



Apartment block Prudência in São Paulo (Brazil), arch. Rino Levi, construction: 1944, adjustments: 2001-02 arch. Andrade Morettin ©Morettin

Contribution to the open discussion Modernism Frozen. Urbanism and Architecture under/after Covid-19

Learning from Modern Movement Interiors in Times of Pandemic.

Specialist Committee on Interior Design of Docomomo International

When in 2020 the magnitude of the virus outbreak became clear the interior architecture magazine *Inner: the interior architecture magazine* immediately launched a call for papers on the topic of living in times of pandemic, arguing that the new condition may have come to stay in our daily lives, – to some degree at least. According to *Inner*, a number of themes concerning this new condition and its relation to interiors therefore needs to be examined: space and multifunctionality, smart working, new duties such as home schooling and fitness, outdoor activities entering the home, the challenges of the smart interior, and how the public interior reacts to social distancing¹. From the perspective of the *Docomomo International Specialist Committee on Interior Design* it seems extremely relevant to consider these issues with reference to the Modern Movement. We thereby propose to focus on ‘interior qualities’ in the sense of all qualities related or close to the body – whether indoor or outdoor –, thus avoiding the narrow interpretation of the interior.

¹ <http://www.innermagazine.org/2020/04/18/prova/> (2020 07 11) and published on 28 12 2020 <http://www.innermagazine.org/> (2021 02 09)

We would like to refer to historian Paul Overy's 2008 book *Light, Air and Openness*, and in particular its opening chapter entitled 'Health'. The volume, which deals with Zeitgeist aspects that deeply influenced Modernism such as notions on hygiene and purity but also on the bond between democracy and economy, touches on We would like to refer to historian Paul Overy's 2008 book *Light, Air and Openness*, and in particular its opening chapter entitled 'Health'. The volume, which deals with Zeitgeist aspects that deeply influenced Modernism such as notions on hygiene and purity but also on the bond between democracy and economy, touches on preoccupations which seem to return in the current Covid era. Zooming in from the city to the house, the author describes the challenges of hygiene and cleanliness in a way which strikingly reflects our present concerns. The modernists' pervasive obsession with hygiene and cleanliness on a personal, domestic and urban level recall the lessons that people around the world have recently been forced to (re)learn: how and how long



Sanatorium Zonnestraal, Hilversum (NL), archs. J. Duiker and B. Bijvoet, 1926-28, Main Building. Interior: bright light yellow walls with blue steel windows, brown linoleum in order to economize. Photo: Mariël Polman, 2003 ©Polman

to wash hands, how to greet, how to quarantine an infected family member in one's home, to more complex questions such as how to organise hospitals and care homes. The parallels run even deeper: the recent calls for a new and better society triggered by the pandemic, involving more equitable societal organisation principles, show many similarities with the modernist ethos.

This reflection raises many questions. What can the legacy of the Modern Movement teach us about living in health and hygiene? How relevant are its views on related issues such as the degree of connectedness or separation between the private and the public, or between the built and the natural environment? Can ideas such as the machine à habiter or the Existenz Minimum provide clues for new, more virus-resistant typologies, which, with the aid of technology, flexibly adapt the boundaries between the private, collective and public spheres, preventing excesses of distance and solitude, and enhancing solidarity? Can concerns for objectivity, the truthful treatment of functions, or an architecture designed around the scale, movement and perception of the human body help give place to the personal, the human and the poetic within a framework aimed at control, purification and biosecurity? How can these topics influence newbuild and re-use design processes?

The recent Docomomo Journal, which foresightedly centred on 'Cure and Care', takes a specific perspective to related issues 'of health and healthcare facilities, entering the realm of "hygiene" with the goal of debating the process of modernization as a medical procedure'². One of Docomomo's great strengths is that it is founded on scientific research of Modernism's theoretic foundations as well as of its practices, its tangible legacy and its most appropriate conservation techniques. This heritage was born from the interplay between what was thought and written and what was built and crafted. We must remember this in handling its conservation and its legacy. The hygienic ideal of 'smooth shiny surfaces'³ should never prevent us from discovering and preserving the fragile materials that were actually used. Neither should materials detract us from the complex and multi-layered ideas behind them: a healthy mind in a healthy body, a sober interior to minimise dust and the need for dusting, machines to lighten labour and increase efficiency, the creation of conditions for leisure and personal development.

² Ana Tostoes, 'Editorial. Health at the core of Modern Movement Architecture. In memory of Vittorio Gregotti (1927-2020)', *Docomomo Journal*, 62, p. 3.

³ Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, 'The Bacterial Clients of Modern Architecture', *Docomomo Journal*, 62, 2020, p. 7.



These idea(l)s and the search for ways to achieve them are as current, challenging and essential as ever. Not only in relation to the private home, care homes or hospitals, but to our entire environment, everywhere.

With this call and the subtitle *Learning from Modern Movement Interiors in Times of Pandemic* the ISC-ID would like to contribute to the open discussion *Modernism Frozen. Urbanism and Architecture under/after Covid-19*, launched by the organisation of the Docomomo International Conference 2020+1, in order to develop it into one of the themes which will take place in September 2021 in Tokyo.

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Sadun Ersin, Eczacibasi Vitra Health Equipment – Or-An Design Competition (T), Award Winning Entry enabling both a-la-turca and a-la-franga use, 1970, photo: Sadun Ersin, 1970 ©DATUMM