

be the most important indicator of the way forward in architecture. And it is a way architects cannot take without the help of the painters and sculptors. If only because we must all acknowledge that, in a negative way at any rate, Loos was right: ornament as the nineteenth-century architects and critics understood it, is wholly dead, beyond any hope of resurrection. We cannot rely on any kind of convention: the world of tangible form has to be learnt anew. Architects never think of buildings as tangible objects, except at the one direct point of contact, the door-handle. And yet buildings are not only enclosure, they are also extensions of ourselves, like clothing. But being more stable, more permanent, more important in fact, they are subject to the importuning demand that we, and by that I mean everybody, make of objects: that they should enhance, enrich, improve with our handling of them. This, it is increasingly clear, will not be done as long as there is a general social assumption that reasonable returns is all we require of products. On the contrary, they must engage our imagination. And they will not do so until architects and designers have really begun to learn the lessons which the painters and sculptors have to teach; and, moreover, have learnt to work together with them, make use of their work not only as analogue, but also as adornment. But such a development will only be valid if it is seen to be necessary, not gratuitous: as long as it will be seen not as a problem of ornament or not ornament, but as a problem of meaning.

architecture" is "ducks" buildings in which the symbolic form is the organising principle of structure, volume and programme. While their validity in the past (Gothic cathedrals) is unquestioned, the Venturis propose as the type of a modern building the decorated shed, in which the shelter is dictated by utilitarian considerations, while the symbolic bits and pieces are stuck on to the front: façades, billboards or signs. Assertively, Venturi has carried his theory out in practice. Decorated sheds, "ugly and ordinary" is what he claims to build, though he also produces the occasional duck: there is after all no ban on ducks in his theory.

The dual classification, with its emphatic preference for the decorated shed, does, however, raise a most important issue; and it may be worth looking at one of their buildings in some detail to state it. This oldish scheme (1967) is useful since it embodies the approach at a level near parody. It is the competition design for the National Football Hall of Fame near the Rutgers Stadium in New Jersey. The scheme is a low (three-storey) vaulted gallery with an atrophied grandstand towards a playing field at the back; but the important feature is the vast electrified billboard (Bill-Ding-Board), the size of a full-size football pitch, more than twice the height of the hall proper, and running its full width. The triangular piazza in front, the building and the pitch are isolated from the surrounding roadways by a parking lot about twice the total area of piazza, building and pitch. The shed is therefore decorated with a vengeance; and isolated in the New Jersey urban sprawl in a way which makes it part of the suburban landscape, camouflaged indeed as an uncritical object among others. Here's the rub. This acceptance of the culture of the shed and the billboard, which *Learning from Las Vegas* has theorised, is an acceptance of the product of technology as the incarnation of some natural force immanent in machine production, it is therefore presented as being outside the critical, judging reach of any cultural criteria. In that way, the Venturi argument is strangely parallel to the Loos argument. Needs dictate the shed: the shed should not be transformed into "sculptured" volume which is more expensive and less directly related to their direct satisfaction. So far the argument has much in common with Loos' more sophisticated justification of engineering works against the tortuous effects of architects' insensitivity to the deeds of men and of nature. But the Venturi argument adds a rather heavy makeweight, which inverts the result. Since variety is an essential human need and buildings need in some way to say what they are, this extra need and the labelling requirement is fully satisfied by sticking the most varied matter on to the building itself: and you have the new architecture, which has moreover the great virtue of looking just like all other buildings.

So concerned are the Venturis to emphasise the unity of their buildings with all that surrounds them that the distinction between the "almost all right" of Main Street and the presumably "quite all right" of the Venturis' work is often blurred; though it is probably discernible in the way the ugly and ordinary have been complex and contradictory.

I say this without malice: it is the Venturis' favourite approval words which I have used to qualify their own work. Since they have become the best-known architectural office (among the younger ones) in the Anglo-Saxon world, the whole problem of ornament has

now been identified with their formulation of it. But in fact it has been about for some time. Some ten years ago, the Zurich Kunstgewerbemuseum presented the argument for and against the thing visually, through an exhibition. And the problem has been re-appearing in quite different ways. Notoriously, certain architects as different as James Stirling (air-conditioning plant in the History Faculty Library at Cambridge) and Richard Rogers and Renzo Piano (service ducting on the exterior of the Centre Pompidou in Paris) have been using services in a way which suggests that they have formulated the problem, at least to themselves. More crucially, it has been explored by the Viennese group: St. Florian, Pichler, Abraham, Hollein and others. For lack of space, I shall arbitrarily take Hans Hollein as the representative of the group. He has none of the populist propensities of the Venturis, though he, too, is concerned with the ordinary, if not the ugly. In particular, he has elevated the method of ironic choice into an exercise which he has called "Everything is architecture." Among his media, he has included an atomiser for making "instant environment" and a box of varying pills for transforming environment "from inside yourself." Many of his more tangible projects involve the changing of some piece of technology (a sparking plug, an aircraft-carrier) into an enigmatic but architectonic object through a change of scale and context. These buildings are all ornament; the very thing that is anathema to the Venturis. In condemnation of such things, they quote an aphorism of Pugin's (from a book he published in 1843) deploring "ornaments that are actually constructed, instead of forming the decoration of construction." In fact, Pugin meant the aphorism to condemn "decorated sheds" of the kind dear to the Venturis, as the first part of that aphorism makes quite clear: "Architectural features are continuously tacked on to buildings with which they have no connection, merely for what is termed effect."

