

FORMATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNE STYLE IN NIŠ

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Abstract. *Architectural forming in the Moderne movement lies, or rather stems from the function, that is, from the structure bulk, whose composition dictates volumetry which is the principal characteristics of a structure. It can be stated that this simplified definition of architectural forming in the Niš Moderne is only partially true, because many other factors influenced forming and creation of the Niš Moderne. The very introduction states that until 30's of the last century, the prevailing styles and directions in Serbian Moderne, and by virtue of this, in Niš, were classicistic pseudo styles, national romantic architecture based on Serbian-Byzantine style, as well as folk architecture. Many authors leading the Moderne in Serbia and Niš, often designed at the beginning of their careers in some of the mentioned styles or combined them, so that the influence of these styles and directions was felt for a very long time in their designing opus. Often, the investors' wishes to add an element or two on the façade in order to make it "more beautiful and richer" left its mark – the majority of Moderne buildings in Serbia and Niš are a sort of compromise resulting from this struggle between old styles, investors' preferences and architects' aspirations to something new.*

Key words: *Moderne, Niš Moderne, forming*

1. INTRODUCTION

Though it might be difficult to tell whether the formative elements used in the Niš Moderne are entirely original or unique, or adopted from some other styles or schools, but it can be said with certainty that their skilful usage, by the authors who created the Niš Moderne, they became specific, recognizable elements of the Niš Moderne.

Architectural formative elements of the Moderne structures in Niš can be divided into two basic groups - contributing to the appearance and recognition of these structures in respect to other styles and schools:

Functional formative elements – those formative elements resulting from the functional disposition of the structure which are the essential confirmation of Modernism postulate that form is a result of function and

Decorative formal elements – elements complementing formative appearance of the façade fronts and individual segments. These formative elements, under no circumstances, can be considered "decoration for decoration's sake", as it is true for the preceding styles, because they originate from the need to complete the certain parts of the structure, or its segments, by pure tectonic elements in order to emphasize their role and function in a structure. Utilization of these "decorative" elements resulted more from the historical heritage of folk architecture which was more "Modernistic" which served as an inspiration to many great names of the world and national architecture in creation of the Modernist movement, such as Le Corbusier, Wright, Kojić and other.

2. FUNCTIONAL-FORMAL ELEMENTS

Function of the Moderne residential building in Niš follows the classicistic pattern, thus if one of the principle postulates of Modernism were that formation stems from the function, it would be very difficult to implement here. It is better to say that visual form in the bulk is achieved through composition, but that function does not have a direct effect on the visual form.

The principal formative elements in the Moderne, such as flat roof are almost rare, and other elements such as façades without decoration are stylized and with a lot of influence of previous architectural movements and folk architecture.

Formation of the structures with bulks achieving dynamism can most frequently be seen in residential villas, where architects emphasized the developed forms of function by bulks which constitute the basic architectural volume, but here a considerable influence of folk architecture is noticeable, particularly in the application of traditional roof design with multiple slopes and with pronounced eaves (Fig. 1). Examples of absolute consistency – where form is dictated by function and where visual form is achieved exclusively by the mutually permeated bulks are rare (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1 Vila Vera



Fig. 2 Vila Živković

Here, absence of an inclined roof and any decoration is noticeable. On this example, semicircular projections in the form of terraces and pronounced bulks of the structure can also be noticed. There are some other important characteristics in formation of the Moderne structures, such as columns on the ground floor which lighten the entire mass of building or continuous window apertures, such as those on Vila Savoia of Le Corbusier. Unfortunately there are little examples of pure Moderne in Niš, and this almost the only one. The semicircular element in formation of the buildings can be very frequently encountered in Niš Moderne architecture and it represents one of the principal characteristics of the Niš Moderne. We may assume that this formative elements that was one of principal visual form elements of the architect Peter Oud in the Netherlands (social housing buildings), left a significant impression on the architects in Niš who adopted it and often implemented it in their architectural designs. This was particularly true for the architect Medvedev who used it very often both in housing buildings and in Public buildings (Apprentice hall, Assembly building of the City of Niš) (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 Apprentice hall – City Assembly

Architects often used this element in formation of free standing staircase with semicircular landing, creating in this way another element of visual form significantly contributing to the totality of structure composition (Fig. 4,5).

