

- In the last session, we studied Art Nouveau.
- Adolf Loos, a controversial architect
- Adolf Loos' architectural position presents a complex relationship with Art Nouveau.
- On one hand, he appears to reject Art Nouveau's decorative tendency, Art Nouveau's aesthetic ideal of the total work of art.
- On the other hand, Adolf Loos seems to still accept the significance of ornament.
- Art Nouveau: ornament completes form
- Loos somehow seems to embrace this idea of ornament when it comes to the design of civic buildings.

Adolf Loos (1870-1933)

-the son of a stonemason

-studied at the Imperial State technical College in Vienna and the Dresden College of technology

-traveled to America to visit his uncle in Philadelphia

-admiration of American culture

-Louis Sullivan “Ornament in Architecture” (1892)

Advocated temporary abandonment of ornament until the architect was better able to manipulate unadorned forms

## Adolf Loos (1870-1933)

### Architectural position

- Loos reacted strongly against Art nouveau's and Jugendstil's attempt to replace Beaux-Arts eclecticism with what he saw as a superficial system of ornament
- rejection of *Gesamkunstwerk* (especially his article “Poor Little Richman”)
- rejection of the very concept of ‘art’ when applied to the design of objects for everyday use, and rejection of the artist as the giver of Form (Gestalt) to machine age. And thus attack on the Werkbund
- Building versus Architecture

The building is a useful object and therefore not architecture (art). The portion of building activity that is considered to be architecture includes only memorials, cenotaphs, and monuments

## Adolf Loos (1870-1933)

- the filling-up of the chasm bt. the objects of the everyday life and imaginative works of art is impossible. Just accept the split (different from Art nouveau)
- emphasized the anonymity of the everyday objects the best dresser is the one who is least conspicuous in the street)
- “the elimination of ornament from useful objects was the result of a cultural evolution leading to the abolition of waste and superfluity from human labor.”

Adolf Loos' furniture pieces reflect his rejection of superficial ornament and his endorsement of modesty, anonymity and simplicity.

chest of drawers (c. 1900)

Adolf Loos

(left) Papuan native, From *Max von Boehn, Bekleidungskunst und Mode*, 1918

(right) Tattooed Japanese man, From *Max von Boehn, Bekleidungskunst und Mode*, 1918

-Images Loos used in his writing to illustrate his point that uncultured, uncivilized, primitive man likes to have tattoos, a kind of ornament for Loos.

## "Ornament and crime" (1908)

-a scandalous article that caused a riot among applied artists in Munich

- "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"

## “Ornament and crime” (1908)

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- “When I want to eat a piece of gingerbread, I choose a piece that is plain, not a piece shaped like a heart, or a baby, or a cavalryman, covered over and over with decoration. . . 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.”

“Ornament and crime” (1908)

Ornament and economy

- “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.”

- “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.”

- the object without ornament lasts longer because it is not affected by fashion. In this sense, it is good for the consumer, and it should be more profitable for the producer because the producer can sell it at a higher price

- In this interior, Loos adopts Colored glass, marble floor, paneled ceiling, and mirrors.
- He also adopts bold colors like red and green.
- Rich materials and colors are used in place of applied ornamentation
- This theme is going to be seen throughout the rest of his architecture
- Loos also shows awareness of different types of configuration in human gathering Individualized space, yet within the awareness of the larger space

*Karntner Bar (1907)*  
Adolf Loos  
Vienna, Austria

-one of the most controversial buildings in Loos' architectural career.

*Looshaus* (1909-1911)  
Adolf Loos

Vienna, Austria

- It is a plain six-story block of residential accommodation above a large shop that sells fashionable gentlemen's outfits
- It faces one of the most civic plazas in Vienna (the Hofburg in the Michaelplatz)
- The intriguing part is the contrast between the plain character of the residential units above and the rather rich expression of the elevation below.
- The elevation on the ground and mezzanine levels adopts classical orders faced with marble.  
(Precisely speaking, they are Tuscan orders faced with marbles, for the entrance canopy and the entablature raised above the mezzanine level)

Adolf Loos  
Columns of the Looshaus

- As a matter of fact, these orders were made in a factory and brought in to the construction site and were inserted into the frame.
- Accordingly, the orders do not assume any structural role.
- This procedure of construction is rather shocking, in that Loos was vehemently attacked ornamentation.

- So, we are facing an interesting problem.
- We cannot help but ask what is he doing?
- What is going on in his mind?
- Is he a little bit out of mind?
- Is he not contradicting what he writes about ornament?

- If I take the direction of defending Loos that it is not inconsistent with what he writes to design a building this way, I think we need to remember Loos' differentiation between building and architecture.
- To architecture belonged monuments, as well as cenotaphs and memorials.
- Loos saw this building not simply as a bldg, but a monument, as it occupied a strategic location in the city and as it assumed the civic function of defining and enlivening the plaza.
- A civic building is not complete unless it is given a proper ornament
- “ornament complete form, its character and performance.”

Adolf Loos, A contemporary view of the Looshaus

- Example of the Judge
- The robe allows him or her to emerge in the court with a proper dignity, authority and trustworthiness.
- Likewise, this building appears with proper dignity and authority in the urban landscape of Vienna at the moment when it is given ornament of the classical period.

## Loos's position about ornament

- As we understand Loos' architecture this way, what Loos was interested in was not a complete, wholesale rejection of ornament.
- He was rather interested in decorum.
- A factory is a factory, and should be designed that way.
- However, a building which is civic either for its location or for its function or for both reasons, should be designed with elegance and dignity.
- Decorum is the principle in which a building appears in proportion to its civic significance.

