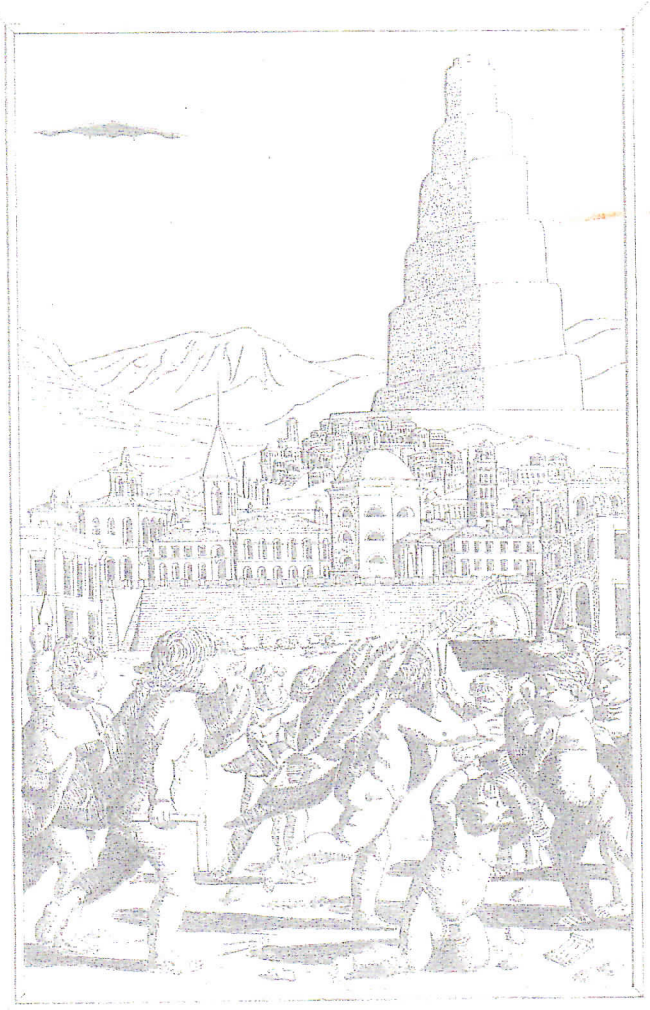
ARCHITECTS & MIMETIC RIVALRY

RENÉ GIRARD LÉON KRIER SAMIR YOUNÉS KENT BLOOMER



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The Sacrifice of Ornament in the Twentieth Century

Kent Bloomer

INTRODUCTION

An ideological rivalry between proponents and opponents of ornament in architecture coincided with the modernist critique of classicism in the early twentieth century. While the term "function" would have historically included cultural functions in the light of decorum, cosmos, social organization . . . , the emerging new canon limited function's conventional meaning in architecture to rational indices such as industrial standardization and plan efficiency.

Shortly after World War II, Western schools of design overwhelmingly adopted the modernist ideology and as a consequence ornament, no longer just a controversy, was eliminated from their core curriculums and its practice came to be regarded as deviant. Could ornament, personified, be considered a scapegoat in a larger, perhaps unconscious conflict that was simmering in the twentieth-century Academies of Art and Architecture?

THE OMISSION

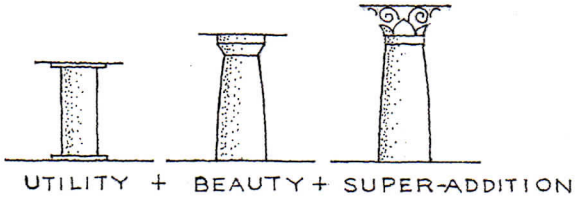
When I was a student of architecture, about a half-century ago, something happened during a lecture on what was referred to as "progressive architecture". I have never forgotten that moment which, over time, had such a great import on the conduct of my practice within the visual arts and architecture. I cannot recall the exact words, but it went something like this. The professor projected an image of the Carson Pirie Scott, originally the Schlesinger & Mayer, Department Store in Chicago, completed in 1906. Almost immediately he shifted the angle of projection to cut off the two-story

Carson Pirie Scott Building, Louis Sullivan, 1899, Chicago. National Register of Historic Places.

