescribe functional buildings to address the lack of space within urban zones [21; 22].

American cultural landscape designers and architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright believed that environmentalism of North America's 18th- to 19th-century Westward Expansion and Romantic traditional eras to the more mundane domesticity of planned townships and cities would, could, never strictly accord with International Style traits, as the latter involves striving for newer standards of built engineering and construction techniques to serve housing needs and city populations that emerged in rapid tandem.

Today, this philosophical debate of human "ownership (control, access) of spaces" through architecture and built techniques, often contradicts with sustainability and urban planning interests of local communities rather than social reformation agendas [22]. University of Illinois architect-educator Scott Murray [20] urges contemporary architects to demonstrate collaborative possibilities with innovative materials by adopting precedent building tectonics to refocus global environmental and social agendas into experiential habitats and spaces. Murray [20] examines the 'enclosed-system' principles as applied through *material translucency*, where energy-efficient materials such as glass curtain walls, stacked glass tubes, double glass skins and other "translucent" techniques are used in designing buildings ranging from residential to religious and commercial sites.

Modernist Functionality and Sustainability in Postmodern Culture

Did modernist forms attempt to build sustainably? This question was raised by Thwaites et al [23] in *Urban Sustainability Through Environmental Design*, on what contemporary designers and architects would consider to be "the chain than links together conventional modernism with its pretended postmodernist alternatives in a single chorus". The answer seems to lie somewhere in acknowledging the differences between the formal aesthetics training of architectural designers today, compared to those who were subject to neo-historical developments of the previous era:

(Without the historical contexts of conditions that produce human art and design) ... We have symbolic celebrations of technology without connection to anything but the celebration itself ...

living in (today's postmodern societies) with their reductive and mechanistic conceptions. (...) Is that all? [23: 51].

In studying the underlying basis of sustainability in modernism, some researchers deconstruct why the 20th-century spirit of individual "heroism" fell out of favour in the antecedent century. Modernist character, posited on fragmentation of societies by Marxist social reactionaries, was identified by past artists and designers through their informal aesthetics educational background, and expressed mostly in and through works that challenged avant-gardism and urged for rationality, social order and complexity [3: 29; 24]. The principles of "space and people-conscious" *urbanisme* disciples including Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe drove art and architectural responses towards formalism and urbanisation.

Other researchers contradict these beliefs, and state that functionalism has moved into an apparent "aesthetic intrusion" today, a continual chaotic response going forward, reflecting Thwaites et al argument that the scale of sustainability planning of modern cities and towns have inevitably brought about "the dawn of the anti-heroic counter revolution" [23: 51].

The next section will provide a short summary of the case study analysis used for this paper, with an examination of examples of classical European modernist architectural design elements of Bauhaus and Le Corbusier's *5-Point Principles*, in a comparative study research of International Style as expressed by American urban architects of the 20th-century.

EVALUATION OF THE CASE STUDY

To understand the issue of whether International Style could stand apart from its myth as an expression of "nostalgic reassurance" of European imperialism, a case study is presented in the following section of this paper, to critically analyse American architectural heritage and Bauhaus 20th-century modernism heritage characteristics in Tel Aviv.

Characteristics of Bauhaus and International Style in Tel Aviv

With over 4,000 buildings standing today as living legacy of the German Jewish migrant community, Tel Aviv is described as the "New York of Israel", populated by over 3 million, an UNESCO World Heritage Site of Bauhaus architectural modernism [25]. Tel Aviv has produced a rarefied expression of International

Myth of International Style: 20th-Century Architectural Modernism and Bauhaus Design in Modernisation of Urban Cities

Style architecture in a symbolic unification of Bauhaus modernism with vernacular characteristics of the early 20th-century, borrowing (and at the same time, subverting) elements of an architectural movement that had spread from Germany to North America [25].

While acclaimed to be an urban lifestyle hub today, Tel Aviv has not lost its heritage identity representing International Style planning ingenuity through a Garden City master plan concept with functional, innovative, climate-responsive and inclusive elements of tradition and culture for its evolving social needs [26].