To tag "Eat Here" on to a café or diner is not what Pugin meant by "the decoration of construction" at all. What he did mean is that ornament must be integrated with the way the building is built, as well as the way it is used. The whole unity, as he conceived it, would then become a kind of social operation. This kind of building he set up against the decorated sheds which his contemporaries purveyed. For him then, as it is for me now, the problem of architectural form was not one of packaging: nor could problems of ornament be solved by "sticking" suitable labels on to neutral packaging.

And yet, at the formal level, both the Venturis and Hollein have something in common with an artist whose irony, whose sense of scale, have made him turn to constructions which are—more or less—urban and monumental complexes: Claes Oldenburg. His technique has always been one of irony: the edible hardened, the metallic made floppy, the household or even the hand-held turned into a vast monument. But always, as he himself has said, he is concerned with a reversal of expectation in his reshaping of the tangible (tangible—untouchable is a most important pair of opposites for him) commonplace.

This is where, perhaps, the Venturis' design is nearest to being critical, in the only sense which makes architecture worthwhile. Their buildings, unlike the creations of their more successful and more generalising contemporaries, are at their best eminently touchable. Hollein, too, is concerned with this bodily quality: almost obsessively. That may

was exemplified by the cult of the Beatles and the Stones, and the graphic style of Alan Aldridge. The style is already past its peak, although its sources—the film strip-cartoon—are a permanent feature of our society, and cater for the same kind of irrational pleasure as the “Cinema Style”: the pleasure which appeals through the medium of a market populism; the people like it because they buy it, *ergo* it is good in itself because the people are good. Yet the critical shift from a bourgeois to a working-class cultural mode has made the joys of cinema interiors seem exotically remote.

The attitude has its sociological and by implication (as often happens nowadays) its philosophical apologist in the work of an American sociologist, Herbert Gans, whose *Levittowners* has counterattacked the many critics of American suburbia. It concentrated on the life of a commercial suburban development, one of a successful chain based on mass-produced, relatively cheap housing (marketed in various styles for the same house) by a large industrial building contractor on the East Coast of the States. Levittown—these suburbs are called—has become a slogan as well as a commercial enterprise. It covers the range of attitudes which maintains that everyone has the right to their life style provided it is within their means and not actively anti-social; that no pundit has any right to tell them otherwise. And in particular not the planner and architect, whose real business is to provide a suitable packaging for the given life-style, including the ornamental patterns which the inhabitant may choose for himself.

Inevitably, too, the attitude acquired a high culture architect as its advocate. He is the triline person of Robert Venturi, Denise Scott-Brown and John Rauch. On his own, when Robert Venturi wrote *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), he replaced the Miesian paradox “Less is more” with the jibe “Less is a bore.” His appeal against the purism of the old Modern Movement, against the uniformities and the boredom of the Masters was to an architecture of variety, and (as the title implied) of Visual and volumetric complexity. Lutyens was quoted almost as often as Le Corbusier; and above all “Main Street,” which had been the cynosure of so many “Purist” critics (Venturi attacked Peter Blake in particular), messy, disorderly, commercialised Main Street was *almost* all right.

His next step was perhaps foreseeable. If Main Street is almost all right, then it can be made wholly so by putting it in inverted commas. So that is what Venturi did. “Ugly and Ordinary” is how he describes the building he wishes to design. Note the inverted commas, however. Not ugly and ordinary, but “Ugly and Ordinary.” These buildings are high culture, to be judged by the same criteria as “architects’ architecture,” just as the Rolling Stones put themselves between inverted commas when they made *Sympathy for the Devil* with Jean-Luc Godard.

The slogan of the ugly and the ordinary is not intended to be a critical judgment on their architecture, although it derives from a jury comment on a competition scheme of Venturi. Unfortunately, even in their second apologia, *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), they do not offer a higher transcendental idea than variety as a justification for their approach. No idea there of variety for . . . ? Variety is presented as good in itself, and the book sets as many posers as it answers.

Learning from Las Vegas was, you might say, the architectural tail of the comet which had Tom Wolfe as its flashing head. The analytical Jeremiaads which were the favoured U.S. kind of journalistic sociology, excellently purveyed by Vance Packard and William H. Whyte Jr., had its architectural equivalent in the post-Modern Movement style of Paul Rudolph. Naturally, he became the Venturis’ favourite target. But architecture is more expensive than clothes or even customised motor cars, and architectural fashions follow behind other fashion manifestations which are cheaper, more volatile and more sensitive to the change of social tone.

The cult of Levittown as a representative of American suburban life combines the self-sufficiency and individualism of the generation which grew up in the fifties and early sixties and is now saddled with the universal paraphernalia of wife, children, mortgage and job. Levittown makes a premium of individuality within the suburban milieu. The variety which Venturi exalted in *Complexity and Contradiction* is available in Levittown, as it is on the Las Vegas strip, although it is a quite different product from the arcane complexities of Lutyens’ plans.

