

Avantgarda na periferiji / *Avant-garde on the Periphery*

Uvodnik / Leader

Miha Dešman

Med prvo in drugo svetovno vojno je slovenska arhitektura v dveh desetletjih prehodila dolgo in pestro razvojno pot. Iz arhitekturno skoraj »nepismene« avstro-ogrške province, kjer so gradili uvoženi arhitekti, je slovenska dežela postala prepoznavna po svojih arhitektih in njihovih delih.

Eden od vzrokov je ustanovitev študija arhitekture na novoustanovljeni univerzi v Ljubljani leta 1920. Na Tehniški fakulteti je prvi docent za arhitekturo Ivan Vurnik, študent Karla Koeniga in Otta Wagnerja na dunajski tehniški visoki šoli. Šolanje, sprva zasnovano kot 2-letni tečaj v okviru gradbeništva, se postopoma preoblikuje v 4-letni študij. Vurnik k sodelovanju povabi Fabiani in Plečnika, takrat mednarodno najuglednejša arhitekta slovenskega rodu. Fabiani po prvi vojni raje ostane v Gorici in Štanjelu, v tedanji Italiji, Plečnik pa leta 1921 iz Prage pride v Ljubljano. V skladu s svojimi nazori ustoliči arhitekturno izobraževanje v tradiciji *beaux arts*, torej kot akademsko disciplino, zavezano svoji zgodovini in vlogi oblikovanja nacionalne identitete. Temu doda svoj specifični arhitekturni etos, ki ga smiselno povzame po Wagnerjevi šoli, Semperjevih teorijah in nadgradi z lastnim pojmovanjem arhitekture in njene zgodovine.

Plečnik je gradil samosvojo smer v arhitekturi, ki se ne da zvesti na takrat dve poglavni tendenci v Evropi: na eni strani podaljšana secesija in *art deco*, na drugi hitro naraščajoči val radikalnega modernizma. Vurnik se je iz narodno dekorativne drže počasi in omahujoče približeval ekspresionizmu in nato modernizmu. Radikalno linijo modernizma je pri nas sprva zastopal predvsem Avgust Černigoj, ki je kratek čas študiral na Bauhausu v Weimarju in skušal potem zanetiti »plamen avantgarde« najprej v Ljubljani, zatem v Trstu. V svojem aktivizmu pa je ostal precej osamljen. V Ljubljani je radikalni modernizem ostal umetniški eksperiment, čeprav se je v tistem času postopoma izoblikoval močan in samozavesten sloj premožnega in razgledanega meščanstva, ki je postal nosilec novih idej in modernega življenjskega sloga. Tem idejam so se posvečali številni tedaj vodilni arhitekti, najbolj prestižne javne naloge pa je načrtoval Plečnik.

Slovenski arhitekti medvojnega obdobja so se sprva večinoma šolali v tujini; pri Wagnerju na Dunaju že Plečnik, Fabiani in Vurnik, kasneje pri Petru Behrensu, prav tako na Dunaju, pa Ivo Spinčič, Jože Mesar in v dveh turnusih tudi Feri Novak. Z Dunaja sta prišla z diplomami tudi Jože Sivec in Ivo Medved, iz Prage Vladimir Šubic, Stanislav Rohrman (diplomiral pri Vurniku) in Ljubo Humek, nekateri so študirali v drugih evropskih centrih.

Vsaj sedem jih je šlo v Pariz, da bi delali pri slavnem Le Corbusieru. Med njimi je prav Prekmurec Feri Novak pri svojih projektih iz tistega časa najbolj dobesedno sledil Le Corbusierjevi doktrini. Kako to?

Danes veljata Murska Sobota in Prekmurje za konservativno regijo, kjer se iz perspektive centra ne dogaja bog ve kaj zanimivega. Nekoč je bilo drugače. Obrobje je bilo naprednejše od centra, tudi avantgarda je bila velikokrat doma na periferiji. To v Sloveniji še posebej velja za severovzhod. Fritz Lang, na Dunaju rojeni režiser, vodilni predstavnik nemškega ekspresionizma 1920-ih in 1930-ih, je v začetku prve svetovne vojne nekaj časa prebival pri Grossmannovih v Ljutomeru. Tam je večkrat kiparil v bližnji lončarski delavnici. Karpo Godina je leta 1990 družinju Langa, »moža z monoklom«, in Grossmanna posvetil film *Umetni raj*. Ker velja tudi trditev, da se na periferiji stvari odvijajo bolj ekstremno, celo groteskno (Wallerstein, 1977¹), so Novakove arhitekturne ideje, ki bi težko zaživele v Ljubljani, lažje našle voljne naročnike v Murski Soboti. Naročniki so bili po eni strani bolj odprti za prevratne ideje, po drugi pa manj previdni in izkušeni. Najbrž je svoje odigrala tudi povezanost z Zagrebom, ki je bil za razliko od Ljubljane veliko bolj naklonjen arhitekturni globalizaciji in mednarodnemu slogu.