Since its founding in 1909, Tel Aviv's "White City" moniker has been a literal symbol of the purity of vernacular aesthetics. Architecturally, it was conceptualised to be a cultural capital and commercial centre by its British founding fathers. Led by urban planner Patrick Geddes, the tactic positions its regional growth based on broader socio-political goals via the creation of "Neue Menschen" (The New People) of Jewish descent [27]. Arie Sharon, Samuel Mistskin, Shlomo Bernstein and Erich Mendelsohn were the leading past architects who changed public landscapes through their urbanisation visions [27: 48]. Bauhaus trained; their return to Israel brought new inspirations through heritage preservation commissions and projects in planning, designing and constructing public spaces from pavilions to *kibbutzims* (communal centres).

Jerusalem architect-author-Sharon Rotbard [26] found that among migrant residents, buildings and spatial designs were external articulation of their European ancestral and narrative memories. According to Reisner-Cook [28: 162], social and religious issues were indeed important to Zionist migrants who relocated from Krakow to Tel Aviv in the 1950s; nevertheless, seeing their new lives expressed "geometrically" took away a sense of local presence, with residential projects mirroring Biblical, Davidian references through the heavy use of walls in blue, red and gold.

A century later in 2019, Tel Aviv's political orientation may be critically viewed through the lens of postmodernism, and questions of the "black chaos" against the enforced urban planning of the White City is being raised, even as exhaustive restoration works denotative of architectural heritage style of 1920s until 1940 continue unabated [16; 29]. In fact, artefacts and cultural vestiges of middle-class Europe appeared in Tel Aviv homes, including the frills-free Bauhaus art influences which crept

fortuitously into a 20-year span of the cosmopolitan's built structures and landscaping history, at a time when a lack of prevailing Palestinian Arab identification and tight budgetary considerations was to determine Tel Aviv's adoption of formalism as its main architectural ethos [16; 30].

Adaptation to Vernacularism and Climactic Conditions

Tel Aviv sought functional architectural and construction solutions in facing rapid shifts of its economic fortunes up until 1970s, through city planning projects symbolising Jewish ideologies while portraying an image of "white" success, from boxy small windows set in expansive walls to whitewashed concrete terraces [25]. The modest yet energetic typology of utopia in a Mediterranean-inspired wasteland brought together vistas of seafronts, gardens and parks that were adaptable to the region's extreme climate [25]. In terms of sustainability, the notion of balancing heritage with urban growth seems essentially sound. However, as some experts have recently pointed out, an International Style heritage enclave did not always ensure long term site and building maintenance [29]; particularly if the aesthetics of "style" itself stagnates and other (vested) political interests take over. Anat Geva [31] published a study of Tel Aviv's "style" indicators (metrics) using academic journals and papers keyword search in architectural design bulletins. Geva [31] found that "sustainability" in Tel Aviv's cultural heritage enclave was indicated by the value of its old buildings; social and economic sustainability being the unfortunate missing factors.



Figure1. Flat rooftops of Tel Aviv apartment buildings

Trim columns, flat roofs, ribbon windows and shadowy entrances intermingled to create cooling microclimates [16]. Flat rooftops offered common spaces for social interaction between house tenants residing within two- and three-bedroom apartments (Figure 1).



Figure 2. Wide cornered balconies in Tel Aviv

While European International style enthused about large windows, recessive facades and deep shaded walls for hanging balcony features adjusts for local climate conditions, while graceful gardens and breezy plazas are part of the modest, regulated landscapes to cancel out Tel Aviv's daytime heat and glare [26]. Long narrow balconies with wide corners are a sustainable demonstration of ecologically bare construction finish using reinforced concrete filled with silicate blocks and concrete (Figure 2). Whitewashing is a crucial passive cooling measure, along with shading devices on windows and roofs which provide cross ventilation to open floor plans, deflecting heat, removing excess moisture within, while protecting from direct glare of the sun [32].

