

Modern Movement: Art Design and Architecture(1)

Miss Leila Musfy (Lebanese) who is presently Assistant Professor, Advisor and Coordinator to the Graphic and Advertising Program at Beirut University College is one of the better known Graphic Designers in Lebanon. She spent one year at Beirut University College studying Fine Arts and Mass Communications before graduating in 1978 from the Kansas City Art Institute with a BFA in Design. Miss Musfy obtained her MFA in Design from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1981. The topic of her thesis was "The Meeting Point between Western and Middle Eastern Art: how can design be legible to both cultures?"

Her professional activities have included, besides teaching, freelance design for numerous companies and institutions. She has been a guest lecturer at universities locally and internationally and has participated in various exhibits in Europe and the United States. Her work appeared in *Case Currents* (Council for the Advancement & Support of Education) magazine, Washington D.C. "Riding the New Wave", February 1982; *Novum Magazine*, Germany, January/February 1982 and *Graphic Design Education* book ABC Editions, Zurich, 1981.

Her private activities in design and painting include interpretation of poems, events and Eastern and Western symbols and images in the form of miniature oriental carpets. Miss Musfy gives Al-Raida a brief update on *The Modern Movement: Art Design and Architecture*.

THE MODERN MOVEMENT: ART, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE.

All Art movements, including Modernism, can be divided into three distinct phases:

— the Archaic phase is the birth of ideas. It is usually represented by the "ISMS" (Constructivism, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism). It is also represented by De Stijl and the beginning of the Bauhaus.

— the Classical phase is the application of the distillation of ideas. It is illustrated by the "BAUHAUS".

— the late Decadent phase is the questioning period and the mannerism. Some artists call this phase "POST MODERNISM".

THE ISMS:

The first decade of the 20th century which is marked by the Industrial Revolution and the introduction of the machine, gave birth to new movements referred to as the ISMS. These movements questioned the Renaissance tradition and its use of figurative signs, rather than abstract signs, as metaphors of expression. They also questioned the theoretical representation of nature.

In France, Cubism introduced faceted volumes, figurative signs, ambiguity of space, word fragments etc... These terms involve the thinking as much as the seeing.

In Holland, De Stijl conveyed the rhythm of the 20th century life to the point where the sense of order ceases to exist. De Stijl introduced a new type of building interlocking cubes with bright coloured outside walls and a new type of furniture, the Rietveld chair.

In Germany, Kandinsky and Klee moved toward a revolutionary new expressions.

In Russia, Suprematism represented the expression of feelings inspired by the modern world: wireless telegraphy, metallic sounds, movement and resistance etc... These are the sense of universal space.

Also in Russia, Constructivism gave a new foundation to sculpture based on materials, volume and construction. Typographic contributions came from El Lissitzky who revealed to the Western world the existence of a Russian avant garde. (See picture 1)

In Zurich, Dadaism, which was not exactly an art movement, aimed to free the minds and establish a constant questioning of the conventions of art as well as of life.

In France Surrealism painting provided a new function, the emptying of the self.

THE BAUHAUS:

In 1919 the opening of a new educational institution in Weimar was intended to attract future architects, sculptors and painters. It was called the Bauhaus.

A History of Graphic Design. Meggf, Philip. Van Nostrand Reinhold, England 1983. Discussions with Catherine McCoy, Chairperson Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan, USA, 1981.



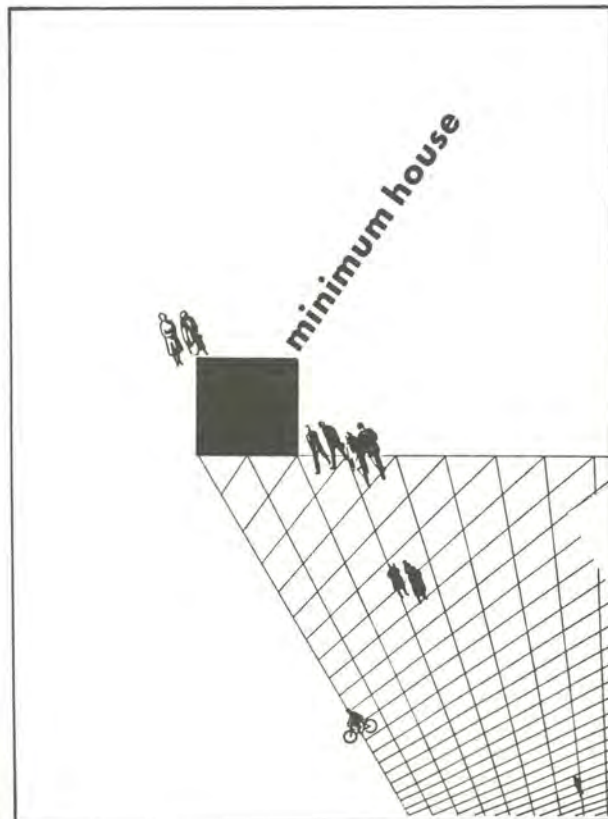
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Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus said: "Let us create a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsmen and artists... Together let us desire, conceive and create the new structure of the future which will embrace architecture, sculpture and painting in one unity and which will one day rise toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith."