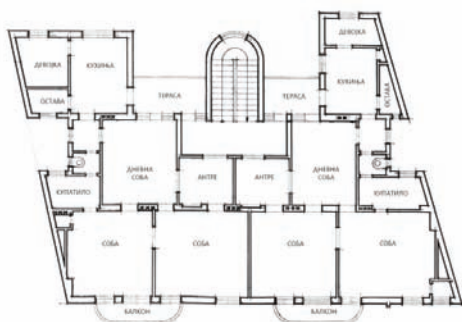


Fig. 4 Layout



Fig. 5 Appearance

Staircase area, as a separate functional-formal element is used in other types of structures as an important and recognizable element of visual form. Thus, the structures which are interpolated into the street front with their narrow façade plane, and a part of corner buildings, have the stairwell with entrance standing out as a separate vertical accent. The impression of verticality is further augmented by narrow, vertical window apertures, light-wells which are at the same time used for aeration of staircase area (Fig. 6).

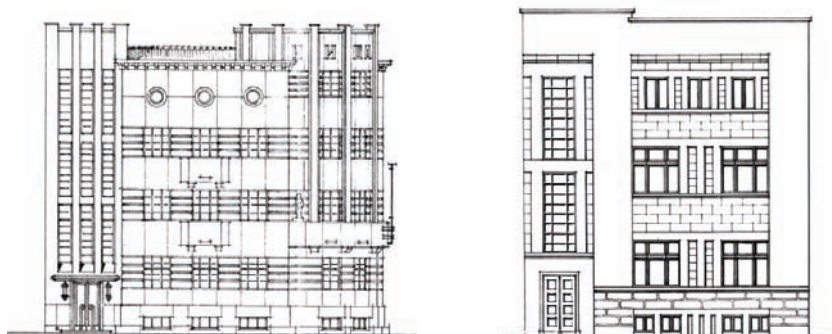


Fig. 6 Accentuation of staircase by vertical elements

Sometimes staircase area rises over the structure, standing out of the total bulk of the building. The authors particularly accentuate this separated quality of the staircase using circular windows – oculi – which are one of the characteristics of the Niš Moderne which will later be discussed in detail, amplifying the impression of bulkiness (Fig. 7).

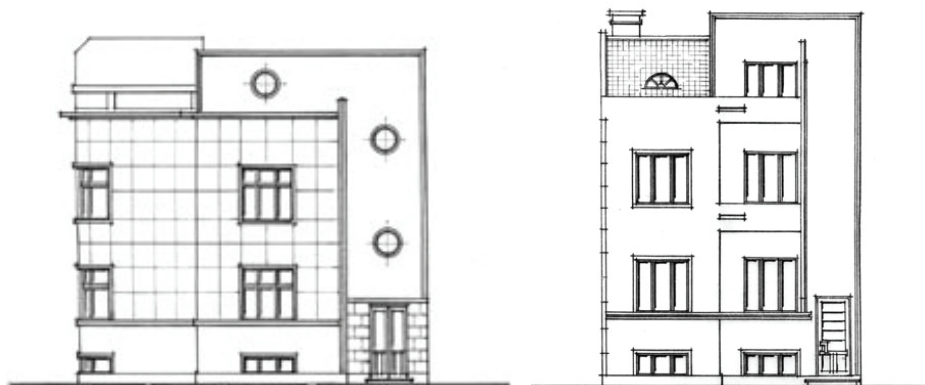


Fig. 7 Stairwell rises over the structure

In those interpolations with wide street front and in one number of corner buildings which have street facades forming an angle, stairwells and entranceways are placed in the axis of symmetry of the street façade. In such structures, accentuation and emphasis of these functional elements is achieved in a variety of ways. Sometimes by recessing the entranceway and stairwell into the volume of the structure and by increasing its height in respect to the building or by particular form of window apertures and light wells (Fig. 8,9).