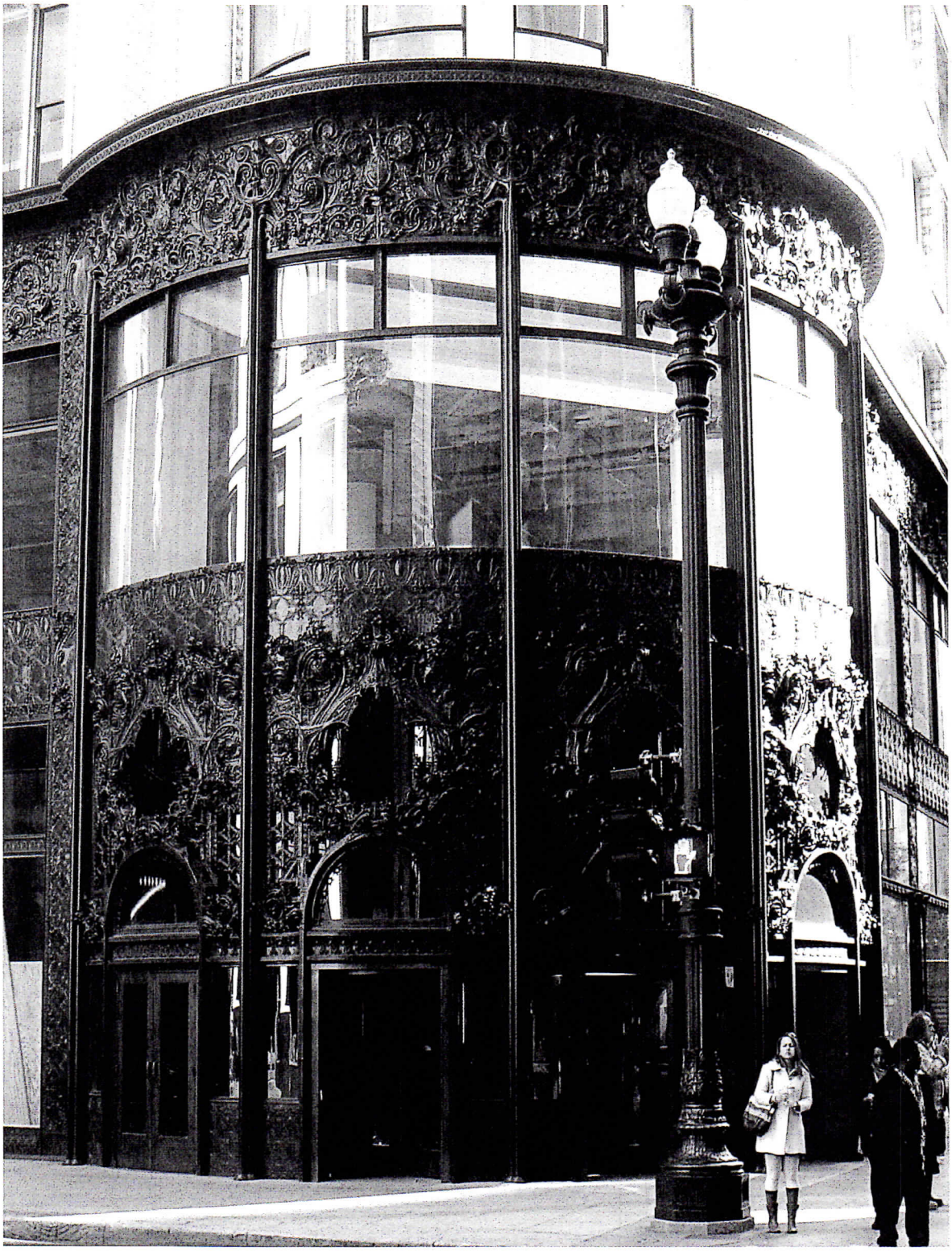
base declaring it was best not to look down there. From the third floor upward we were to observe how architecture had progressed and to take note of its elegant regularity and whiteness. My curiosity was aroused. Why was there such a move to shield something? A few of us rushed off to the library and discovered the extraordinary ornament of Louis Sullivan which had evidently been removed from view for being 'not progressive'.

The complete omission, indeed the cancellation, of the study of ornament from the core curriculum of education in architecture became official in the second half of the twentieth century. Its absence became an accepted article of modernism and the term "modernism" came to be associated with actual progress. Keep in mind that ornament had been a property of architecture for an untold thousand of years, basically forever. Not only was the study omitted, most discussion of ornament was clouded or avoided by a stridently pejorative attitude, as though a taboo existed. There was both a contempt and a fear of ornament. I began years ago to suspect there must be an explanation, perhaps a malaise, that lurked behind the academic discourse on ornament, or perhaps we should say the destruction of that discourse in schools of art and architecture. That suspicion was fuelled by the absence of a single credible (rational, aesthetic, or pragmatic) explanation for deploring the practice of such an enormous legacy. Let me mention some of the bizarre explanations uttered in the early years of the modern movement and nicely assembled by Mark Wigley in his work *White Walls and Designer Dresses*.

- Ornament was unclean, an uncleanliness that fouled clean design.
- In fact, it was a prostitution, a sexual lure and seduction. It was effeminate and deviant.



Utility-added-super-added. Drawing by Kent Bloomer.



Carson Pirie Scott Building, Entrance, Louis Sullivan, 1899, Chicago. Photo Beyond My Ken, Wikimedia Commons.

- Performing as inessential surplus, it masked the truth and thus it was a lie, a cover-up.
- And then there was Loos's intentional (or accidental) criminalization of ornament: "A CRIME"!

Samir Younés's mention of mimetic rivalry struck a chord. Reading René Girard's notions of rivalry, sacrifice, and victim seemed to provide clues, perhaps even the explanation for a procedure in which the practice of ornament was first vilified, then indicted and finally condemned. Could it be that the study and practice of ornament was indicted and then sacrificed? Was ornament personified made a scapegoat in the effort to resolve some sort of rivalry; but if so, between whom and for what? My thesis will assume that ornament was capable of addressing (perhaps even resolving) one of the most vexing problems of the twentieth century, a problem that the professional academies of art and architecture did not want to resolve.

The unwanted problem was how, in our art and architecture, can we connect (or re-combine) the disparate pieces of an increasingly fractured and atomized vision of the world and of ourselves, pieces that appear to have been visually united in the fabric of the great buildings to which the ideal of architecture owes its profound original identity.