But the counterposition of Las Vegas and of Levittown is interesting for another reason. The study done in *Learning from Las Vegas* deals *only* with the strip. Not a word is said of Las Vegas housing. Though if you look at the Venturis’ plans of the town on which the strip is marked for your admiration, you will see that it is virtually square: and yet in the book, the parts of the town beyond the façades of the strip do not appear, except at the edge of one or two aerial photographs. Their attention is entirely focused on the eccentric volumes of the casinos and hotels: but even more, on their signs.

The variety of the neon and other electric signs is, of course, what continues to fascinate so many journalists as well as the architects and designers who make Las Vegas part of their grand tour. And yet Tom Wolfe, who had popularised it, also had, all those many years ago, a warning for them: his first hero of the Las Vegas adventure, whom he called “Raymond” and who—“although not a typical Las Vegas tourist”—is a “good example of the impact Las Vegas had on the senses,” demonstrated that the impact, augmented by alternating doses of amphetamine and meprobamate (taken with alcohol), had induced a state of toxic schizophrenia.

The Venturis have now transferred their attention to the much more anodyne varieties of “customised” Levittown housing, which indicates a duality (unresolved and perhaps unresolvable) in approach. On the one hand is the public space of Las Vegas; on the other, the private one of the speculators’ suburb. Variety is the one transcendent value to which they pay any service. Yet in the first book there was a pervading assumption that variety had no meaning without a unity to which it is subsumed.

In the later studies there is less talk of unity. In the Las Vegas study there is a crucial attempt to classify all building into two major classes: ducks, that is buildings which are three-dimensional, volumetric envelopes for a given function (a drive-in in the shape of a vast duck was illustrated in a book by Peter Blake, *God’s Own Junkyard*, which he ridiculed); and “decorated sheds.” Venturi maintains that most modern “architects’

detached colonnades, the apparatus of details derived from the style of *le grand siècle*. In the meanwhile, his old opponent van de Velde had become converted to a similar creed, if not a similar manner: the belief, as he put it, that "the rational conception produced the silex or cut onyx tools and weapons . . . [it] is the inexhaustible, and ever-cool source of all that strain, which—through the ages—has born witness to the existence and constant vitality of a style which never ages, which is and shall be of every age."

It was this ageless modern style which van de Velde was introducing to the Paris public by way of comment and almost of protest at the time of the decorative art exhibition in Paris in 1925. That exhibition was as much the apogee of Art Deco as the 1902 Turin show was of Art Nouveau. And the whole of what came to be called the Modern Movement was a protest against its pervasive influence.

Now the Modern Movement eschewed ornament with the greatest acerbity. But it did not quite dispense with the more or less 'decorative' work of art. Mies van der Rohe, the harshest of the Modern Movement formalists, not only employed sculptures by Kolbe and Lehmbruck as the only photographable inhabitants of his building, but also modelled the figures in his drawings on Lehmbruck's sculptures. Le Corbusier employed work by Jacques Lipschitz and by Léger, and in his later work—*faute de mieux* sometimes, as he himself knew—his own paintings and even sculptures. Of one building of that period, the Spanish pavilion at the Paris exhibition of 1937, little is remembered. But the painting which was specially done for it, Picasso's *Guernica*, has become the best-known single twentieth-century image. It also contained the mysterious painting by Miró (*Rebellious Catalan peasant* or *The Reaper*) and the mercury fountain by Calder, which stood before it, is fairly well known. The building itself deserved better than to become the Sistine Chapel of the twentieth century. But it is entirely dwarfed by the works of art which it sheltered, and which were in part commissioned by the architects and sometimes—as was the case with the mercury fountain—even attributed to them. Such buildings represent the upper tip of what you might call "architects' architecture" for the thirties. The minor masters were, of course, much more thorough in their eschewing of the visual "irrelevance." The generalised belief that whatever was beautiful did not need to decorate because it was itself *décor* was extended. It was beautiful because it served its purpose most directly. And therefore that which served its purpose most directly could in itself turn into an object à *émouvoir*; the archetype of such an object was, of course, the technological product, which had radically altered the means at the artists' disposal in the twentieth century. It had been regarded as a slave until the middle of the nineteenth, when it became an enemy. The volume of technological objects grew, however, and the dialogue with machine production altered in tone. The enemy of the nineteenth century became the master, the *deus* (doubly you might say) *ex machina*. God-created (as against man-created) nature became muted, trivialised. The menace to twentieth-century urban man was no longer drought, storm and flood. The great dangers came from a different nature from the boom-crisis economy, from the methods of secret persuasion and of oppression, and from the omnipresent destructive forces we have devised: gases, bacteria, nerve-drugs

in drinking-water, the BOMB; or even from the increasing malfunctioning of our ingenuities: pollution, overcrowding, jamming, the rising flood of detritus.