Windows of its traditional residential quarters are muted wraparounds for corners and curves, ensuring local glass were used sparingly. Balcony railings accentuate the slim-line profile of ribbon windows. Horizontal 'ribbon' windows adapted to local conditions: incisions shaded by deep balconies or slim cantilevers. Ventilation wells and air conditioning systems were centralised to minimise space uptake [33].

The role of balconies in Tel Aviv architectural heritage is explored by Aronis [34], who found in a study that shaded balconies are both demarcated private spaces and areas where social lifestyles are fostered. Instead of the stolidity of concrete, the membranous walls of many Tel Aviv apartments integrate rooms seamlessly, symbolising intentional mingling, yet formed a practical "curtain" that separates occupants for functional privacy [26]. This

adaptive luminosity suggests that while walls are treated as curtains that shift directions even in formal cubistic layouts, strict rationalistic design features are dismissable in the name of a more harmonising cultural milieu [30; 32].

Characteristics of American Architectural Modernism

According to Judith Pearlman, documentary producer of award-winning *Bauhaus in America* [35], the Utopian ideals of Bauhaus are an historical record of a transformative vision to unify visual arts and crafts with industrial planning and mass-production techniques, resulting in a "people society", rather than a "thing society", the outcomes and experiences interweaving into the lives of locals for whom the design of everyday objects, communities, social neighbourhoods and experiences are invented [35].

Edward Durell Stone and Frank Lloyd Wright were the leading American architects who schematically endorsed historicity in their practices, to express a distinctive pride of place over buildings and landmarks, as clearly as Bauhaus had imbued architecture with timeless and universal values [36; 37]. While Wright (1867-1959) personified the rugged, organic, minimalist elegance which marked 1930s' progressive American architecture, Edward Durell Stone (1902-1978) appropriated only certain recognisable aspects of International Style in his commercial and cultural works ranging from exhibition pavilions, embassy buildings, hotel lobbies, museums and theatres, to a university law school [20: 43-47; 38; 39].

Many researchers believe that Stone's conscious rebellion towards European modernism arose from a more optimistic, Romantic-era view towards preservation. The ultra-modern design for MoMA headquarters in New York solidified his credibility in 1939, yet he did not feel the need to follow the strictest European modernist canons [40]. Criticised for doing a backflip to conservatism as mid-20th-century arrived, Stone countered by saying that instead of heterogynous "ice-cage glittering facades" of steel and aluminium which many city buildings had then embraced, embellishments of luxury such as white marble, opaque glass and black granite reflected taste and thoughtfulness in 'ornamental functionalism' [41; 42]. Despite flagging endorsements from the American architectural community in later years, Stone's legendary stature was nevertheless affirmed by the multiple honorary degrees and lifetime awards from prominent leagues [43].

Mandel House: Icon of American International Style



Figure3. Living room of Mandel House

An example of Stone's functionalist approach is seen in the Mandel House in Westchester County, New York, designed and built for architect Richard H. Mandel (1933-1935) as a pioneering showcase of American International Style that integrates design efficiency with spatial elegance. With stuccoed concrete walls bathed in pristine white, Mandel House incorporates a recessed basement that fell naturally along the sloping contours of a site overlooking a former reservoir. An asymmetrical lightness offsets its commanding vista of woodlands from within stylish interiors (Figure 3). There is podium featuring cork flooring, heating and furniture that fills space intentionally to appear compact and purposeful. Le Corbusier's *brise-soleil* (Figure 4) sunlight deflection strategy is achieved through curvilinear punctured openings in the exterior building design, using concrete blocks which provide a heightened sense of expanse and sophistication, characteristic of the optimism and inventiveness of International Style New Formalism, directly influenced by Le Corbusier.



Figure4. Exterior of Mandel House

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

American International Style architecture differentiates from the European (and particularly, German) traditional concept of abstract expressionism, by avoiding rigidity which obviates distinguishable features", states Alfred Barr, Jr., MoMA founding director [44]. Le Corbusier [19], in viewing architecture's embodiment and extension of machines and systems, the spirit of 20th-century modernism point to spatial designing with emphasis on functionalism, cost-consciousness, material-consciousness and space-consciousness, efficiency was the result of the pragmatic intermingling of social and industrial heritage. The application of Le Corbusier's architectural vision also did not necessarily aim to demonstrate environmental aesthetics and inventiveness; instead, financial prudence and individualism were prized by many leading Bauhaus-inspired architects.