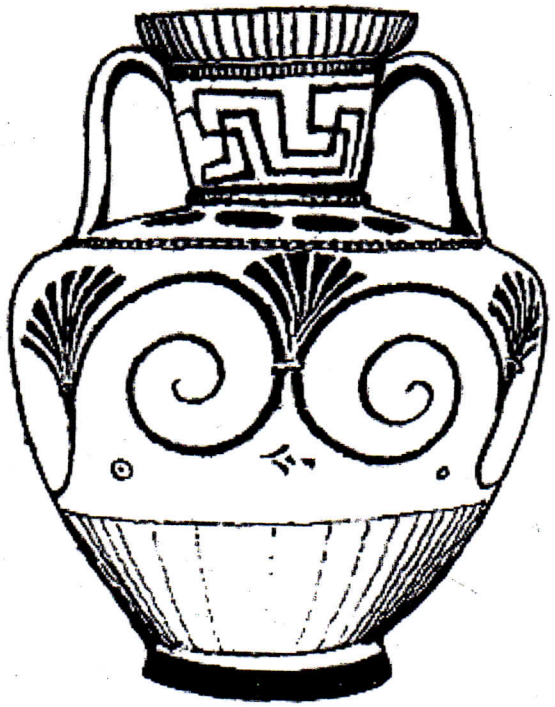
The exemplary and treasured models of seminal Western architecture such as the Greek Temple, the Roman Forum and Pantheon, the thirteenth-century Cathedral, the ideal Renaissance Villa, even the nineteenth and early twentieth-century Railroad Station and Library, sought to express, if only momentarily, a vision of an ordered world, a "peaceable kingdom" that revealed the 'cosmos' of life. Expressing and memorializing an ordered cosmos was the subject of civic architecture. And throughout my life it has been evident that ornament was a critical player, a *parergon*, in expressing this extraordinary and inspiring order.

But let me digress for a few paragraphs and say how I am employing the term "ornament".

Originally the Latin term "*ornamentum*" from the verb "*ornare*", to equip, meant being an accessory to a useful thing such as a bowl or a temple. The term "ornament" is a Western word, without an equivalent in ancient Greek or Chinese vocabularies, although the ancient Greek word closest to "ornament" is thought to be "cosmos". In his sixth book, *On Ornament*, Alberti declared "ornament may be defined as a form of auxiliary light and complement to beauty. From this it follows … that beauty is some inherent property to be found suffused all through the body of that which may be called beautiful; whereas ornament, rather than being inherent, has the character of something attached or additional,"[i] albeit an essential property of architecture. Ornament performs as cosmos suffusing beauty.

Leaping from the fifteenth to the mid-nineteenth century Christopher Dresser, one of England's

greatest theorists, makes a similar statement. "Ornament is that which, super-added to utility, renders the object more acceptable through bestowing upon it an amount of beauty which it would not otherwise possess."[ii] Here Dresser suggests that an amount of beauty is first added to utility (such as shaping a bowl into a beautiful form) before ornament (such as foliation) is super-added to that shape to complete the project. In respect to both statements, observe that the combination of ornament and the practical thing constitutes a heterogeneous system of at least three formal agendas, i.e., the inherent utilitarian agenda, the ordering of beauty, and the incorporation of adhering auxiliaries or super-additions.



Greek amphora. Drawing by Kent Bloomer.

(The first and most fundamental principle of ornament, therefore, is that figures of ornament are dependent upon an object (the thing) being ornamented in order to perform. Figures of ornament always act in combination with other elements of design and do not aspire to be autonomous or self-sufficient.

Understanding that the objects being ornamented ordinarily have typical original and economic forms of their own, i.e. immediately recognizable shapes such as bowls and buildings, we can discern that the fundamental figures of ornament (for example spirals and zigzags) are different and originate from the world-at-large outside their object. Ornament is not merely an elaboration or an augmentation of the object's form. Consider an acanthus or a spiral expressing the organic and expansive idea of growth as distinct from the static geometry of a vessel shaped by the need to contain liquid. That combination of expansion and containment exhibits a balance in which the adherent figures of ornament remain distinct from the inherent form of the object and thereby manifest the different movements through an intimate coincidence, i.e. a consonant union of visible differences in the material body of the vessel.

(The product is neither a purée nor a synthesis in the scientific sense of two compounds producing an entirely new compound. The embedding of ornament in an object contributes to a complex visual product capable of expressing several ideas

The Triumph of Galatea, 1512-14 (fresco), Raffaello Sanzio / Villa Farnesina, Rome, Italy / Giraudon / The Bridgeman Art Library.

simultaneously with each expression remaining visually intact.

SPECIALIZATION

Returning to the notion that ornament was sacrificed, we must ask again, why would such a discriminate union of apparent dissimilarities provoke hostility in the emerging twentieth-century ideology governing modern architecture? We know that during the Enlightenment specialization evolved from the progressive compartmentalizing of learned and professional disciplines. That specialization was intensified by the growth of scientific studies. In the eighteenth century different kinds of national schools were founded. "Engineering schools emerged as independent institutions around 1740 in France and 1754 in Germany, while medical academies asserted their independence from scientific societies throughout the eighteenth century. Like industry itself, this specialization created a complex division of purposeful labour." The refinement of classical composition in architecture "had benefited from an embodied and memorable legacy when it was centered around a sacred model, but with the Enlightenment a process of disembodiment evolved."[iii]

"While the Royal Academy of Architecture in France emphasized the scientific approach to architecture, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, founded shortly after the French Revolution, treated architecture as an art. It started with a concern for human experience, personal identity, and a carefully developed sense of compositional order and beauty."[iv]

These qualities defied (as they still do) the precise quantification found in science. A schism of sorts resulted from the two trajectories of engineering and art, both claiming to teach the fundamentals of architecture. The academies of fine art enjoyed a variety of visual 'thinkers' (as we might say today) including painters, sculptors, and architects. Although they could work separately and possessed different skills they also worked together under the muse of the fine arts, especially in the production of buildings. In Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture* it was taken for granted that painters, sculptors, and artisans were united to work within the project of architecture. The notion of architecture as the mother of the arts implied, in the late nineteenth century, that architecture held a maternal responsibility towards the other visual practices and their different ways of imagining. However, some cracks eventually appeared in the community of the fine arts that were to erupt in the twentieth century.