Artists were not able to absorb the technological product into their work and had therefore to account for it by irony: naming, indicating and quoting. It started gently with collage and frottage, and was speeded up by R. Mutt's famous fountain choice—of which so much has already been said. This attempt to absorb the industrial and exalt it into culture was a much more powerful and hazardous piece of magic than we can now realise. But the magic wore off (with the war), and had to be renewed. The efforts ranged from solipsist inflatable defiance to the total immersion of Ulm; from the admiring imitations of Tinguely to the rebarbative *longueurs* of Warhol. The work of the artists stood apart from the rational normality of what was built and inhabited. Buildings increasingly became images of technical production, from which the world of the imagination was banished. But while the artist had less and less truck with society—and therefore with rationality—architects and designers strove earnestly to assimilate their procedure to that of the mechanic. In the heroic days of De Stijl, of the Russian Constructivists and, to some extent, in the later years of the Bauhaus, the very leap into the realm of quantity was exciting by the desperate nature of the exercise. Unfortunately, its consequence was anything but exhilarating. The pressing of all imaginative effort into the mould of pseudo-rationalism (of the particularly naïve positivist brand which went on in the late thirties and immediately after the war) has convinced the architect's most important clients, the world's various civil services and the boards of the large companies, that the answer to their problems in terms of what is now called "built form" (that is, architecture and building) will be a good social service provided that they are presented in tabulated form, and the quantities show some positive result, however doltily calculated. Hence the various products of "systems design" and its even dottier by-products (some of which, such as the work of the Ulm school) have even entered the murky penumbra of modern mythology.

Production is the result of our dialogue with nature: and the process of dialogue and production is what we call culture. Not an adequate definition perhaps, but it does something to tie up the diverse dictionary meanings of worship, tillage, selective breeding, training and education; and distinguishes it from the towmy, even bourgeois qualities of civilisation. The truth is that technology is "Son of Culture," as they say in the titles of horror films, but culture has not learnt to take account of its vast offspring, at any rate not on a conscious level. The sad, playful attempts in the forties and fifties of our century to produce a generally acceptable and machine-based (as well as machine-made) ornament is a warning of the futility of any short-cuts. We are witnessing a similar and equally futile exercise just now: the revival of what has been called the "Cinema Style"; the ornamental jollities of Odeon cinemas and Lyons Corner Houses in this country oping the majority of twenties and early thirties skyscrapers in the U.S. But the revival raises the problem, which derives from a sub-cultural phenomenon: the shift in the social pattern of taste to a dictatorship of the working-class, more specifically the Anglo-Saxon working-class, which

object became increasingly less important, as artists moved into that kingdom which has come to be known as Bohemia.

There were protests. The Pre-Raphaelites made stained glass and tapestries for William Morris. Puvis de Chavannes painted a fresco-cycle in the Paris Pantheon. But these were exceptions. The view of ornament as a conventional dressing was welded to a notion of style. A style was conceived from about the middle of the century onwards as a complete and integral "expression" of an epoch. It was, of course, most easily characterised by its surface features, its ornament.

Although various attempts had been made to devise a repertory of new ornament for the coming epoch, these were hampered by the kind of devaluation I have described. Some of the more adventurous innovators conceived an ideal point in time such as fifteenth-century England or Renaissance Italy to which architects might return, since it was a point of fusion; and took original development beyond it, first having achieved a satisfactory emulation of the chosen historical style.

The final attempt to create the total artistic vesture for the new age lasted about fifteen years in all. It had various names: Art Nouveau, Jugendstil, Stile Liberty and so on. At its height, one of the most influential architects of the time wrote: "there is no doubt that the point may and shall be reached when nothing visible will be created without receiving an *artistic baptism*."

It is a good description of tensions. But, of course, the aim was soon seen to be unattainable. And this gave rise to the final triumph of the Polytechnicians in a destructive attack on all ornament. It was summarised in the essay "Ornament and Crime" by the Austrian architect, Adolf Loos, which first appeared in 1908, the argument of which was insistently recapitulated through his work. To Loos pleasure in architecture is—ultimately—pleasure of the imagination; but it is the whole architectural object which must engage the imagination, having also satisfied reason, however. For Loos, the only ornament which is licit is that which expresses the maker's pleasure: of the upholsterer (mouldings and brass-work on furniture), of the nomadic carpet-weaver (patterns in oriental carpets), and the shoemaker (brogue shoes). It is an expression of the maker's pleasure, *not* a concession which indulges the user's eye. True pleasure in one's surroundings for the civilised man (defined by Loos as a man who listens to Beethoven's Ninth or to *Tristan*) is in the smooth texture of objects designed to perform their job with least fuss: the saddle, the smooth silver cigarette-case are examples obviously liked, as he liked the products of engineering and industry. They cater to the pleasures of reason and of the senses. Ornament—all art in fact—had its origin in the obscene, magical scrawl of the cave-dweller. The art of modern man is not concerned with the instinctive needs which were satisfied by such daubs, but is addressed to the higher faculties. In so far as architecture has to do with feeling and imagination, it is the whole mass of the building which does so, not any of its details.

Loos was not entirely consistent, but his attack was symptomatic, and was echoed by other writers. The sociologist Georg Simmel, for instance, writing in the same year as

Loos, in 1908, suggested that ornament, being related to the individuation of objects, may subsist in craft, but is out of place in industrial production, and must in any case be identified with the greatest possible "generalization" since style and elegance depend on the lack of individuality.