Between the two World Wars, in the space of two decades, Slovene architecture made a long and varied developmental journey. The once architecturally illiterate Austro-Hungarian province employing imported architects, Slovenia became recognisable by Slovene architects and their architecture. One of the reasons lies in the establishment of the course on architecture at the freshly founded Slovene university in 1920. The first associate professor for architecture at the Technical Faculty was Ivan Vurnik, student of Karl Koenig and Otto Wagner at the Vienna College of Technology.

The study of architecture, initially conceived as a two-year course within the civil engineering study, was gradually made into a four-year study. Vurnik sought collaboration from Maks Fabiani and Jože Plečnik, who at the time were the two most internationally acclaimed architects of Slovene origin. After World War 1, Fabiani chose to stay in Gorizia and Štanjel, both part of Italian territory at that time, while Plečnik did come back to Ljubljana from Prague in 1921. Adhering to his beliefs, he set up the architectural education in the Beaux-Arts tradition, which treated architecture as an academic discipline with a responsibility to its history as well as its role in shaping the national identity. To this, Plečnik added his specific architectural ethos informed by the Wagner School and Semper's theories, and further developed through his own understanding of architecture and its history.

Plečnik was treading a highly individual architectural path, one which was not a denomination of either of the two key tendencies in Europe of the time, i. e. the drawn-out styles of Art Nouveau and Art Deco on the one hand, and the rapidly rising wave of radical modernism on the other. Ivan Vurnik was slow and hesitant to step away from his nationalist-decorative stance so as to align himself first with Expressionism and then with Modernism.

The radical line was initially represented in Slovenia chiefly by Avgust Černigoj, who spent a short period studying at Bauhaus in Weimar and tried to light "the flame of the avant-garde" first in Ljubljana and then in Trieste. He remained relatively isolated in his activism, however. In Ljubljana, radical Modernism did not progress beyond being an artistic experiment despite the gradual formation of a strong and self-confident class of wealthy and cosmopolitan middle class, who adopted new ideas and a modern lifestyle. These ideas were the focus of many leading architects of the time, while the most prestigious public commissions were Plečnik's to design.

Slovene architects of the interwar period were mostly educated abroad. Already Plečnik, Fabiani, and Vurnik studied under Wagner in Vienna; later, also in Vienna, Ivo Spinčič, Jože Mesar, and - in two stints - Feri Novak studied under Peter Behrens. Also among those returning from Vienna with a degree were Jože Sivec and Ivo Medved; from Prague, Vladimir Šubic, Stanislav Rohrman (who graduated under Vurnik), and Ljubo Humek; some studied in other European centres. At least seven Slovenes went to Paris to work for the famous Le Corbusier. Among them, it was the Pannonian Feri Novak, who followed Le Corbusier's doctrine most literally in his projects from that period. How come?

*Today, the Slovene Pannonian region and Murska Sobota as its capital are considered a conservative region where, from the perspective of the centre, not much of interest is happening. This was not always the case: the periphery was more advanced than the centre, with the avant-garde often being at home there. In Slovenia, this is particularly characteristic of the North East. Fritz Lang, the Vienna-born director and leading figure of German Expressionism of the 1920s and 1930s, stayed with the Grossman family in Ljutomer around the onset of World War 1, and did some sculpting in the nearby pottery workshop. Director Karpo Godina dedicated his 1990 film *Artificial Paradise* to the association between Lang, the "man with the monocle", and Grossman.*

- 1 Wallerstein, I. (1974). *The modern World System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. New York: Academic Press.