"Between 1750 and 1758, within the same academic climate that led to the founding of schools of art, engineering, and applied science, the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten wrote two volumes called *Aesthetika* in which he attempted to establish aesthetics as a scientific study. His was the first systematic effort to employ rational principles and scientific rules for the treatment of the beautiful, and to elevate the study of that which

depends on feelings and the sense of beauty to the status of a science with an independent body of knowledge. By recognizing that feelings dealt with sensitive knowing as compared to rational knowing, Baumgarten proposed that sensing the beautiful was *real* knowledge."[v] His conclusions, however, had the effect of taking with his left hand what he had given with his right, for he emphasized the difference between the non-rational knowledge derived from the senses and the pure knowledge derived rationally from logic, and he continued to declare that while sensible knowledge was also real knowledge, it was nevertheless inferior to the clear and distinct knowledge developed logically by the mind. Thus the science of aesthetics was dubbed by its founder to be a science of lower knowledge; art, it was implied, was inferior to science.

As the subjects of art were set apart from the scientific mainstream of higher knowledge, they were increasingly toughing it out within the halls of higher education to gain their share of respect. Their advocates declared that individual works of art were complete and definite carriers of truth in their own way. Indeed, a great work of art should be granted self-sufficiency and recognized as a work of genius that could stand alone like an elegant equation in physics.

In his preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, published in 1835, the French critic and writer, Théophile Gautier, articulated the earliest expression of "Art for Art's Sake" as he attacked and degraded the bourgeois valuation of usefulness and useful work. "There is nothing truly beautiful but that which can never be of any use whatsoever."[vi] His ideas were further developed in his poem *Art*, ..., published in 1857, in which he opposed the idea of art as imitation, claiming that the artist's creative imagination or 'inner vision' should be the source of inspiration.

The critic, writer, and Oxford don, Walter Pater, became the leading proponent of the Art for Art's Sake movement in England with the publication of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* in 1873. Because music was immaterial and independent of subject matter, unlike art in which matter (subject), and form (execution), could be distinguished, Pater made his famous proclamation: *"All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music"* (his italics). He further claimed, "this form, this mode of handling, should become an end in itself ... this is what all art constantly strives after."[vii] "Art, then, is always striving to be independent of mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material ... [a] perfect identification of matter and form."[viii]

Works of art, Pater insisted, should express one's personal impressions rather than objective standards. The best works "bear the impress of a personal quality, a profound expressiveness ... some subtler sense of originality – the seal on a man's work of what is most inward and peculiar in

Seagram Building, Mies van der Rohe, 1958, New York. Photo Dan De Luca, Creative Commons.

his moods and manner of apprehension: it is what we call *expression*, carried to its highest intensity of degree" [ix] (his italics). [Here we have a *call for self-expression*.] In his concluding chapter, which is considered a manifesto of the Art for Art's Sake movement in England, he emphasized the priority of experience. "Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end.... To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life." Experience had priority over theory. Life, he argued, was a continuum of fleeting impressions, every moment passing even as it was being reflected upon, hence "we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. What we have to do is to be forever testing new opinions and courting new impressions, [here we have a *call for innovation*] never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy."[x] [Here we have *aversion to past ideas*]. "For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake."[xi] [Here we have a *reverence for the temporary and the hyper-present*.] His theories profoundly influenced Oscar Wilde and promoted decadent behaviour.

The nineteenth-century Art for Art's Sake movement propelled the arts to cut themselves off from the

past and, like the sciences, to search instead for novelty, uniqueness, and the cutting edge. Tradition and imitation were becoming associated with contamination, with dangers to the process of creativity and newness. Ridding art of those contaminates would clarify the search for pure uncorrupted properties and would also distinguish the essential (the special) nature of each discipline belonging to the family of the arts. For example, what are the special properties belonging to painting, to sculpture, to architecture? Obviously if such properties could be found, then specific territories could be deeded to each member. The fine arts were being prepared for compartmentalization and compartmentalization would fuel territorial rivalry.

All of this was coming together at the beginning of the twentieth century as notions of modernism and progress in design were being formulated. The fine artist's production of autonomous objects had established a foothold in the great museums designed to give their works individual locations and to sanctify their ability to stand alone. The construction of particular buildings already provided with individual locations guaranteed a sense of autonomy to a work of architecture.