Within a matter of months of the publication of that fateful essay on Ornament and Crime, the man who Loos sometimes regarded as his arch-enemy was commissioned to design a theatre in Paris. This theatre was to be an epic building. Van de Velde recounts the story in circumstantial detail in his memoirs, though, he did not finish it of course: the original project was modified by Auguste Perret, who had been invited as a concrete expert, and ended by ousting van de Velde as van de Velde had ousted the previous architect, Roger Bouvard. The men who had maintained their part in the building, however, through the three architects' régimes were the painter Maurice Denis, a pupil of Cézanne, who had been commissioned from the outset of the whole enterprise to paint the auditorium ceiling (and acted as its impresario), and the sculptor, Antoine Bourdelle, who was to do the panels on the façade and the decorations of the foyer. The decorative continuity, which had been van de Velde's main preoccupation, was broken by Perret. For the flowing Art Nouveau lines, for the broken and coruscating surfaces, he substituted a smooth, severe, clipped, "French-classical" manner, much more to the taste of the committee which had originally commissioned the theatre than van de Velde's decorations. The divisions it marked between the articulations and the artists' works were also more to the taste of Bourdelle and Denis. And it marks a break in European taste from which there was no going back.

Perret, of course, had used ornament before, in the elaborate flower-design ceramic facing of his own flats in the rue Franklin, which was done in 1902–03; there, he already declared his independence of the current Art Nouveau linearities, his faith in a new material, reinforced concrete. He used it as a skeleton, inducing a modular severity which he chose to interpret in a "classical" fashion. But the abundant use of sculpture and painting in the Théâtre des Champs Élysées was not something he normally favoured; here it was part of the commission, and Bourdelle and Denis were there before him. He was to work with Denis again on the church of Our Lady at Raincy, done in 1922–23, where Denis was responsible for the coloured windows which fill the panels between the shorn and elongated classical colonettes. Although he went on designing churches based on the Raincy idea, this was the only other time he willingly collaborated with an artist of importance. "That which is beautiful does not need decoration, since it decorates," he used to say, according to an admirer, and so elided the problem. (Perret meant something more like "dignifies" or "gives decorum" than the English word "decorate.") And, of course, in the twenties a rather specious distinction grew up between the work of sculptors or painters, "works of art" used "decoratively" and the repetitive ornament produced by mere craftsmen. Perret did use both, and that in spite of his noble aphorism. He never wholly abjured the hammered and inlaid ornament of the shorn classicism I spoke of—even after the last war, in the reconstruction of Amiens and Le Havre, he did not renounce the

most urgent physical needs. The beauty of necessity satisfied reason alone; much as the beauty of association and sentiment could appeal only to the imagination. Here was a dichotomy which was to grow more divisive throughout the nineteenth century.

There were two kinds of architecture: that of the poets and that of the Polytechnicians. They often overlapped, and in any case the public came to consider them suitable for different kinds of building. The poets concentrated their attention on historical, and therefore nostalgic, ornament; the Polytechnicians maintained that if beauty must be specially catered for in building, it was through proportion. Not the old musical consonances of universal harmony, dear to Renaissance and Baroque theorists, but three different and separate kinds: that simply derived from the properties of materials, and that derived from economy which is the desire for the greatest possible simplicity of geometry (and justified their insistent use of the circle and square); and, as a mean, that old-fashioned kind of proportion which was associated with classical orders—and therefore with a repertory of decoration—and which was considered *useful* in that it would, by clothing structure with convention, spare the users of the building the shock of the unusual. This last proportion was thought to be of purely local application in Europe and the Mediterranean. Builders in Persia, China or India would have no call for this kind of packaging and could rely on materials and economy alone to furnish them with all they needed.

As the disciples of the Polytechnicians spread throughout Europe, to the Far East, to the American West and to Africa, they carried this doctrine with them. It is, of course, true that the nineteenth century was the great age of applied ornament. But as the century went on, the merely conventional nature of ornament was increasingly evident, and increasingly despised by any vital artist. Even those whose practice involved them in the most elaborate ornamental inventions theorised in terms which were not unsympathetic to the Polytechnicians. There should be no features about a building which are not necessary for convenience, one of them wrote; construction and propriety and all ornament should consist of the enrichment of the essential structure of a building. Such ideas now seem a strange justification for a full-blooded return to the imitation of English architecture in the late fifteenth century. But such theories were advanced as a justification of Gothic and classical, Hindu and Moorish and even Chinese. The appeal was ultimately to the polytechnic justification of ornament as a shock-absorbent package, particularly necessary in an age of structural innovation and functional specialising and diversifying. It was, however, self-destructive in the end, when the justification of ornament by convention would appear threadbare or even cynical. The process was expedited by another, and rather different development: throughout the nineteenth century, artists who had earlier been uprooted from their guilds and gathered into academies were schooled in the disciplines of taste. Art schools grew from the academies at the time when the Polytechnics were created. In the schools, artists shifted their attention from creating objects intended to edify, move or excite the spectator, and concentrated on an authentic expression of individual vision, in which the artist's relation to the spectator *through* the

Philosophical Text

JOSEPH RYKWERT, "ORNAMENT IS NO CRIME."

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There was a time when the painter and sculptor had a clear idea of their link with the architect: they were all three "visual" artists. The art of the painter and sculptor, however, was imitative of nature: that of the architect was only partially so. Architecture imitated, yes—but imitated culture. Monumental building reproduced the *necessary* forms of a primitive but rickety construction in permanent and noble materials. In so far as it came to imitating nature, it was the proportions of the human body which the architect abstracted in his measurements.