-This position of Loos on ornament is further verified by his entry for a competition project, the Chicago Tribune Tower.

-His proposal is a skyscraper in the form of a giant Doric order. (with 22 floors of offices)

-This proposal was very radical in that it was not simply historical in its design, but the whole body of the building was rendered into a single giant Doric order.

*Chicago Tribune Competition*

(1922) Adolf Loos

*Chicago Tribune Competition* (1922), from left to right:  
after Giotto; after Renaissance prototypes; Adolf Loos; Walter Gropius;  
the winning entry by Raymond Hood and John Mead Howells

## Adolf Loos

“Adolf Loos and I, he in reality, have done nothing else than show that there is a difference between an urn and a chamberpot and that this difference is necessary because it guarantees the game of culture. The others, on the contrary, who mistake the urn for a chamberpot and those who mistake the chamberpot for an urn

Colquhoun, Modern Architecture, p. 30

-rejection of the Gesamkunstwerk as long as it emphasizes continuity among different elements, genres (but controversial based upon how we understand Gesamkunstwerk)

-art is art, industry is industry – cultural totality is the summation of these incompatibles, the nature of modernity for Loos

-Architecture: a building activity that embodies collective memory (the monument and the tomb)

-civic role and decorum of the public monument

-what is implicit here is the world perspective that acknowledges different roles with different shapes and dignity given to individual participants

Adolf Loos

Raumplan

- The free disposition of volumes within a simple building form to give more complex interior spaces than are possible with continuous horizontal floor divisions
- a succession of individualized and more intimate rooms within a larger room of simple volume
- the intimate rooms are negotiated through a series of flights of steps
- plan not as horizontal division of spaces, but as the division of volumes within a volume (each room with a different ceiling height)
- The contrast or reconciliation between internal spatial complexity and prismatic external forms
- the experience of the house – spatio-temporal unfolding. A carefully controlled movement, but without any a priori system of expectation

*Steiner House*, rear view (1910) Adolf Loos

Vienna, Austria

- This house is famous for its white, simple body, qualities of modern architecture which emerged almost a decade earlier than Le Crobusier's white architecture.
- Its flat-roofed, three-storey garden front, with an abstract cubic form, smooth white surfaces and horizontal windows prefigures the International Style by nearly a decade
- This house is also one of the first private houses to be built in reinforced concrete

Adolf Loos  
Study in the Steiner House, 1910

The Interior is very different from the idea of “total work of art”

*Scheu House* (1912)  
Adolf Loos  
Vienna, Austria

- an example of Raumplan
- The Stepped-profile provides roof terraces at each floor

*Scheu House*, interior view (1912)

Adolf Loos

Vienna, Austria

- Interior view shows a series of different spaces within a larger volume.
  - Each space is distinctively articulated.
  - The space around the fireplace is (rather low in its ceiling height. It) is compact, intimate and informal.
  - The space on the side is given a large window and a bigger volume to reflect its formality.
  - The wide opening b/t rooms
- Dialectic b/t more intimate space with low ceiling and bigger open space

- This kind of interior is quite different from the interior of the total work of art by Art Nouveau.
- If in art Nouveau's interior aestheticism dominates, in Loos' interior what is important is life, the praxis of life, the practice of dwelling.

“The walls belong to the architects . . . all mobile items are made by our craftsmen in the modern idiom (never by architects) – everyone may buy these for himself according to his own taste and inclination.”

Colquohun, Modern Architecture, p. 78

- the issue of unity
- the issue of authorship

*Rufer House*, diagrammatic elevations (1922)

Adolf Loos

- This house shows an elevation that is characteristic of the idea of Raumplan.
- This diagrammatic elevation shows randomly placed windows to reflect the different positions of the rooms and their volumes.
- Put differently, the interior organization, its complexity with split levels is reflected upon the random disposition of windows.

*Muller House* (1929-1930)  
Adolf Loos  
Prague, Czech Republic

- This is another split-level domestic interior (Raumplan)
- The architects creates dynamic, interlocking spaces across levels
- (Drawing shows the mechanics of Loos' concept of the Raumplan)
- Changes of level b/t individual rooms are negotiated by a complex arrangement of short flights of stairs.

*Muller House* (1929-1930)

Adolf Loos

Prague, Czech Republic

- In the interior, the wall b/t the 2 rooms is perforated, w/out destroying the volumetric definition of each room
- The perforated wall is clad with marble.
- Notice the masking and unmasking of the movement of the person while he or she is ascending the stairs.
- For the relationship between the staircase behind the perforated wall and the living room, there is as strong quality of theatricality.
- The perforated wall appears as if it were a proscenium curtain in a theatre.

Adolf Loos  
Moller House, 1928  
Street facade

-This house is  
also expressed in  
its exterior with  
bare concrete.

-In the interior, the house combines a series of individualized rooms with the unfolding of framed vistas.

-One enters the house and then passes through a series of rooms that are gradually ascending (section, next slide).

-Each threshold in this journey is defined by a wall that is pierced to form an opening.

-For this, there is an effect of layering and the enhancement of depth.

-The journey comes to an end at a room.

-This room is the Lady's chatting or tea room.

Adolf Loos  
Moller House, 1928  
Plans and sections

Adolf Loos  
Vienna, Austria

*Moller House* (1927-1928)

Adolf Loos

Moller House, 1928

View of the raised sitting room