

Art Nouveau and German Werkbund at the Turn of the Century

Art Nouveau

Art Nouveau

-was influenced by Arts and Crafts movement (emphasis upon the hand-made craftsmanship, the elimination of alienated condition between the artist and its production, and the objective of reforming the state of the industrial arts)

Art Nouveau

-also based upon the development of wrought-iron technology particularly as interpreted by Viollet-le-Duc, Viollet-le-Duc's experimentation with iron as a new expressive architectural medium
-But, Art Nouveau was not a repetition of Viollet-le-Duc's rationalism based upon the program and the structural clarity and economy, but conjoined the structural rationalism with an idealist decorative approach

-"the main precepts Viollet-le-Duc bequeathed to the Art Nouveau movement were

1. the exposure of the armature of a building as a visually logical system
2. the spatial organization of its parts according to function rather than rules of symmetry and proportion
3. the importance of materials and their properties as generators of form
4. the concept of organic form

The Red House (1859)

Philip Webb (for William Morris)

Bexley Heath, England

Market building on iron supports
Eugene-Emmanuele Viollet-Le-Duc

Design of a large hall with iron skeletal arches
Eugene-Emmanuele Viollet-Le-Duc (dates)

Art Nouveau: between ornament and structure

-Characteristic motifs: a flowing plant-like form merging different parts of the object into one

-“the object became thought of as a single organic entity rather than an aggregation of separate parts”

-the distinction between ornament and structure becomes indistinguishable. Ornament is structural (a possible point of differentiation of Art nouveau from the Rococo organic shape)

-in this sense, Art nouveau does not negate structural rationality. To the contrary, some of the best works of Art Nouveau are based upon a deep understanding of the structural logic of the buildings

The Oval Salon
Hotel de Soubise
(1737-1740)

Germain Boffrand

Paris, France

Hall of Mirrors
Amalienburg Pavilion
(1734-1739)

Francois Cuvillies

near Munich, Germany

“Ornament completes form, of which it is the extension, and we recognize the meaning and justification of ornament in its function. This function consists in ‘structuring’ the form and not in adorning it. . . The relations between the ‘structural and dynamographic’ ornament and the form or surfaces must be so intimate that the ornament will seem to have determined the form” Henry van de Velde, as quoted in Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, p. 18

-“Ornament completes form”

-In other words, a form without an ornament leaves something to be desired in its performance

-Ornament is not a decoration, but an essential component without which form would not be able to perform optimally and without which form would be of an incomplete character.

-In this regard, decoration is an addition which does not affect at all the performance and character of the form.

Art Nouveau, its sense of reality

-the capturing of reality not in split, but in totality. Reality as the pristine power of life that does not know the division between structure and ornament, and essence and surface

Jardiniere, 1887 Eugene Rousseau

-an example in which we can have a glimpse into Art Nouveau's sense of reality.

-In this piece, we somehow see that there is a handle and the main body.

-However, it is not easy to tell the handle from the body, or vice-versa.

-It is not easy to tell where the body ends and the handle starts.

Art Nouveau

its social context

-socially, closely associated with the rise of a new industrial bourgeoisie

-”although it aspired to be a popular movement, its hand-crafted products were only affordable by a wealthy minority and it disintegrated with the decline of a certain set of bourgeois”

-the medium of its circulation: *The Studio*

Art Nouveau in Belgium

Henry van de Velde (1863-1957)

Victor Horta (1861-1947)

- This piece presents an
Integration of ornament and
structure
- The piece is defined by taut
curves and diagonals.
("structure in dynamic balance")
- “Different parts of the chair flow
into each other”

Chair (1896)

Henry Van de Velde

Havana Cigar Shop, 1899, Berlin
Henry Van de Velde

- In this piece, we see an “absorption of individual objects into a dominant plastic unity”**
- Disregard of practical functionality to a certain degree to realize the ideal of holistic, flowing imagery.**

Staircase Hall (1892-1893)

Hotel Tassel

Victor Horta

Brussels, Belgium

- This work is an example to show how ornamental qualities grow out of the given structural system, rather than being applied on the surface.**
- Put differently, this work shows how ornament can grow from the depth of the given structural system.**
- The shaft in the shape of a tree trunk turns into a tendril-like ornamentation.**
- This ornamentation further transforms gradually into the vegetal shapes of banisters, wall-paper, and floor mosaics**
- The structural system based on steel is imaginatively integrated with natural forms.**

-In this way, this also presents the organic analogy of growth and tension based upon the shapes and structures abstracted from nature

-To a certain degree at least, this work is both rational and romantic.

-Finally, this work is a synthesis of formal inspiration from the English Arts and Crafts movement and the structural emphasis of the French Rationalism

Art Nouveau

-the ideal of total design from the level of portable objects to the level of architecture

-“total design (Gesamkunstwerk)”

Gesamkunstwerk (Complete, unified or total work of art)

-term first used by Richard Wagner in *das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849)

-”to describe his concept of a work of art for the stage . . . All the individual arts would contribute under the direction of a single creative mind in order to express one overriding idea”

-harmonious whole: the fusion between the visual and aural arts, synaesthetic experience of the environment and the perceiver’s complete emotional involvement with the environment

(Does this idea mean the aesthetic or compositional consistency?)

-By the late 19th century, Wagner’s idea of total work of art expressing one dominant idea was taken up by some of the Art Nouveau artists.

-Art nouveau’s ideal of capturing reality in totality and restoring wholeness to the human environment from the level of the object to the level of architecture

-”compositional consistency”? Is it “total design”?