This view of the art of building, consecrated by theorists since Vitruvius (and he had drawn on much older sources) had an enormous vogue at the end of the eighteenth century. With a change of century came a change of attitude, shown by a double attack on the old view. Architecture, some said (with Goethe and the poets), did not imitate primitive construction: architecture imitated nature—the sacred wood, the cave-shrine. In this novel argument the old belief that architecture was based on the proportions of the human body (which had been the mainstay of the advocates of nature) was forgotten. But even this modified form of the natural argument was contradicted by a new and important breed, the Polytechnicians. Architecture, they maintained, did not imitate anything. Architecture was dressed-up construction. The Polytechnicians did not—at any rate at first—ever advocate that construction should appear shamelessly naked. Decency, propriety, convention—society in short—demanded that naked construction be covered, and that covering was ornament.

Ornament had once meant that which makes decent in supplying a missing essential. "Modesty," the French Academy dictionary defines, "is a great ornament of merit." That is not what the Polytechnicians meant. Ornament was not supplying that which was good in itself with its essential complement, but covering the unacceptable. The cover catered to trivial pleasure. Architecture was concerned primarily with necessity, and its true essential beauty depended on a direct and economic satisfaction of man's

This seems to be the secret of the Austrian economy. When a fire breaks out, how often does one hear someone say, "Thank God! Now there is work for people again." Just set a house on fire, set the Empire on fire, and everyone will be rolling in money! Just keep on making furniture we chop up for firewood after three years, mountings we have to melt down after four, because even at auction they will not fetch a tenth of the cost of labor and materials, and we will get richer and richer!

Not only the consumer bears the loss, it is above all the producer. Nowadays, putting decoration on objects which, thanks to progress, no longer need to be decorated, means a waste of labor and an abuse of material. If all objects would last as long in aesthetic terms as they last physically, the consumer would be able to pay a price for them that would allow the worker to earn more money and work shorter hours. For an object from which I am convinced I will get full use until it is worn out I am quite happy to pay four times the price of another I could buy. I am happy to pay forty crowns for my shoes, even though there are shoes for ten in another shop. But in those trades that languish under the yoke of the ornamental artist, no value is put on good or bad workmanship. Work suffers because no one is willing to pay for it at its true value.

And that is a good thing too, since these ornamented objects are bearable only when they are shoddily produced. I find it easier to accept a fire when I hear it is only worthless rubbish that is being destroyed. I can enjoy the trumpery in the *Kunstlerhaus* because I know it takes a few days to put it up and one day to tear it down. But throwing coins instead of stones, lighting a cigar with a bank note, crushing up and drinking a pearl, I find unaesthetic.

Only when these ornamented things have been made from the best material with the greatest care, and have taken up many man-hours of work, do they become truly unaesthetic. I have to admit I was the first to demand quality workmanship. Professor Hoffmann's interior for the Apollo Candle Factory shop in Vienna, done in pine with a colored stain fourteen years ago, is by no means as unbearable as his current designs. Or as unbearable as Hoffmann's designs will look in a further fourteen years' crime. My Café Museum, however, which opened at the same time as the shop, will be unbearable only when the carpentry work begins to fall apart.

A modern person, who regards ornament as a symptom of the artistic superfluity of previous ages and for that reason holds it sacred, will immediately recognize the unhealthy, the forced—painfully forced—nature of modern ornament. Ornament can no longer be produced by someone living on the cultural level of today. It is different for individuals and people who have not yet reached that level.

The ideal I preach is the aristocrat. What I mean by that is the person at the peak of humanity, who yet has a profound understanding of the problems and aspirations of those at the bottom. One who well understands the way the African works patterns into his cloth according to a certain rhythm, so the design appears only when the fabric is taken off the loom; likewise the Persian weaving his rug, the Slovak peasant woman making her lace, the old woman making marvelous needlework from silk and glass beads. The

aristocrat lets them carry on in their own accustomed way; he knows the time they spend on their work is sacred to them. The revolutionary would go and tell them it was all pointless, just as he would drag an old woman away from the wayside shrine, telling her there is no God. But the atheist among the aristocrats still raises his hat when he passes a church.

My shoes are covered with decoration formed by saw-tooth patterns and holes. Work done by the shoemaker, work he has not been paid for. Imagine I go to the shoemaker and say, "You charge thirty crowns for a pair of shoes. I will pay you forty-eight." It will raise the man to such a transport of delight he will thank me through his workmanship and the material used, making them of a quality that will far outweigh my extra payment. He is happy, and happiness is a rare commodity in his house. He has found someone who understands him, who respects his work, and does not doubt his honesty. He can already see the finished shoes in his mind's eye. He knows where the best leather is to be found at the moment, he knows which of his workers he will entrust with the task, and the shoes will have all the saw-tooth patterns and holes an elegant pair of shoes can take. And then I say, "But there is one condition. The shoes must be completely plain." I will drag him down from the heights of bliss to the depths of hell. He will have less work, and I have taken away all his pleasure in it.