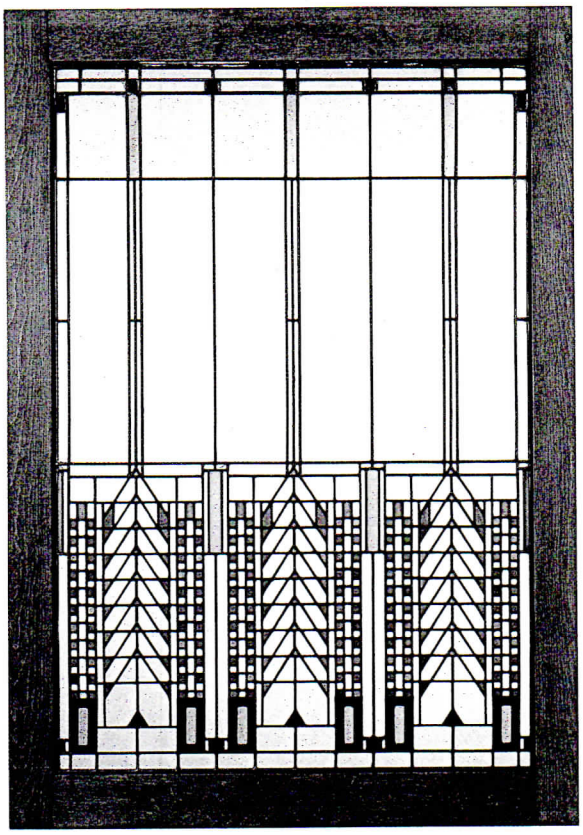
Around 1900 the decorative arts, which include ornament, were expelled from the museums of fine art because they depended upon and were implicated with objects such as bowls, walls, and buildings. They were not autonomous; therefore they were not sufficiently 'fine' to be elegant carriers of truth all by themselves. The distinction between fine art and applied art stiffened. The fine arts had gained a tentative foothold of equality with the sciences, at least enough so they could now claim to also express 'creative' genius. And, while scientists were already bestowed with a superior status, the fine arts would proceed to make their own claim to superiority by demoting those among them who depended upon utilitarian forms for their production such as decorators and ornamenters.

Number 26A: Black and White, 1948 (enamel on canvas), Jackson Pollock/ Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France / Giraudon / The Bridgeman Art Library.

THE RIVALRY

Already in a schism with engineering, architecture was now at odds with disciplines in the fine arts for appearing to have a leg in both fine art and the practical sciences. It more desperately needed a *pure* academic identity of its own. In 1962 the art historian Kenneth Clark wrote a provocative article titled *The Blot and the Diagram*. The Seagram Building had been completed in 1957 and Jackson Pollock's canvases typified the contemporary abstract expressionist movement in painting.

Clark observed both a similarity and dissimilarity between the works of Mies and Pollock. Both the architect and the painter engaged in a type of fine-grained compositional repetition or isotropy, a homogeneity that filled the boundaries of their compositions. The profound difference between them was that "the architecture went off in one direction with the diagram and painting went in another with the blot."[xii] He also surmised they would go well together, a Pollock in a Miesian space, with the intuitively painted blots standing for "the embers of fire, or clouds, or mud", while the diagram stood for "a rational statement in a visible form involving measurements and done with an ulterior motive."[xiii] Here we have a painter and an architect imagining the world from different viewpoints with the proposition that their work, combined together, would provide a more complete or more fulfilled world-picture.



Window, 1904 (leaded glass), Frank Lloyd Wright/ Private Collection / The Bridgeman Art Library.

Yet the physical manifestation of the diagram by itself, bereft of the blot, was the essence the architects were seeking; no other modern art was better constituted to express the pure and rational ordering of concrete space than architecture. That was a clue to their province, their unique purpose, and their elusive 'self'. They could do without the "embers". Architects could manage without ornament.

In the second half of the twentieth century the academic establishment as a whole was shifting across the board from the liberal arts to professional studies. The federal government in

the 1970s demanded that architectural schools provide "criterion for the criterion": for holding an exclusive claim on the use of the word "architect". Architects not only craved a stronger academic identity, they were now required to produce a professional one or they could not be recognized as a legal entity with all the attendant 'rights'. They had to specify more precisely what they were, and indirectly what they were not.

And so they did. They chose to officially purge, that is to sacrifice, those elements and traditions in architecture that might compromise or contaminate their identity as a distinct practice performing rational tasks. They emphasized that architecture had its own very special function apart from the visual arts. To perform like architects rather than artists meant, in a curious academically political way, that they had to appear to remove the seemingly unnecessary art-like features in architecture, a project that they further implemented by founding their own autonomous schools and divorcing the schools of fine art altogether, even as they continued to mimic the produce and behaviour of art and artists e.g. 'cubist' composition in the sixties and seventies and 'wiggles' towards the end of the century and today.

Because architecture was an integral part of the fine arts academy in the nineteenth century it was also implicated with the "Art for Art's Sake" movement. Its legacy, its 'self', included much of the histrionics generated within that academy's rhetoric even as it moved to segregate itself from being identified with art itself. A territorial rivalry between the 'self' of architecture and the 'self' of art was underway.

The schism with schools of engineering had become resolved by the mid-twentieth century. The licensed architect held the authority to do his own engineering as long as he carried the liability. In large projects he could sub-contract an engineer without losing his claim to be the architect and principal designer. However, the fickle affair between modern architecture and modern art became more complicated. Architecture, while mimicking certain ways of thinking associated with art, had to confirm its commitment to an identity predicated on the rational concretized diagram. The modernist Academies of Architecture had to critique those elements and traditions still lingering within the classical legacy of architecture that might, for being art-like, compromise or contaminate the logical purity of their new project. In an uncanny way the modern movement in the architecture of the late twentieth century proceeded to replay the polemics of the nineteenth-century movement of Art for Art's Sake, but this time it became an unstated 'Architecture for Architecture's Sake', although now the protagonist was claiming to be the useful and rational figure. Paradoxically architecture moved to reject the idea 'art' from its fabric even as it adopted art's nineteenth-century rhetoric. We can almost quote Walter Pater. The new architecture proceeded to strive for self-expression, i.e. the 'self' of the architect and the institutional 'self' of the new