Novakov osebni razvoj v arhitektu je potekal od dela na gradbišču Plečnikove cerkve v Bogojini, na kateri je v zgodnjih dvajsetih delal kot mlad zidarski vajenec, in se nadaljeval s šolanjem na tehnični srednji šoli v Ljubljani, kjer se je srečal s slovensko avantgardo (Černigojem in Delakom). V Ljubljani je očitno spoznal in se navdušil nad idejami in pionirji modernega gibanja, Behrensom, Loosom in Le Corbusierom. Kasneje je našel pot do kar dveh med njimi, saj je najprej študiral pri Behrensu na akademiji na Dunaju (1930–33), potem pa odšel delat v biro k Le Corbusieru v Pariz (1938), po vrnitvi pa še enkrat na Tehnično univerzo na Dunaj, od koder se je vrnil leta 1940 zaradi začetka vojne.

Novaka niso zanimali lokalni centri, Ljubljana, Zagreb ali Budimpešta. Skupaj z naročniki je želel poseči v jedro modernosti, kar je hotel doseči z razgradnjo samoumevnosti in domačnosti lokalne scene, z navezavo na globalno arhitekturno avantgardo.

Novak je, za razliko od ljubljanskih arhitektov, ki so se zgledovali predvsem po Behrensu in Loosu, v svojih predvojnih arhitekturah najbolj direktno povzemal nekatere Corbusierove oblikovne principe: hiša na pilotih, pasovna okna, ravna streha s teraso in prosti tloris. Tako so nastale hiše z odprtim pritličjem in zgornjim bivalnim volumnom, katerega so podpirali elegantni tanki betonski stebri, z ravno streho in velikimi pasovnimi okni. S tem je sledil doktrini, da je za novo arhitekturo potreben nov človek, ki bo živel osvobodeno življenje, brez predsodkov in balasta tradicije. To pa je stališče, ki je v temelju estetike moderne arhitekture. Le-ta je zahtevala, da oblika sledi funkciji, kar pomeni, da lepota zgradbe izvira iz materiala in konstrukcije in se ju zato ne sme skrivati, iz česar sledi tudi odsotnost slehernega ornamentiranja. Modernistično oblikovanje prostora sledi principu racionalnosti, izhaja iz funkcije, zato se imenuje tudi funkcionalizem. Značilni sta skrajna racionaliziranost dimenzij in ločitev prostorov (tako v stanovanju kot na ravni mesta) glede na funkcijo, tako da je vsak prostor namenjen opravljanju samo ene vrste dejavnosti (*coning*).

Za vrhunski izkaz Le Corbusierove arhitekturne teorije kot tudi za vrhunec modernistične lepote velja Vila Savoye. Novak je, zlasti pri Vili Šerbec, ki jo je načrtoval v času, ko je bil v Parizu, skušal slediti podobnim principom. Resnici na ljubo pa Corbijeva vila lastnikom, za razliko od Ferijeve, ni prinesla veliko veselja. Stalnica so bile težave s puščanjem strehe, pregrevanjem, neudobjem bivanja in hitrim propadanjem. Znana so obupana pisma naročnice mme Savoye, ki opisuje, kako streha pušča na različnih mestih in kako se v vili ne da normalno živeti.

Vila Savoye je danes prenovljena in sije v izvorni podobi, tudi s pomočjo sodobnih tehnoloških materialov in detajlov. Hiša Šerbec, ki teh težav ni poznala, pa je izgubila dinamičen nagovor diagonalno pozicioniranih nadstreškov in dobila dvokapno streho. Nekdaj odprto pritličje je neprimerno zastekljeno, prav tako pasovi oken v nadstropjih. Žal bi še lahko naštevali ... In to kljub dejstvu, da je Novak znal narediti ravno streho, ki ni puščala, in hišo, udobno za bivanje.

Tako se je v obeh primerih potrdila zgodba o padcu iluzij, ki sledi prevelikim pričakovanjem in obljubam – te je zbujala zamisel o novem, modernem in znanstvenem svetu, ki ga je modernizem skušal udejanjiti. A omenjena arhitekturna izziva sta potekala na različnih ravneh: v prvem primeru tehnično znanje arhitekta ni bilo doraslo zahtevni izvedbi, v drugem je uničevanju botrovala neumnost in neznanje novih lastnikov in uporabnikov.

Modernizma seveda ni brez konservativizma, sta par, nekakšen jing in jang, drug drugemu pogoj. Plečnik in Novak, ki sta se srečala v Bogojini, na eni strani zrel umetnik, na drugi mlad, za avantgardno arhitekturo vnet fant, sta šla vsak svojo arhitekturno pot. A skupno jima je bilo prepričanje, da ima arhitektura poslanstvo in moč, da naredi življenje boljše in lepše. Skupna jima je bila tudi vloga arhitekta, ki je dal svojemu mestu neizbrisni pečat.