The ideal I preach is the aristocrat. I can accept decoration on my own person if it brings pleasure to my fellow men. It brings pleasure to me, too. I can accept the African's ornament, the Persian's, the Slovak peasant woman's, my shoemaker's, for it provides the high point of their existence, which they have no other means of achieving. We have the art that has superseded ornament. After all the toil and tribulations of the day, we can go to hear Beethoven or *Tristan*. My shoemaker cannot. I must not take his religion away from him, for I have nothing to put in its place. But anyone who goes to the *Ninth* and then sits down to design a wallpaper pattern is either a fraud or a degenerate.

The disappearance of ornament has brought about an undreamed-of blossoming in the other arts. Beethoven's symphonies would never have been written by a man who had to dress in silk, velvet, and lace. Those who go around in velvet jackets today are not artists, but clowns or house painters. We have become more refined, more subtle. When men followed the herd they had to differentiate themselves through color, modern man uses his dress as a disguise. His sense of his own individuality is so immensely strong it can no longer be expressed in dress. Lack of ornamentation is a sign of intellectual strength. Modern man uses the ornaments of earlier or foreign cultures as he likes and as he sees fit. He concentrates his own inventive power on other things.

or a baby, or a cavalryman, covered over and over with decoration. A fifteenth-century man would not have understood me, but all modern people will. The supporters of ornament think my hunger for simplicity is some kind of mortification of the flesh. No, my dear Professor of Applied Arts, I am not mortifying the flesh at all. I find the gingerbread tastes better like that.

It is easy to reconcile ourselves to the great damage and depredations the revival of ornament had done to our aesthetic development, since no one and nothing, not even the power of the state, can hold up the evolution of mankind. It can only be slowed down. We can afford to wait. But in economic respects it is a crime, in that it leads to the waste of human labor, money, and materials. That is damage time cannot repair.

The speed of cultural development is hampered by the stragglers. I am living, say, in 1912, my neighbor around 1900, and that man over there in 1880. It is a misfortune for a state if the culture of its inhabitants stretches over too great a time span. The peasant who farms in the shadow of the Großglockner lives in the twelfth century. On the occasion of the festival procession to celebrate the Emperor's jubilee we shuddered to learn that here in Austria we still have tribes from the fourth century. Happy the land that does not have many cultural stragglers and laggards. Happy America! Here in Austria even in the cities there are people who are not modern, people still living in the eighteenth century, horrified at a picture with violet shadows because they have not yet learned to see the color violet; people to whom a pheasant tastes better if the cook has spent days preparing it, and to whom a cigarette case looks better if it is covered in renaissance ornament. And out in the country? Clothes and household goods all belong to earlier times. The peasant is not a Christian, he is still a heathen.

These people who lag behind are slowing down the cultural development of the nations and of humanity. As far as the economic aspect is concerned, if you have two people living next door to each other who have the same needs, the same aspirations, and the same income, but who belong to different cultural epochs, you will find the man of the twentieth century getting richer and richer, and the man of the eighteenth century poorer and poorer. I am assuming, of course, that in both cases their lifestyles reflect their attitudes. The man of the twentieth century needs much less capital to supply his needs, and can therefore make savings. The vegetables he likes are simply cooked in water and served with a knob of butter. They taste good to the other only if there are nuts and honey mixed in, and a cook has spent hours over them. Decorated plates cost more, while twentieth-century man likes his food on white crockery alone. The one saves money while the other throws it away. And it is the same with whole nations. Woe betide the people that lag behind in their cultural development. The English are getting richer, and we poorer . . .

The harm done by ornament to the ranks of the producers is even greater. Since ornament is no longer a natural product of our culture, but a symptom of backwardness or degeneracy, the craftsman producing the ornament is not fairly rewarded for his labor. The conditions among wood carvers and turners, the criminally low rates paid to

embroiderers and lace makers are well-known. An ornamental craftsman has to work for twenty hours to reach the pay a modern worker earns in eight. In general, decoration makes objects more expensive, but despite that it does happen that a decorated object, with materials costing the same and demonstrably taking three times as long to produce, is put on sale at half the price of a plain object. The result of omitting decoration is a reduction in working hours and an increase in wages. A Chinese wood carver works for sixteen hours, an American laborer for eight. If I pay as much for a plain box as for one with ornamentation, the difference in labor time belongs to the worker. And if there were no ornaments at all—a state that will perhaps come about after thousands of years—we would need to work for only four hours instead of eight, since at the moment half of our labor is accounted for by ornamentation.

Ornament means wasted labor and therefore wasted health. That was always the case. Today, however, it also means wasted material, and both mean wasted capital.

As there is no longer any organic connection between ornament and our culture, ornament is no longer an expression of our culture. The ornament being created now bears no relationship to us, nor to any human being, or to the system governing the world today. It has no potential for development. Where is Otto Eckmann's ornamentation now, or that of van der Velde? In the past the artist was a healthy, vigorous figure, always at the head of humanity. The modern ornamental artist, however, lags behind or is a pathological case. After three years even he himself disowns his own products. Cultured people find them intolerable straight away; others become aware of it only after a number of years. Where are Otto Eckmann's works today? Where will Olbrich's be in ten years' time? Modern ornament has no parents and no offspring, no past and no future. Uncultivated people, for whom the greatness of our age is a closed book, greet it rapturously and then disown it after a short time.