Although modernist styles bore the symbolic essence that residential buildings and living spaces are meant to embody [45], the notion of industrial spaces can be early observed in weaving through the interstitial spaces and typology of built designs found in Tel Aviv city, with harmonising proportions of its urban spirit expressed through gardens, parks, historical and heritage sites, even while it continues to grow into a world-class city [46]. The mosaic of architectural adaptations to local climactic elements is visible in Tel Aviv Bauhaus elements.

To historian Mark LeVine [47], urban architecture in neighbouring Jaffa and Tel Aviv seem to highlight the ways Palestinian Arabs and Jews struggled to live together in townships that separated and compartmentalised them through their fundamental ideological differences. Nevertheless, the formalism principles of geometric layouts established by International Style architects shows adaptiveness to characteristics of vernacularism in the urbanisation of Palestine and Jerusalem, this view of resolving sociocultural conflicts through space concurs with heritage researcher Alona Nitzan-Shifan [48; 49] from the Israel Institute of Technology, whose research examines seven decades of Jerusalem's development as the Holy City of God, after the Palestinian British Mandate halted in 1947 and impacted on urban planning such as transportation and public housing.

Jerusalem's 1968 master plan, although heavily criticised for a lack of thematic core, was part of its "civic beautification" to perpetuate the

Zionist vision of a sacred city through “architectures of unilateral unification” [48]. In her book *Seizing Jerusalem*, Nitzan-Shiftan [49] explains the rationale of Tel Aviv’s post-colonial master plan, where emotionally aesthetic elements such as gardens, recreational parks and religious precincts enable continuity of work to preserve holy sites such as Al-Aqsa Mosque, Temple Mount and Dome of the Rock. At the same time, the metropolitan flavours of a charismatic urban centre capture the soul of its living culture, subverting visions of the dramatic ‘purification’ of Jew society from non-Jews from ethnically segregated (Lewis Mumford calls “over-compartmentalised”) models of residential living [48; 50].

Ironically, while Tel Aviv faces economic unease due to tensions in neighbouring Syria and Iraq, the historical preservation efforts has pushed up prices of apartment and office remodelling and other commercial and private building renovations in recent years [25; 51]. First in the neighbouring village of Jaffa, and later in Tel Aviv, the modernist legacy formed the backstory of an ambitious laboratory programme by Israel to “fill the cultural vacuum” [52: 360] and transform displaced Palestinian Arab society through establishing a distinct vision modelled to bring peace and prosperity in the Promised Land, despite segregated spaces amid socio-political and socioeconomic upheavals [26; 47; 49; 52; 53; 54].

American International Style, on the other hand, consciously rebelled and broke away from European functionalism with vigour, through a more subtle fusion accomplishment in material and spatial design concepts pioneered by Le Corbusier in France.

Scholars explore the dynamics of “transnationalism” to challenge Euro-centric ideologies of enforced social relations and cultural identities through urban planning and spatial designing. Advocacy for a less-formal construction design has been echoing throughout the postmodern age, where architectural preservation is viewed as part of the globalisation controversy of “restoring vs. retrofitting”. For instance, the famously described 12-storey “lollipop building”, 2 Columbus Circle at the intersection of downtown Manhattan, New York, built in 1964 and redesigned with retrofitting in 2006 by Allied Works Architecture under Brad Cloepfil, it has become the permanent home of New York’s *Museum of Arts and Design* (MAD), after it reopened to the public in 2008 [55].