Because it is also true that on the fringes, everything happens in a more extreme, even grotesque way (Wallerstein, 1977²), Feri Novak's architectural ideas, which would have been a hard sell in Ljubljana, found willing clients in Murska Sobota: on the one hand, they were more open to revolutionary ideas, and less cautious and experienced on the other. The proximity to Zagreb is also likely to have played a role, since unlike Ljubljana, Zagreb was much more in favour of architectural globalisation and the International Style.

Novak's personal development describes an arc which starts with his working on the building site of Plečnik's church in Bogojina, where Novak did manual labour as a young masonry apprentice in the early 1920s, and continues with his education at the technical secondary school in Ljubljana, where he came into contact with the Slovene avant-garde (Černigoj and Ferdo Delak). It seems that in Ljubljana, Novak was also acquainted with and excited by the ideas and pioneers of the Modernist movement, Behrens, Loos, and Le Corbusier. Later, he found his way to two out of the three men: first, he studied under Behrens at the academy in Vienna between 1930 and 1933, while in 1939, he left for Paris to work at Le Corbusier's studio. On returning, he entered the Vienna College of Technology for the second time, where his studies were interrupted in 1940 by the outburst of World War 2.

Novak was not interested in the local centres, Ljubljana, Zagreb, or Budapest. The Ljubljana architectural school, both Plečnik's and Vurnik's course, must have been too conservative for him. Together with his clients, he wanted to reach into the core of modernity, and he attempted to do that by breaking up the self-contented and complacent local scene and affiliating with the global architectural avant-garde.

Unlike the architects working in Ljubljana, who were influenced predominantly by Behrens and Loos, Novak adopted certain Corbusier's design principles very literally in his pre-World War 2 architectures: house on pilotis, ribbon windows, flat roof with a terrace, and a free plan. This resulted in houses combining an open ground floor with an upper living volume supported by elegant thin concrete columns, flat roofs and large ribbon windows. In this, he followed the doctrine which claimed that a new architecture requires a new kind of people who will lead a liberated life without prejudice and the ballast of tradition. This standpoint is found in the very foundation of the aesthetic of Modern architecture, which demanded that form follows function, meaning that the origin of a building's beauty is in its material and construction which must therefore not be hidden, leading to the absence of any ornamentation. Modernist design of space follows the principle of rationality, it is derived from function, which is why it is also called Functionalism. It is characterised by utter rationality of dimensions and a separation of spaces (equally on the level of a single apartment and that of a city) according to their function, dedicating each space to only one activity (zoning).

Villa Savoye is regarded both as a superb embodiment Le Corbusier's architectural theory and as a paragon of Modernist beauty. Especially in designing Villa Šerbec during his stay in Paris, Feri Novak tried to follow similar principles. Le Corbusier's villa - unlike Novak's - did not bring very much joy to the owners. The leaking roof, overheating, lack of comfort and rapid deterioration persisted as its faults. In her well-known letters, full of frustration, Mme Savoye describes how the roof is leaking in several places and how it is impossible to live a normal life in the villa.

Today, Villa Savoye stands renovated and shines in its original form, also with the help of contemporary hi-tech materials and details. But Villa Šerbec, which never experienced such problems, lost its dynamic communicative power of diagonally-positioned canopies, and received a gable roof in turn. The once open ground floor has been unsuitably glassed in; the ribbon windows in the upper floors have also been changed. And so on, despite the fact that Novak knew how to make a flat roof that didn't leak, and a house that was comfortable for living.

Both cases, therefore, present a confirmation of the story of fallen illusions, a necessary aftermath of over-optimistic expectations and promises fuelled by the idea of a new, modern and scientific world, which Modernism tried to realise. But the stories of these two sets of challenges have unfolded on very different planes. In the case of Villa Savoye, the technical prowess of the architect did not measure up to the demanding realisation, while the destruction of Villa Šerbec was brought about by senselessness and ignorance of the new owners and users.

There is no Modernism without conservatism, obviously - they are a pair, a sort of yin and yang, either a precondition for the other. Plečnik and Novak, who met in Bogojina, one a mature artist, the other a young lad with a keen interest in avant-garde architecture, went their separate architectural ways. But they shared a conviction that architecture has a mission and possesses the power to make life better and more pleasant. And they had another thing in common: the role of an architect who left an indelible mark on their city.