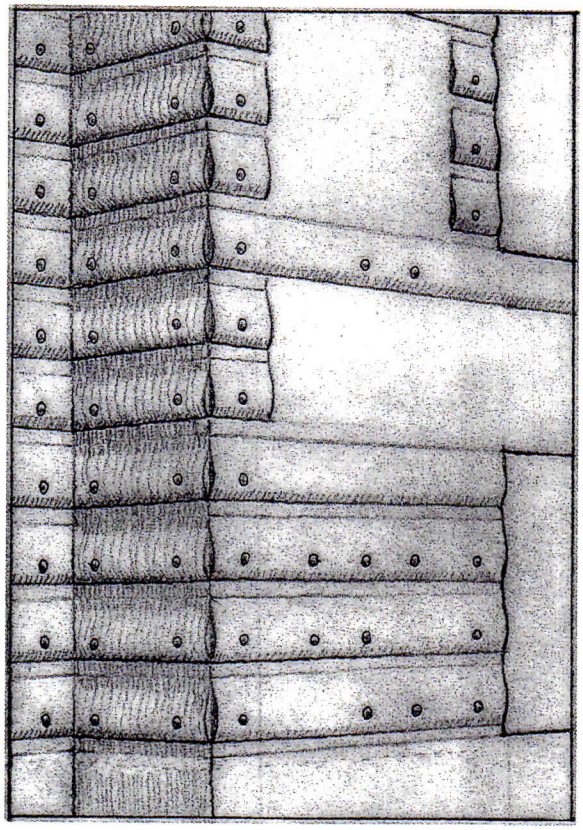
practice, to be emphatically innovative, to reject the work of the past, and to operate in the hyper-present, i.e. the contemporary. The new architect was to be a creator, and creative geniuses were not supposed to imitate.

THE PROCEDURE

The circumstances leading to the sacrifice of ornament were convoluted. Ornament, despite its brilliant surge in early twentieth century modern architecture (Sullivan, Wright, Horta), is not only art-like, albeit not 'fine-art'-like, it respects and reiterates an ancient tradition with arguably the longest history among all the visual arts.

Yet ornament's art-likeness and tradition evidently did not provide the most damning rationale to justify its sacrifice. In the formative years of modernism ornament was theoretically allowed a qualified membership in the modern project, so long as its figuration was composed exclusively from structural details, materials and spatial metrics *innate* to the tectonic ordering of space. Thus the graining of wood and stone (e.g. Looshaus or Mies's Tugendhat house) or arrays of bolts (Otto Wagner's post office) would be regarded as acceptable details of ornament.

Ornament, in other words, would be acceptable on aesthetic grounds as long as it did not function as ornament but instead appeared only as an elaboration of details and materials innate to the essential object of utility. Ornament's deviation



Bolts; Post Office Savings Bank, Otto Wagner.
Drawing by Kent Bloomer.

from this new regulation, its indictable crime, would reside in ornament's function to import, indeed to harbour figures that are extrinsic to the essential diagram and its tectonic minutiae, i.e. non-essential to pure architecture as defined by the revolutionary modernist ideology. Such imports are, simply stated, impure, unclean, and deviant when distributed into the fabric of modern architecture, and therefore should be forbidden.

Purity and its emblems of whiteness and cleanliness (sanitation) is an extreme condition because it conveys an abstract claim or wish for unblemished completeness. In design such purity is somewhat

anorexic. An ideology grounded in the pure expression of building would consider the incorporation of an auxiliary like ornament, with the figures ornament negotiates to admit such as spirals with fantastic leafage, a contamination.

This impurity proposes a heterogeneity, a non-uniform condition containing multiple types of ingredients. Combining these different types may produce metamorphoses, e.g. figuration intrinsic to the utility morphing with figures which are obviously super-added and auxiliary. Such metamorphoses with their implication of one system undergoing transformation abound both in nature and in the history of architecture, and this intimate coincidence has often been brilliantly incorporated in the composition of buildings.

As an example, ornament's imported figuration, particularly in Western ornament, has usually appeared on thresholds and joints. Those liminal spaces, where the purely *utilitarian and diagrammatic imperatives of design are naturally exhausted*, welcome other species and activities. Ornament flourishes in the ambivalence between inside and outside and in the joints of structural transition (as in a column cap or zones of intersection between wall and ceiling). It occupies boundaries as it pries open their edges and thus "defines space and even creates such space that may be necessary to it".[xiv]

From the standpoint of perception such ambivalent figuration performing in the liminal space of utilitarian objects neither destroys the expression of the "diagram" nor negates an articulation of its fundamental tectonics. It is obvious that great ornament has flourished when (or after) the basic structure of its object is rendered explicit. Sullivan's architecture for example, like the architecture of the Parthenon and Chartres Cathedral, is muscular. The equipoise between ornament and construction even helps us see how buildings are organized and built as one agenda fuels the other.

Ornament, by its own rules, is a mediator and a collector of meaning from the world-at-large. It is a provider of intricacy. It can, at the same time, only be a detail. It performs as a messenger. It is an agent of design that thrives amongst differences and a visual power of resolution without a concrete formation until it is called into action. What, then, was accomplished by its removal from the discipline of architecture?

The accomplishment was to cement the credo of a revolutionary ideology proclaiming to be more modern and more progressive than an academic body resisting the formulaic destruction of traditional content. "Tradition" here refers to tracing a discipline (e.g. architecture, sculpture, geometry, ornament) back to its original elements, forms and functions, i.e. the ongoing historic process of the millennia.[xv] The replacement of ornament with a barren white wall was intended to produce a revolutionary emblem. The "whiteness", the anorexia, manifested the brave new project.