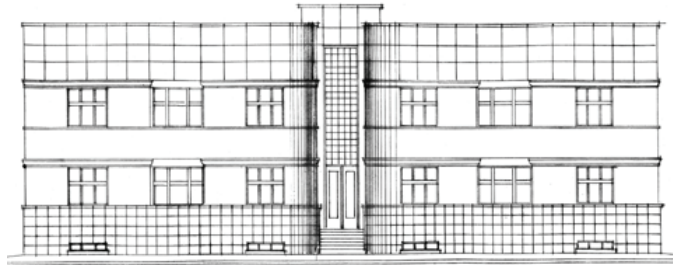


Fig. 8 Central position of staircase in respect to the structure

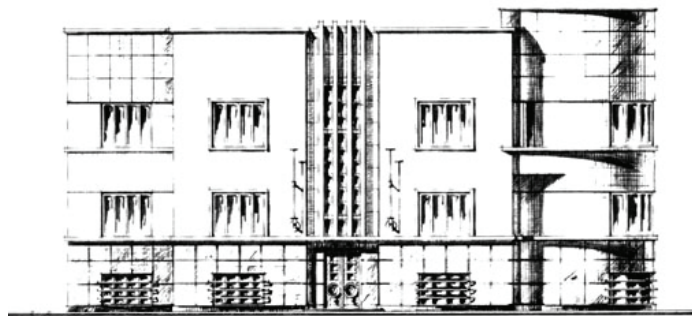


Fig. 9. Central position of staircase in respect to a façade plane

In some types of the buildings, accentuation of entranceway and staircase area, when the stairwell is recessed into the depth of the lot, is solved by decorative elements such as accentuated entrance or narrow and tall pilasters over the entrance (Fig. 10).

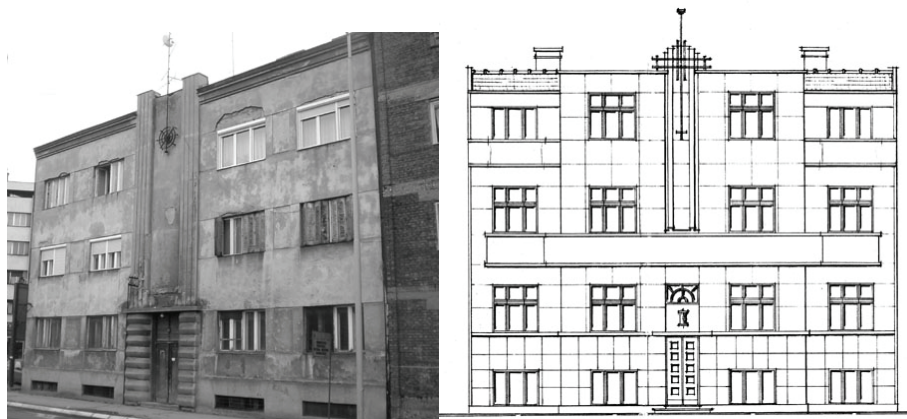


Fig. 10 Accentuation of entrance by shallow pilasters

Meeting point of two street fronts and creation of a corner has always represented a challenge in the entire history of architectural design and construction. The Moderne architects paid due attention and respect to this issue, sometimes far greater than to the

other formative elements. Designing the corner in various ways, depending on the location and conditions, they created a special formative-functional element, which, though already long time used and implemented in history, represents one of the main traits and characteristics of the Moderne movement.

In designing the corner, the authors resort to a variety of elements uniting two street fronts, creating at times very interesting forms which become the dominant element of the entire structure. Sometimes it meant adapting to the radius of a street, that is, corner, and sometimes it was an interesting compositional element.

Merging of street fronts is very often accomplished by semicircular element whose radius in most cases depends on the crossroad radius. Special accentuation of a corner is realized by heightening its corner element, or by particular treatment of details accentuating the corner, such as oculi with a flag pole holder, additional projections in the likeness of terraces, small window apertures in the attic or tall and elongated pilasters (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11 Corner formation adapting to street radii

The corner design was sometimes paid extra attention and treated more creatively, especially where the layout of the structure was demanding and complicated, and it was the result of talent and creativity of the designer himself, so there are examples of the street fronts, though semicircular, that is, adapted to street radius, having been recessed from the street front (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12 Recessing of façade planes and recession of the corner

The corners were rarely treated differently, but fortunately, there are such examples, when certain corners were solved as intermingling of two street fronts, with some other connecting elements at their juncture, such as shallow, rounded balconies, and the corner was additionally emphasized by covering it or by a strong support wall which separated the street front from the corner (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13 Accentuation of the corner by semicircular terraces

Particularly interesting corner designs are those when new formal element is introduced between two street façade planes. Sometimes it was cylindrical, and sometimes a cubus with square or rectangular floor plan, more or less merged with the mass of the entire structure (Fig. 14).