The rationalisms of American International Style, Bauhaus and Le Corbusier’s architectural concepts continue to be the subject of evocative discussions in the 21st-century among research scholars, practitioners and self-styled experts [16; 4]. One such latter architect, Steven Holl, wrote in his monograph *Urbanisms* [56: 291] that subjective, sensorial perceptions of materiality and spatiality can be achieved, intertwined and celebrated through exploring porosity of light and landscape fusion for urban zones. Holl’s notion of spatial transience aligns with Le Corbusier’s trajectory of pioneering contribution to urbanism. As architectural historian at The University of Zurich, Stanislaus von Moos [17: 207] quotes:

“... *tangible objects in our surroundings [environment] serve as the starting points of poetry*”.

Indeed, a sense of poetic surrealism, the term used by Kenneth Frampton to describe Le Corbusier’s vernacularism approach, is fine-tuned through his “pilotis” principle of lifting structures away from the ground, a spatial optimisation strategy enabling the building to be a veritable *machine* controlled by man [17; 57]. Additionally, sustainable urbanisation requires a careful balance of projects that focus on the nurture, restoration and enhancement of native riparian growth (flora and fauna species) through landscape management, a challenging task due to surrounding encroachment issues [58].

Due to uncertainties surrounding large-scale projects that may or may no longer sustain or preserve surrounding nature, the style ideals of functionalism and formalism are neither practical nor viable in facing the realities of intense globalisation and rapid sprawl of cities and townscapes. It can be asserted that *Bauhaus modernism’s principles of symmetrical linearity, purity and eclectic qualities of order and rationality DO NOT qualify it as a “style*”. The mythification of those attributes do not account for sociocultural fusions of languages, religions, worldviews and political awareness which form the chaotic identities of cities today, just as it did in 1930s Israel and 1950s North America. Findings signify that postmodern paradigms would be a more relevant framework to characterise the continuity of communities through the *interstices of sustainable urbanisation and economic growth*.

CONCLUSIONS

Modernity and heritage preservation are opposing ideological principles found in architecture and architectural elements. Design principles of Le Corbusier's *5-Point* fundamentals of modernism versus International style, when assessed for creativity, inventiveness and innovativeness, would depend on the outlook of urban planners and costs involvement, before the results of sustainable urban planning policies can be measured and calculated to grow cities sustainably and conserve important cultural heritage features in the long run. Nevertheless, it is our belief that restoration of urban spaces can combine industrial and modern art, and creative ways sought to overcome the legal and economic constraints that often make conservation less than ideal for building owners. In that regard, we should dispel the myth of International Style as the end outcome of urban growth; it is a means to the end.

The content analysis demonstrates several key discourses for this "radical" shift. This paper has revealed the relevance of International Style in emphasising art historians' insights on socio-political inspirations in the complex transitioning of architectural design for the globalisation of societies. In sum, the utilitarian philosophy of Bauhaus aesthetics may be identified from its cultural historicity and socio-political significance. However, Bauhaus prescriptions to take modern urban architecture to its greatest possible limits does not fit every culture, or every episodic era of development, and indeed loses its primacy with today's urban sprawls cutting through socio-demographic borders [26: 56-63]. International Style, in contrast, shows a more revolutionary trajectory of ideals through its emphasis on structural integrity, formalism, purity, lightness, spatial volume and linearity rather than mass (weight) and curves [12; 13].

In the process, the researcher also found a lack of rationales to urge for International Style formalism approaches on cities undergoing rapid urbanisation. A gap in theorising exists, as the inherent characteristics of modern cities must factor in challenges of preserving and championing vernacular heritage today, while prioritising and reconciling environmental interests over urbanisation growth policies. Dialogues on this issue are fragmented at best, depending on the vested socio-political interests of nations, states, regions and communities.

For the unprecedented issues of global population and housing explosion amidst transnational

migratory flows today, it would be a myth to describe any universal influence on architectural design as a coherent "International Style" as such. Research, however, suggests that the character of 21st-century architecture should closer reflect Le Corbusier's *5-Point Principles*, with an aesthetically recognisable approach in construction. More importantly for long term sustainability of cities, spatial development must realise "people-conscious" principles where modernity is dignified, healthy community living celebrated, new technologies optimised and heritage conservation approaches sought out to resolve pertinent issues for urbanist dreams of expansion to be fulfilled.