Humanity as a whole is healthy, only a few are sick. But these few tyrannize the worker, who is so healthy he is incapable of inventing ornaments. They compel him to execute the ornaments they have invented, in a wide variety of different materials. The changing fashion in ornament results in a premature devaluation of the product of the worker's labor; his time and the materials used are wasted capital. I have formulated the following principle: *The form of an object should last, that is, we should find it tolerable as long as the object itself lasts.* I will explain: A suit will change its style more often than a valuable fur. A woman's ball outfit, intended for one night alone, will change its style more quickly than a desk. Woe betides us, however, if we have to change a desk as quickly as a ball outfit because we can no longer stand the old style. Then we will have wasted the money we paid for the desk.

Ornamental artists and craftsmen are well aware of this, and in Austria they try to show this deficiency in a positive light. They say, "A consumer who has furnishings he cannot stand after ten years, and thus is forced to refurnish his apartment every ten years, is better than one who buys something only when the old one becomes worn out with use. Industry needs that. The rapid changes in fashion provide employment for millions."

nineteenth century, were not capable of doing something every negro tribesman could do, something every age and nation before us had done!

The objects mankind created in earlier millennia without ornament have been casually tossed aside and allowed to go to wrack and ruin. We do not possess a single workbench from the Carolingian period, but any piece of trash having even the slightest decoration was collected, cleaned up, and put in an ostentatious palace built specially to house it. And we made our way sadly around the showcases, ashamed of our impotence. Every epoch had its own style, and ours alone should be denied one! By style people meant ornamentation. But I said, "Do not weep. Do you not see the greatness of our age resides in our very inability to create new ornament? We have gone beyond ornament, we have achieved plain, undecorated simplicity. Behold, the time is at hand, fulfillment awaits us. Soon the streets of the cities will shine like white walls! Like Zion, the Holy City, Heaven's capital. Then fulfillment will be ours."

But there were hobgoblins who refused to accept it. They wanted mankind to continue to strain under the yoke of ornament. Mankind had reached the point where ornament was no longer a source of pleasure, where a tattooed face, instead of increasing people's aesthetic pleasure as it does for the Papuans, diminished pleasure. People had reached the point where they liked a plain cigarette case, while they would not buy a decorated one, even if the price was the same. They were happy with their clothes, and glad they did not have to go around dressed like fairground monkeys in red velvet trousers with gold braid. And I said, "See, the room where Goethe died is more splendid than all your renaissance pomp, and a plain piece of furniture is more beautiful than your museum pieces with all their inlay work and carving. Goethe's language is more beautiful than all the flowery language of the Nuremberg pastoral poets."

That displeased the hobgoblins, and the state, whose task it is to obstruct the people's cultural progress, decided to promote the development and revival of ornamentation. Woe to the state whose revolutions are made by its civil servants! Soon in the Vienna Museum of Applied Art there was a sideboard called "The Miraculous Draught of Fishes," soon there were cupboards with names like "The Bewitched Princess," referring to the decoration with which these unfortunate pieces were covered. The Austrian state takes its task so seriously it ensures the ancient footcloth does not disappear entirely from within the bounds of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. It forces every cultured twenty-year-old man to spend three years marching in footcloths instead of in knitted hosiery. After all, every state works on the assumption that a primitive population is easier to govern than a cultured one.

The epidemic of ornament enjoys state recognition and state subsidy, then. For my part, however, I see that as a retrograde step. I do not accept the objection that ornament is a source of increased pleasure in life for cultured people, the objection expressed in the exclamation, "But if the ornament is beautiful!" For me, and with me for all people of culture, ornament is not a source of increased pleasure in life. When I want to eat a piece of gingerbread, I choose a piece that is plain, not a piece-shaped like a heart,

Original Text

ADOLF LOOS, "ORNAMENT AND CRIME."

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In the womb the human embryo goes through all phases of development the animal kingdom has passed through. And when a human being is born, his sense impressions are like a new-born dog's. In childhood he goes through all changes corresponding to the stages in the development of humanity. At two he sees with the eyes of a Papuan, at four with those of a Germanic tribesman, at six of Socrates, at eight of Voltaire. At eight he becomes aware of violet, the color discovered by the eighteenth century; before that, violets were blue and the purple snail was red. Even today physicists can point to colors in the solar spectrum which have been given a name, but which it will be left to future generations to discern.

A child is amoral. A Papuan too, for us. The Papuan slaughters his enemies and devours them. He is not a criminal. But if a modern person slaughters someone and devours him, he is a criminal or a degenerate. The Papuan covers his skin with tattoos, his boat, his oars, in short everything he can lay his hands on. He is no criminal. The modern person who tattoos himself is either a criminal or a degenerate. There are prisons in which eighty percent of the inmates have tattoos. People with tattoos not in prison are either latent criminals or degenerate aristocrats.

The urge to decorate one's face and anything else within reach is the origin of the fine arts. It is the childish babble of painting. But all art is erotic.

A person of our times who gives way to the urge to daub the walls with erotic symbols is a criminal or a degenerate. What is natural in the Papuan or the child is a sign of degeneracy in a modern adult. I made the following discovery, which I passed on to the world: *the evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use*. I thought by doing so I would bring joy to the world: it has not thanked me for it. People were sad and downcast. What depressed them was the realization we could no longer create new ornament. What? We alone, the people of the