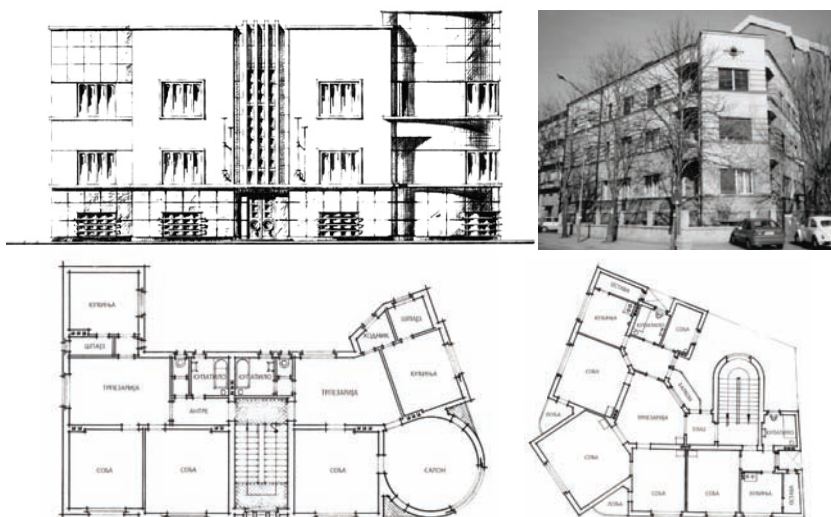


Fig. 14 Accentuation of the corner by cylinder and cubus

This new element is sometimes realized through narrow and almost non-functional balconies, and sometimes this element is almost consumed by the bulk of the building, as it is connected to it by more emphasized and functional balconies. In both cases, this newly introduced formal element contained the most representative parts of apartments, such as salons for reception of guest, so in this case it may be stated that form resulted from the functions, that is, that the most representative part of the structure in functional terms is also emphasized as a visual element of the entire building.

The shallow balconies, rounded at their ends can also be counted in functional formal elements, as they are one of the fundamental characteristics of Serbian and Niš Moderne, and add to the charm of the Moderne in general. This functional-formal element represents one of the constants in the Niš Moderne, because it was implemented in all sorts and types of housing, starting with eh family houses and villas, to the four-story buildings, "Palaces", the tallest residential buildings of the time. The mentioned detail was not rare in public buildings, because it was and is one of the characteristics of the Moderne (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15 Characteristic shallow rounded balconies

3. DECORATIVE – FORMATIVE ELEMENTS

Decorative formative elements in the Moderne are in no way just mere elements of decoration, but as it has been said earlier, represent a kind of substitution for decorative elements which can be found in some preceding styles. Here these formative elements have some relation to the function of the structure, be it only in traces, or just accentuate it additionally.

The precondition to follow the building alignment had as a result that in the designers' struggle to achieve certain dynamics or emphasize some segment of the structure particularly with interpolated and corner buildings the façade support walls were recessed, most frequently for the thickness of the support wall itself. This produced the effect of a shal-

low plastic of the building and emphasized a part of the façade which is also important for the building function. This formative element, even in the contemporary architecture, occurs often especially in housing buildings, so we may consider this treatment of the façade planes to be actually taken from the Moderne (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16 Formation by recessing of façade planes

As there was a need to emphasize certain parts of the building and accentuate them in vertical direction, that is, to give certain significant functional segments adequate vertical visual component, the Moderne architects also attempted to emphasize individual floors, particularly in order to emphasize the difference between ground floor, in respect to other floors, irrespective whether the purpose of the ground was business or residential. Such division by floors is a pattern inherited from the classicistic formation of façade planes, which has its roots in the Renaissance formation of the facades where each floor was different from the previous one in treatment and used materials. The Moderne designers most frequently used either different materials for a ground floor, or used the same material which was worked in a different manner than the rest of the façade. Apart from the difference in material of finish, the pronounced difference may be observed in the size of window apertures, which are, as a rule, smaller than those in the higher floors. Such treatment of window apertures is based on the structural reasons, because those were still masonry system made of full bricks, so the entire load from the top floors was transferred to the ground floor, which necessitated usage of either solid support walls and of small window apertures in them. Such division and special treatment of the ground floor were intended to create an impression of a pedestal on which the entire building rested (Fig. 17).