Henry van de Velde

Mackintosh

Josef Hoffman

Havana Cigar Shop, 1899, Berlin
Henry Van de Velde

German Werkbund (Deutscher Werkbund)

German Werkbund

- the formation of the German Empire in 1871, unification of many states into one
- With this political restructuring and with her competition with other European countries, there arose an issue about cultural identity.
- the issue of cultural identity especially in opposition to France (the Napoleonic wars) and the disappointment of the development of art and architecture during the 1890s and the turn of the century

-Kulture versus Zivilisation

-While culture meant the authentic mode of being in human history, civilization meant materialistic accumulation and wealth.

-In the preservation of the German identity in the midst of the deepening industrialization was to appreciate culture, revive it and confront the negative facets of industrialization with it.

-return to the rooted culture of the German *Volk* and, yet, coping with modernity and modernization to be able to compete with other European nations

The German Werkbund

- formed in Munich in 1907 as the chief agent of artistic and cultural reform
- partly consolidation of many versions of German Arts and crafts movements during the late 19th century
- production of high-quality goods for mass consumption
- based upon the awareness of the increasing gap between artists and producers, between the studio and the factory

The German Werkbund

“many people do not have money to hire artists, and, consequently, many products are going to be mass produced; for this great problem, the only solution is to infuse mass-production with meaning and spirit by artistic means.”

As quoted in Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, p. 58

The German Werkbund

- invited twelve architects and twelve companies to join.
- These companies were manufactures of domestic furniture and equipment
- integration between art and industry, art and capital value

“The time has come when Germany should cease to look on the artist as a man who . . . follows his inclination, and rather see him as one of the important powers for the ennobling of work and therefore for the ennobling of the entire life of the nation, and to make it victorious in the competition among peoples . . . There is in aesthetic power a higher economic value.”

As quoted in Alan Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, p. 59

- the artist was given a new historical mission
- the mission was to develop a new high-quality design to save Germany and to make Germany competitive among other peoples and countries of Europe.**

Heinrich Tessenow *Dalcroze Institute*, exterior (1911-1912)

Hellerau, Germany

-He was interested in Mass housing, repetition of architectural elements and how to combine mass-producing with the dignity of Classicism

- The Dalcroze Institute is a rectangular auditorium w/temple front-like façade**
- Orders are replaced by square piers to reflect Tessenow's interest in standardization and classical architecture**
- The steep pediment shows a fusion b/t German high pitched roof and Classical pediment**

-In the inside is a dance performance in a highly abstract setting.

-the architect also seeks to join abstraction and dignity of Classicism.

-Simple repetition creating complex patterns

-His architectural vision is based on an insight into the potential of rectangular, standardized machine production not as a cheap & economic mode of production, but that is based upon abstraction.

-This abstraction necessarily involves simplification of elements and elimination of figurative ornamental elements.

-While lacking in ornament, his building gets rewarded with dignity.

Peter Behrens (1868-1940)

-one of the twelve architects invited to join the Werkbund

-originally a participant of the German secessionist movement, but turned to the symbolic implications of geometry. -his directorship of the School of Arts and Crafts at Dusseldorf (1903-1907)

"The . . . School seeks mediation by going back to the fundamental principles of form, to take root in the artistically spontaneous, in the inner laws of perception, rather than in the mechanical aspect of work."

Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, p. 65

Peter Behrens *AEG Pavillion* (1908)

Berlin, Germany

- Octagonal pavilion**
- Centralized**
- Geometry**
- Romanesque solidity**

Peter Behrens *AEG Turbine Factory*, exterior (1908-1909)

Berlin, Germany

- Steel skeleton structure, yet symbolism w/the imagery of the classical architecture when it come to the treatment of the corner.**
- Corner buttresses with their rounded edges and horizontal striations create a feeling of mass**
- But, in reality, they are thin membranes supported on a frame**

- an outer colonnade of steel columns and the inner glazed surface.
- The steel supports, its repetitive articulation the orderly colonnade of the classical temple
- “The continuous side glazing is inclined to the same slope as the inner face of the steel supports,” as if the factory itself is anchoring itself down to the ground.

corner buttresses

- The corner creates the effect of solid mass and stability, yet in the reality it is finished with thin membranes and perform no structural role
- The combination b/t technical positivism and classical appearance
- Why? What kind of struggle was Behrens going through?

-Interior: expression of the structural logic to secure a spacious workplace
-no aesthetic intent
-Contrast b/t the literal use of steel and glass in the interior and the monumental expression of the exterior

Walter Gropius

- In comparison w/Behrens, Gropius was more concerned w/the social implications of machine production**
- realizing that the irretrievable separation of artistic conceptualization and the production process**
- the relationship b/t the craftsman and his own products would henceforth be that of consumer, not producer**
- Socialist concern such as the working condition of laborers (influence of Marxism)**

Fagus Factory (1908-1909)

Walter Gropius with Adolf Meyer

Alfeld an der Leine, Germany

- South-east façade of the administration wing**
- Polemical reversal of Behrens' Turbine Factory in which the glass surface slopes back and is recessed behind the solid structure**
- In contrast, the structure slopes back and the glass projects in front of it**

- Behrens' rhetorical use of repeating columns, giving them maximum corporeality to create the effect of classical monumentality,**
- but Gropius tries to make his necessarily massive brick piers disappear**
- the effect is to emphasize glass, its presence**

- The corner treatment is also different
- Behrens emphasizes the solidity of the corner by cladding covering the corner frame with stone-like membranes,
- but Gropius voids the corner w/real transparency (also round vs. sharp corners)
- Lack of symbolic charge in contrast with Behrens' factory
- honest expression of the interior function especially the adoption of large windows light, hygiene, spirit of the workers

Walter Gropius

“Work must be established in palaces that give the workman, now a slave to industrial labour, not only light, air, and hygiene, but also an indication of the great common idea that drives everything. Only then can the individual submit to the impersonal without losing the joy of working together for that common good previously unattainable by a single individual.”

As quoted in Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, p. 68