Fantastic Leafage by Kent Bloomer after William Morris.

Both revolutionary and traditional ideologies believed they could generate an architecture capable of contributing to the development of a better world. The modernists wanted to start anew while their adversaries desired to conserve attributes of the best accomplishments. Yet both unconsciously imitated the great works from history for "there would be no human mind, no education, no transmission of culture without mimesis".[xvi] In fact, both claimed to be carrying forward the essentials of great architecture. Even today, after the sacrifice of ornament, the alleged "modern", along with the traditional programme of study, still requires a certain amount of analysis of great seminal works. The modernists know they are beholden to them and unconsciously desire to be like them. How then did the modernist academy manage to implement the disappearance of ornament which was so visually prominent in the fabric of the masterworks?

The steps taken in the early twentieth century are remarkably similar to those considered by Girard in his discussion of the hostility generated by mimetic rivalry. Already the impulse 'to vanquish' was implicit in the battle of styles as well as an urge for a new style (or no style at all) capable of accommodating the enormous changes in building technology and building type brought on by industrialization and mass production.

In the early twentieth century the profusion and the confusion of tongues, particularly visible in the nineteenth-century panoply of ornament, provided an easy target for satirical and derogatory comments such as "deviant", "dishonest", and "non-essential". Thus the first step leading to ornament's condemnation was vilification and mockery. Girard points out that people and their progeny who exhibit extremes and are out of the ordinary, such as hunchbacks or kings, are the most vulnerable

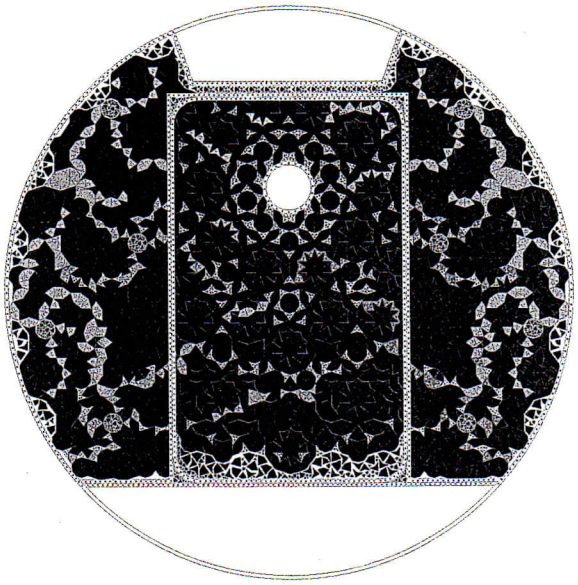
and are selected for victimization in moments of conflict. Figures of ornament, viewed in this light, can readily be regarded as 'out-of-order' simply by recognizing their visual imperative which is to incorporate figuration originating *outside the order* of the basic utilitarian object. Ornament is meant to be a carrier and importer of super-additive and auxiliary content. That is its active cause. These adherent figures can be humorous; they are often metamorphoses and occasionally appear to be monsters, albeit usually playful monsters. Indeed Sullivan himself is occasionally referred to as the tattoo artist inferred in Adolf Loos's 1908 essay, "Ornament and Crime".[xvii]

Still, how did the spat exercised in the early twentieth-century schoolyard successfully lead to the actual elimination of ornament in the schoolroom considering that both the revolutionists and their rivals admired and were beholden to the great ornamented works from the millennium?

Triggered by catastrophic circumstances and the conflict climaxed by World War I, the subsequent need to rebuild provided a crisis of a magnitude that demanded explanation and resolution. The desire for a better world was intense and thus a second step in the playing out of a mimetic rivalry began to develop. To stake their claim, the modernists needed a victim, a scapegoat in order to inaugurate their official existence. They were starting anew and were searching for a rite-of-entry. Their scapegoat had to be exceptional, a person or a personified condition of enormous stature by virtue of its pervasive presence, authority and historicity. Such a 'person' could be sacrificed and exhibited as a troublemaker. The act was to be witnessed by all parties. Indeed the ritual sacrifice of ornament would rid architecture of an obvious outsider capable of soiling and perverting their vision of a new and better world. By cleaning the slate a revolutionary order could be created and proclaimed by a ritual of expulsion, a death in the light of purification. It would appear to be an act of sanitation and would perform as a curative.

BAD MIMESIS

The execution took time and was assisted by a procedure that Girard refers to as "bad mimesis" as compared to acquisitive mimesis. Acquisitive mimesis means a strong desire to possess the object being imitated which, in examining a masterwork of architecture, must address the object in whole cloth. The "whole cloth" would necessarily include the ornament. By contrast, bad mimesis only allows a distorted act of mimesis. The modernists could enforce their special interest by altering the object of mimesis in a manner that might serve their programme of sanitation. They would obfuscate or denigrate the visible elements of ornament as unclean articles not to be seen or to be imitated even as they were conscious of their existence in the esteemed model. Such partial imitation, which re-writes history, is bad mimesis in which the 'self' of ornament becomes a 'non-person'.



Symmetries. Drawing by Moises Berrun.