Fig. 17 Emphasis of the floors using different materials

One very important formative element of the Moderne is the high attic, which in the original Moderne is a parapet of a flat terrace. As it has been previously said in the paper, and determined* in the previous research of the Moderne of Niš, the buildings with the entirely flat roof as one of the principal elements of the modernist architecture dating back to the beginning of the 20th century were very rare. The designers of the Niš Moderne most frequently implemented classic roof structure, with multiple slopes. This is a result of several centuries of construction tradition and inherited building pattern in these parts. Both investors and architects preferred it, and in particular the contractors who knew this construction method well and who applied it in practice, while construction of a flat roof required additional knowledge, new materials and new technology for which they were not ready at the moment. Apart from the rare exceptions, the designers also succumbed to the influence, particularly the civil engineering engineers who were equal in designing rights with the architects of the time*. The high attic element is very important formative element in the Moderne architecture, because apart from concealing the inclined planes of roof, it was also there to complete the architectural composition. The attic is most frequently in agreement with the visual form of the building, and it was emphasized in those parts of the façade plane which were accentuated themselves. At the corner buildings, the attic was usually bigger at the corners and often additionally decorated with some decorations, oculi or flag pole holders (Fig.18).



Fig. 18 Concealing of roof planes with high attic

The central façade plane of the structure between the ground floor and the high attic was treated by the designers as an integral formal entity, so treatment of the visual appearance of this entity was also integral with the exception of the already mentioned recessing of bearing walls and of the part which contained the staircase, whose façade was treated specially, as well as the corner in the corner buildings which was also discussed earlier. The relationship of the full and the empty is the principal characteristic of the design of façade plane in the Moderne, where the empty is represented by the various forms and sizes of window apertures and the full are support walls which were sometimes simple, and sometimes had horizontal or vertical grooves in the form of a flute. Putting frames around the window apertures with a horizontal intermediate space is one of the characteristics of the Moderne. Sometimes this frame is almost imperceptible and it was created by recessing within the façade support wall, and sometimes it was very pronounced, with prominent concrete frame and pronounced Art-deco saw-like flutes (Fig. 19).



Fig. 19 Various forms of putting frames around the window apertures

Particularly interesting window aperture is oculus - circular window representing a sort of a trade mark and a very clear, even for the laymen, formative-decorative element by which the Niš and the Serbian Moderne are recognizable. It can be seen both on housing and public buildings. It is sometimes in a row with other oculi in the attic as an ending of the window apertures of the lower floors or it is a base element of the flag pole holder which is also interesting and recognizable element of the Moderne. Sometimes the oculi are used as skylights for the staircase, but irrespective of their position, function or purpose on the façade, this interesting decorative-functional-formative element, gives the special charm to all other buildings where it is implemented (Fig. 20).

Closing the visual form of the Niš Moderne analysis is not possible without mentioning yet another formative element, that is, detail, which apart from the already mentioned oculi is one of the clearly recognizable elements of the Moderne of Niš and Serbia and beyond even at a first glance. That is the flag pole holder which can be seen in almost all the public and housing buildings. Regardless of whether it is positioned over the entrance of the building or whether it is integrated with the oculus on the attic rising over the corner building corner, or whether it is positioned centrally, in the axis of the composition of the entire building, it is a clear mark that the building in question is entirely or partly constructed in the spirit of Moderne. This simple, exclusively metal, detail, has in it some symbolic quality of the modernism, just as the flag it was intended to support, which is also symbolic in its essence (Fig. 21).

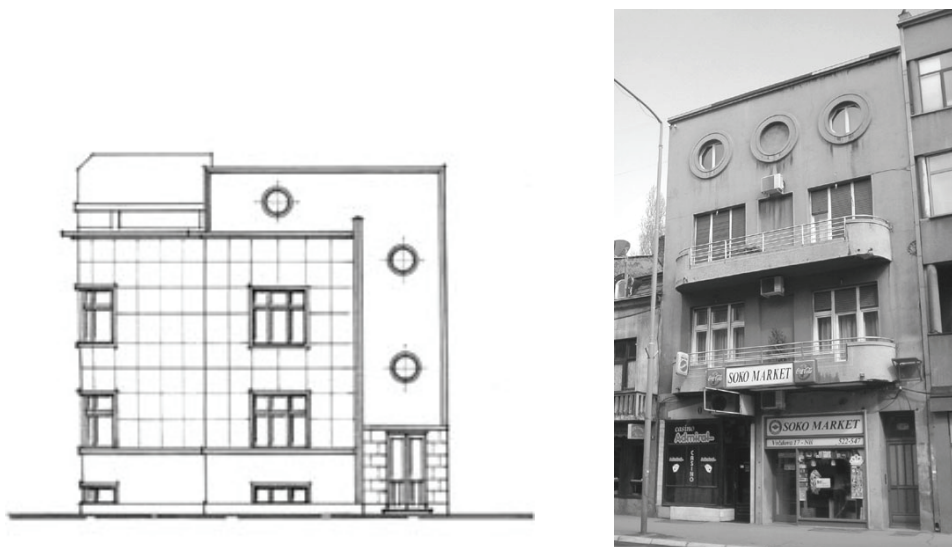


Fig. 20 Circular windows– oculi – important detail of the recognizable visual form of the Moderne