REFERENCES

- [1] Winton AG. 'The Bauhaus, 1919-1933' [Essay]. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. 2016. Available from: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/bauh/hd_bauh.htm [Accessed 4th November 2020].
- [2] McComas J. *The Politics of Display: Exhibiting Modern German Art in America, 1937-1957*. [Doctoral Dissertation]. Department of the History of Art, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University; 2014.
- [3] Hitchcock HR, Johnson P. 'Modern Architecture: International Exhibition'. *Museum of Modern Art* [MoMA Catalogue]. 1932. Available from: https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2044_300061855.pdf [Accessed 15th October 2020].
- [4] Stephens S. 'Three Historians Weigh in on the Bauhaus'. *Architectural Record*. 2019; June 1. Available from: <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/14113-three-historians-discuss-the-bauhaus> [Accessed 26th September 2020].
- [5] Bacon M. 'Modernism in America: From Hound & Horn to an Americanised International Style'. [Conference Proceedings] *ACSA 91st International Conference*. Helsinki, Finland. 2003; July 27-30.
- [6] Bacon M. *John McAndrew's Modernist Vision*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press; 2018.
- [7] Tulane University. *Preservationists Campaign to Save the World Trade Center*. Tulane School of Architecture [New Orleans Preservation Timeline Project]. 2015. Available from: <http://architecture.tulane.edu/preservation-project/place/448> [Accessed 7th October 2020].
- [8] Ricciotti D. 'Edward Durell Stone and the International Style in America: Houses of the 1930s'. *American Art Journal*. 1998; 20(3): 48-73.
- [9] Gartman D. *Fordism and Architectural Aesthetics in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press; 2009.
- [10] The Art Story. *The International Style – History and Concepts*. 2017. Available from: <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/international-style/his->