Gropius's conceptions were broad and visionary if not Utopian. These called for standardization, simplification and new applications of given materials.

With Mies van der Rohe the Bauhaus moved towards what became the principles of Modern Design or the classical period of Modernism. Mies's love of quality in materials, his search for perfection and his simplicity in design form the basic foundations of modern architecture.

These are best illustrated in the Seagram Building in New York City. "Less is More" says Mies van der Rohe. Rational design makes rational societies and searches for a Utopian town. Modernist architecture and design was an answer to social crises. The very idea of modernity signified a unique fusion of romance and rationality. It sprang out from the same roots as Marxism. Technology meant precise function; a weeding out of the superfluous. Architecture can reform society. The modular grid was the face of equality. Sheet glass was the supreme utopian material.



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Mies van der Rohe emphasized straight lines, rational thought and extreme refinement of proportion and details.

The same ideals were applied to graphic design and typography. Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer and Josef Albers were the major contributors at the early stages of the Bauhaus. Picked up by the Swiss later, the formulas for the same ideals were also applied. (See picture 2)

One can therefore summarize the main ideals of the Modernists architecture and graphic design into the following points:

- No ornamentation
- Reduction of any unnecessary space
- Use of universal free flowing space without interruptions
- Establishment of the rectilinear grid
- Edges are free
- Tight tensions are towards the center
- Establishment of a universal international style not bound with cultures, climates or emotions
- Non objective

- Reduction to primary elements and colours
- Abstraction of forms as opposed to the specific and literal
- Rational
- Simplicity of line and form
- Tight spacing between the letters, words and lines
- Use of one letterstyle: Helvetica.

These were the ideals fed to the architects, designers and artists of the Modern movement. Thus if the artist or architect abides by the rules, set up by the Bauhaus Masters, then the establishing of the Ideal (the one and only solution) is possible specially if applied to city planning. However one question arises: what is the reason for the failure of the city of Brasilia? Designed by Costa and Niemeyer and built in 1960 the city of Brasilia was intended to be a true Utopia and the city of the Future. It became a true example of what is liable to happen when architects and artists:

— Design for an imagined world and its political aspirations instead of a real world with its needs and culture.

— Think in terms of abstract space and of the single instead of real place and the multiple.

It took some time to realize that artists and designers were blocking up nature. Towards the end of its phase, Modernism came to be considered as being reductive if not austere and sterile. Its purity, with its strict rigid adherence to established forms, came to be considered as puritanical.

Like democracy Modernism is being reinterpreted in terms of its insistence on forms and laws rather than freedom and liberty. Like science, Modernism seems dogmatic and brutal.

This leads us to the latest phase of the movement which some artists call "Post Modernism".

People tend to have different terms for this phase: Inclusionists, Post Constructivists, New Wave, Punk, Swiss Punk, Fad, extension of Modernism etc... The truth is that it is too early to put a tag on this phase as it is happening now.

Post Modernism started with the architect, Robert Venturi's book "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture" which he wrote in 1965. In this book Venturi talks about the combination of found objects and the breaking of the grid. In graphic design, Wolfgang edges, different angles and tends to look explosive. ed with the application of free typography; a typography that renounces extensive design dogma and tends to look unorthodox. (See picture 3-4)

Post Modernism is what Modernism isn't. It is additive, complex, ambiguous, irrational, contradictory, a style of fragments and combinations and a dispersion of forms. It breaks the grid, uses overlapping, uses the edges different angles and tends to look explosive. There is a strong reference to the past (mixture of periods: roman columns with sheet metal), it uses different styles of letters and there is a return to the hand made quality (calligraphy), the unfinished look etc... It uses subdued colours, tints, screens, letter spacing and is emotional and personal.