Fig. 21 Flag pole holder – an important detail characteristic for the Moderne buildings

4. CONCLUSION

Architectural formative elements of the Moderne structures in Niš can be divided into two basic groups - contributing to the appearance and recognition of these structures in respect to other styles and schools:

Functional formative elements – those formative elements resulting from the functional disposition of the structure which are the essential confirmation of Modernism postulate that form is a result of function and

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Formation of the structures with bulks achieving dynamism can most frequently be seen in residential villas, where architects emphasized the developed forms of function by bulks which constitute the basic architectural volume, but here a considerable influence of folk architecture is noticeable.

The cylindrical or semicircular element in formation of the buildings can be very frequently encountered in Niš Moderne architecture and it represents one of the principal characteristics of the Niš Moderne. Meeting point of two street fronts and creation of a corner has always represented a challenge in the entire history of architectural design and construction. Designing the corner in various ways, depending on the location and conditions, the designer created a special formative-functional element which represents one of the main traits and characteristics of the Moderne movement. The shallow balconies, rounded at their ends can also be included in the significant formative elements, as they are one of the fundamental characteristics of Serbian and Niš Moderne. Division and accentuation of various floors is also one of the characteristics of formation in the Moderne. The high attic element is very important formative element in the Moderne architecture, because apart from concealing the inclined planes of roof, it was also there to complete the architectural composition. The relationship of the full and the empty is the principal characteristic of the design of façade plane in the Moderne, where the empty is represented by the various forms and sizes of window apertures and the full are the support. Putting frames around the window apertures with a horizontal intermediate space is one of the characteristics of the Moderne. Particularly interesting is oculus - a circular window representing a sort of a trade mark and formative-decorative element by which the Niš and the Serbian Moderne are recognizable. It can be seen both on housing and public buildings and irrespective of its position or purpose this interesting decorative-functional-formative element gives the special charm to all the buildings where it is implemented. In some residential buildings a sort of pilasters can be seen, which are used to accentuate and emphasize parts of the objects via their elongated and vertical form. Another formative is a base element of the flag pole holder which is also interesting and recognizable element of the Moderne. Another formative element, that is, detail is one of the clearly

recognizable elements of the Moderne of Niš and Serbia and beyond. That is the flag pole holder which can be seen in almost all the public and housing buildings. It is a clear mark that the building in question is entirely or partly constructed in the spirit of Moderne. This simple detail has in it some symbolic quality of the modernism.

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OBLIKOVNE KARAKTERISTIKE MODERNE U NIŠU

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Arhitektonsko oblikovanje u Modernističkom pokretu počiva, ili bolje reći proizilazi iz funkcije, odnosno iz masa objekta, čijom se kompozicijom postiže volumetrija koja čini osnovnu karakteristiku objekta. Može se reći da ova pojednostavljena definicija arhitektonskog oblikovanja u Niškoj Moderni je samo donekle tačna, jer su i mnogi drugi faktori uticali na oblikovanje i stvaranje Niške Moderne. U samom uvodu je rečeno da su sve do 30-tih godina prošlog veka preovlađujući stilovi i pravci u srpskoj Moderni, pa samim tim i u Nišu, bili klasicistički pseudo stilovi, nacionalna romantičarska arhitektura zasnovana na srpsko vizantijskom stilu, kao i folklorna - narodna arhitektura. Mnogi autori koji su predvodili pravac Moderne u Srbiji i u Nišu vrlo često su na početku karijere projektovali u nekom od navedenih stilova ili ih kombinovali, tako da su se i uticaji tih stilova i pravaca dugo osećali u njihovom projektantskom opusu. Često su i želje investitora bile od velikog uticaja da se ponekad doda neki element na fasadi kako bi ona bila "lepša i bogatija", tako da većina objekata Moderne u Srbiji i u Nišu predstavlja neku vrstu kompromisa proizašlog iz te borbe između starih stilova, želja investitora i htenja i težnji arhitekata ka nečemu novom.