- tory-and-concepts/ [Accessed 18th November 2020].
- [11] Eisenman P. *Giuseppe Terragni: Transformations, Decompositions, Critiques*. New York: Monacelli Press; 2003.
- [12] Maciuka JV. 'Art in the Age of Government Intervention: Hermann Muthesius, Sachlichkeit, and the State, 1897-1907'. *German Studies Review*, 1998; 21(2): 285-308. Northfield, Minnesota: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- [13] Maciuka JV. *Before the Bauhaus: Architecture, Politics and the German State, 1890-1920*. New York: Cambridge University Press; 2005.
- [14] Nitzan-Shifan A. 'Contested Zionism-Alternative Modernism: Erich Mendelsohn and the Tel Aviv Chug in Mandate Palestine'. *Architectural History*, 1996; 39: 147-80.
- [15] Artsper Magazine. (2017). *A lesson in style: Le Corbusier and L'Esprit Nouveau*. 2017. Available from: <https://blog.artsper.com/en/a-closer-look/lesson-style-le-corbusier-lesprit-nouveau/> [Accessed 13th October 2020].
- [16] Harpaz N. *Zionist Architecture and Town Planning: The Building of Tel Aviv*. W. Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press; 2013.
- [17] Moos SV. *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis*. Cambridge: MIT Press; 1979.
- [18] Colomina B. *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press; 1994.
- [19] Le Corbusier. *Towards a New Architecture*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc.; 1986.
- [20] Murray S. *Translucent Building Skins: Material Innovations in Modern and Contemporary Architecture*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge; 2013.
- [21] Barr AH Jr., Hitchcock HR, Gropius W, Nelson G, Walker RT, Gutheim F, Breuer M, Blake P, Kallmann G, Hamlin T, Mumford L, Koch C. What is Happening to Modern Architecture? [MoMA Symposium] *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*. 1948; 15(3): 4-20.
- [22] Saval N. 'How Bauhaus Redefined What Design Could Do for Society'. *New York Times*. 2019; February 4. Available from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/04/t-magazine/bauhaus-school-architecture-history.html> [Accessed 24th September 2020].
- [23] Thwaites K, Porta S, Romice O, Greaves M. eds. *Urban Sustainability through Environmental Design: Approaches to time-people-place responsive urban spaces*. London: Routledge; 2007.
- [24] Morel-Journel G. *Le Corbusier: Construire la vie moderne*. Paris: Editions du Patrimoine Centre des Monuments Nationaux; 2015.
- [25] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *UNESCO Designates Tel Aviv as "World Heritage Site"*. 2003; July 6. Available from: <https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/pressroom/2003/pages/unesco%20designates%20tel%20aviv%20as%20world%20heritage%20site.aspx> [Accessed 5th October 2020].
- [26] Rotbard S. *White City, Black City: Architecture and War in Tel Aviv and Jaffa*. London: Pluto Press/MIT Press; 2015.
- [27] *Bauhaus Dessau Magazine*. 2013; Issue 2. Available from: <https://www.bauhaus-dessau.de/bauhaus-magazine-issue-2.html> [Accessed 16th November 2020].
- [28] Reisner-Cook Y. *The Troubled Relationship between Architecture and Aesthetic: Exploring the Self and Emotional Beauty in Design*. [Doctoral Dissertation] School of Architecture and Design, Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University; 2009.
- [29] Bigon L. 'White City Black City: Architecture and War in Tel Aviv & Jaffa' [Book Review] *Architecture Beyond Europe*. 2015; 11. Available from: <https://journals.openedition.org/abe/3550> [Accessed 27th October 2020].
- [30] Azhkenazy D. 'Tel Aviv: Bauhaus Capital of the World'. *Israel Magazine on the Web*. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 1998. Available from: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/> [Accessed 8th September 2020].
- [31] Geva A. 'Rediscovering Sustainable Design through Preservation: Bauhaus Apartments in Tel Aviv'. *APT Bulletin*, 2008; 39(1): 43-49. Available from: <http://archives.njit.edu/vol01/etd/2010s/2014/njit-etd2014-005/njit-etd2014-005.pdf> [Accessed 14th October 2020].
- [32] Warkentin E. 'How Did Tel Aviv Become a Beacon for Stunning Bauhaus Architecture?' *Architectural Digest*. 2019; September 25. Available from: <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/how-did-tel-aviv-become-beacon-stunning-bauhaus-architecture> [Accessed 25th November 2020].
- [33] Merin G. 'Architecture City Guide: Tel Aviv'. *Architecture Daily*. 2013; September 10. Available from: <https://www.archdaily.com/175525/architecture-city-guide-tel-aviv-2> [Accessed 6th October 2020].
- [34] Aronis C. 'Balconies of Tel-Aviv: Cultural History and Urban Politics'. *Israel Studies*, 14(3): Fall, 157-180. Indiana University Press; 2009.
- [35] Pearlman J. 'Bauhaus in America'. [Reviewed by C. Burns] *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 1996; 55(2): 182-185.
- [36] Encyclopedia of Arkansas. *Edward Durell Stone (1902-1978)*. 2018. Available from: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/edward-durell-stone-1776/> [Accessed 17th September 2020].
- [37] Epstein HM. 'Eight Architectural Gems'. *Westchester Magazine*, 2004; October. Available from: <http://www.westchestermagazine.com/Westchester-Magazine/October-2004/Eight-Architectural-Gems/> [Accessed 28th October 2020].