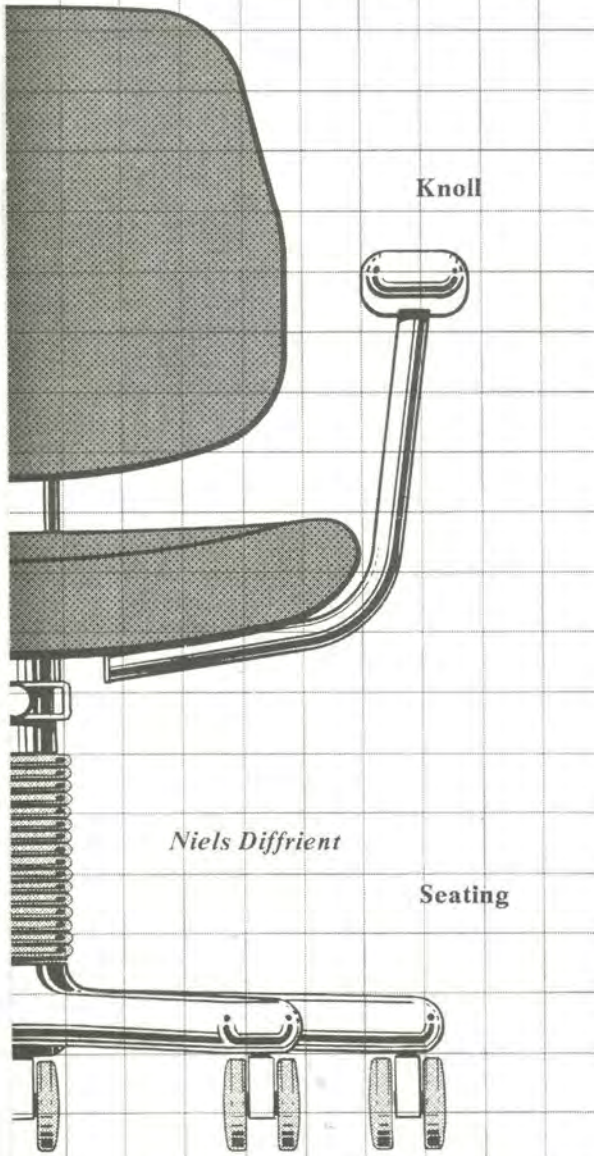
The rise of Post Modernism gave designers a greater range of styles and methods to choose from.

But where do you draw the line between well designed Post Modern work and slapped on gerrish design which is merely a fad?

It is probably the terminology that plays an important role. It is New Wavish or Punkish if it is a fad. There is no awareness of the historical background of design. It is easy to imitate and slap on designs. Late Modern would be a more appropriate term for Post modernism, since it is a synthesis rather than an analysis.

Whether it is a transitory period, a fad or a full fledged movement Post Modernism has barely begun. It is too early to determine whether it will open a new era in the history of Art and Design. One thing is certain though; it has provided the artists, architects and designers with a new vibrant look that was certainly lost with the application of Modernist theories. It has also provided the artists with a wide range of elements and styles to choose and use. It has certainly enabled the artists to become more personal and implement some of their personal motivations, thus providing them with enjoyment in their work. As Eero Saarinen puts it: "the creative spirit of the individual is what matters."

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Beirut University College



Knoll

Niels Diffrient

Seating

500 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Members

SUNDAY 9 NOVEMBER 1980

6:00-9:00pm

DOWNTOWN

DETROIT

C ^M _{useum of}
ranbrook
 Academy of Art

Members' Preview

Sunday / 18

November 1979

6:00-9:00p.m.

500 Lone Pine Road
 Bloomfield Hills, MI

T W E N T Y
 O N E

A R T I S T S

Artists

- | | |
|------------|---------|
| DAVID | ELLEN |
| BARRR | PHELAN |
| GLENN | JOHN |
| BOOTH | PIET |
| DIANE | MELVIN |
| CARRR | ROSAS |
| JAMES | PAUL |
| CHATELAIN | SCHWARZ |
| NAOMI | ROBERT |
| DICKERSON | SESTOK |
| JOHN | JOHN |
| EGNER | SLICK |
| STEVE | LOIS |
| FOUST | TEICHER |
| ARIS | ADAM |
| KOUTROULIS | THOMAS |
| MICHAEL | PAUL |
| LUCHS | WEBSTER |
| CHARLES | ROBERT |
| MCGEE | WILBERT |
| GORDON | |
| NEWTON | |