- [38] Gray C. 'Streetscapes/Edward Durell Stone and the Gallery of Modern Art, at 2 Columbus Circle'. *New York Times*, 2002; October 27. Available from: [https://www.nyc-architecture.com/ARCH/ ARCH-Stone.htm](https://www.nyc-architecture.com/ARCH/ARCH-Stone.htm) [Accessed 9th November 2020].
- [39] US Modernist. *Edward Durell Stone*, FAIA (1902-1978). 2020. Available from: <https://www.usmodernist.org/stone.htm> [Accessed 10th October 2020].
- [40] Ricciotti D. 'The 1939 Building of the Museum of Modern Art: The Goodwin-Stone Collaboration'. *American Art Journal*, 1985; 17(3): 51-76.
- [41] Paletta A. 'The Most Hated of Architects: On Edward Durell Stone'. *Los Angeles Review of Books*. 2013; January 20. Available from: <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-most-hated-of-architects-on-edward-durrell-stone/> [Accessed 21st September 2020].
- [42] van Vynckt RJ. (1993). *International Dictionary of Architects and Architecture*. Vol.1 [Architects]. London: St James Press; 1993.
- [43] Skolmen RL, Stone H. 'Edward Durell Stone'. *Life*. n.d. Available from: <https://www.edwarddurellstone.org/> [Accessed 2nd October 2020].
- [44] Johnson P. *Machine Art*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art. 1934. Available from: https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_1784_300_061872.pdf [Accessed 13th November 2020].
- [45] Jordy WH. 'The International Style in the 1930s'. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. 1965; 24(1): 10-14.
- [46] Rubin NH. 'Celebration, condemnation and reinterpretation of the Geddes plan, 1925: The dynamic planning history of Tel Aviv'. *Urban History*. 40(1): 114-135. Cambridge University Press; 2012.
- [47] LeVine M. 'Globalization, Architecture, and Town Planning in a Colonial City: The Case of Jaffa and Tel Aviv'. *Journal of World History*. 2007; 18(2): 171-198.
- [48] Nitzan-Shifan A. 'Memorandum on the Plan for Jerusalem'. *Places* [Blog]. 2018; December. Available from: <https://placesjournal.org/article/lewis-mumford-on-the-plan-for-jerusalem> [Accessed 24th October 2020].
- [49] Nitzan-Shifan A. *Seizing Jerusalem: The Architectures of Unilateral Unification*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press; 2017.
- [50] Mumford L. *Memorandum on the Plan for Jerusalem*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Kislak Center. 1970. Available from: <https://placesjournal.org/article/lewis-mumford-on-the-plan-for-jerusalem> [Accessed 5th September 2020].
- [51] Rottscheidt I, Bowen K. 'Jewish refugees put their own twist on Bauhaus homes in Israel'. *Deutsche Welle (DW)*. 2009; April 1. Available from: <https://www.dw.com/en/jewish-refugees-put-their-own-twist-on-bauhaus-homes-in-israel/a-4139253> [Accessed 16th October 2020].
- [52] Lane BM. 'Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity'. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. 2010; 69(3): 430-434.
- [53] Tal A. *Pollution in a Promised Land*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press; 2002.
- [54] Zaidman M, Kark R. 'Garden cities and suburbs in Palestine: Case of Tel Aviv'. In L Bigon and Y Katz (eds.) *Garden Cities and Colonial Planning: Transnationality and Urban Ideas in Africa and Palestine*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2004; 167-189.
- [55] New York Preservation Archive Project. *2 Columbus Circle*. 2016. Available from: <http://www.nypap.org/preservation-history/2-columbus-circle/> [Accessed 27th November 2020].
- [56] Holl S. *Urbanisms: Working with Doubt*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press; 2009.
- [57] Frampton K. *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*. New York: Oxford University Press; 1980.
- [58] National Park Service. *Lady Bird Johnson Park*. 2019; May 23. Available from: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/600245.htm#4/34.45/-98.53> [Accessed 8th December 2020].

IMAGES CREDIT

- [1] Figure 1: 10 of Tel Aviv's best examples of Bauhaus residential architecture. 2016; August 24. Available from: <https://www.dezeen.com/2016/08/24/10-tel-aviv-best-examples-bauhaus-residential-architecture/>
- [2] Figure 2: Bauhaus Tel Aviv Tour. 2018; August 18. Available from: <http://leancytravel.co/bauhaus-tel-aviv-tour/>
- [3] Figure 3: Early Modern architecture. 2018; February 20. Available from: <https://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?p=145528507>
- [4] Figure 4: Mandel House. 2018; April. Available from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mandel_House.jpg

Citation: Stephen T.F. Poon, "Myth of International Style: 20th-Century Architectural Modernism and Bauhaus Design in Modernisation of Urban Cities", *Journal of Fine Arts*, 3(3), 2020, pp. 09-19.

Copyright: © 2020 Stephen T.F. Poon. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.