Controlled obfuscation is an instrument of "bad mimesis". We must ask, therefore, what elements of architecture are conventionally selected for analysis in our strictly modernist architecture schools today when great works are examined? What types of measurements are used in contemporary analysis, and how are the findings critically appraised and employed in the generation of ongoing projects in the studio or practice? Analysis is a difficult and specialized enterprise requiring a procedure of selecting agendas. For example one might emphasize the ordering of basic light, or the means of circulation, or the physics of construction. In visual analysis certain elements are often seen in isolation, apart from those excluded from the exercise. Thus it is within the arena of controlled, i.e. indexed selection that a particular ideology is able to intervene and diminish the import of its rivals. Valued attention is given to one thing at the expense of another. Such intervention can substitute a credo for a reality, particularly for those who have not visited the actual works of architecture and for students who cannot easily escape a professor's procedure of limiting what is to be seen, such as tilting the image of the Carson Pirie Scott façade. Tilting the image was an overt act of misrepresentation masquerading as an act of scholarly observation. It was a lie.

Tilting the image produced "bad mimesis" by concealing Sullivan's actual ornament upon the building and by idolizing the reticulated white wall that was being foregrounded "with concepts such as originality and novelty constantly advocated [throughout the twentieth century] in an incantatory and empty fashion."[xviii] Sullivan's ornament is both a convenient and necessary element to be dismissed because it is so extraordinary, visible and astounding.

By ignoring and suppressing a quantitatively minor element, the impression can be given that "good mimesis" is at work. Yet, in the procedure of controlled analysis the visual state of affairs (the gestalt) can be entirely changed. The *pro forma* omission of ornament from an analytic format, if the omission is buried behind foregrounded images or within diagrams claiming to manifest progress, order, and innovation, lends the modernist project an amount of credibility by making it appear as though a precedent is being rigorously considered. Thus, while the mimetic mechanism may be unconsciously at

work, the apparent mimetic content is falsified in the course of study. But is this process of "bad mimesis" a successful resolution to the mimetic rivalry between the proponents for and against ornament?

Viewing the architecture of the late-twentieth century (and much of today) we must grant that the strategy of eliminating opposing ornament has been overwhelmingly successful. But there are some intriguing fault lines in the means of achieving success that deserve attention in the light of mimetic rivalry.

In 1969, Alan Colquhoun, in his essay "Typology and Design Method", noted that the mid-twentieth-century modernists had been rigorously copying themselves [self-mimesis] for decades as they still largely do today.[xix] It is noteworthy that contemporary gyrations and formal wiggles have not really altered the canon barring ornament. Self-mimesis is indeed mimesis and it carries with it the rewards and perils of the mimetic process. Mimesis, whether it is of 'self' or 'other', fulfills both the necessity and the desire to imitate. "Mimetic desire is a form of aristocratic distinction, a kind of luxury...before modern times only the aristocrats could afford it."[xx] But can a routine mechanism of self-mimesis, if it perpetuates an emblem predicated upon newness such as the white wall barren of ornament, manage to survive today? Can its incantation and its repeated claim of being innovative and revolutionary withstand the monotony of reissuing the same emblems of inauguration for nearly a century? Colquhoun revealed that the claim of novelty persisted while the implicit scorn of history (their own history) was overlooked. Meanwhile, the world around has changed rapidly and violently from the one in which modernism was born. Colquhoun was writing about modernist self-mimesis forty years ago. In the shadow of recent conflicts, will the activity of mimetic rivalry begin again, and if so will it include the proponents and opponents of ornament? Has ornament's status become so diminished that its importance will be overlooked once again?

CONCLUSION

Innovation is a valued response to conflicts and economic changes in the cultural, and natural environment. One of the transformative functions of ornament has always been to mediate with and to find the space for articulating forces, values and ideas that originate outside the tectonics of its objects, i.e. to locate us in the world-at-large. Modernism and its sanitized emblems of pure unsoiled space was, once-upon-a-time, stimulating, refreshing and appearing to resolve conflict. Can the authority of its negativism, however, renew itself after so many decades of its "bad" and self mimesis?

Perhaps the more important question might be, would the modernist project of architecture remain stable and culturally viable after a revelation that bad mimesis of architectural masterpieces from the millennium has been practised for decades in the

Academy? And what would be the reaction to finding that bad mimesis was the consequence of a scapegoat mechanism? Girard declares that the scapegoat mechanism, particularly the identity of the scapegoat as a scapegoat rather than a justly condemned offender, occurs unconsciously. (He prefers the term "*méconnaissance*.")[xxi] His theory allows that the omission of ornament is unlikely to be perceived as a cultural problem without an overt exposure of the scapegoat mechanism. However, such ignorance does not mean that the 'scapegoaters' themselves did not know what they were doing.

What then would be the consequence should the community, or perhaps more urgently the Academy, come to consciously recognize that the sacrifice of ornament was actually the "murder of an innocent victim"? What would be the reaction to the realization that the inclusion of ornament is, and could have continued to be, as modern as any single agenda valued by the modernists? "This would destroy the spiritual comfort, the righteous anger [the modernist believer] derives from the belief that [ornament] is guilty".[xxii]

i. Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. Joseph Rykwert, Neil Leach, Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p.156.

ii. Christopher Dresser, *The Art of Decorative Design* (Watkins Glen, NY: American Life Foundation, 1977), p.1. (Originally published by Day and Son: London, 1862.)

iii. Kent C. Bloomer and Charles W. Moore, *Body, Memory, and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p.17

iv. *Ibid.*, p.18

v. *Ibid.*, p.17

vi. Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (New York: Modern Library, nd), p. xxv

vii. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (New York: Modern Library, nd), p. 111

viii. *Ibid.*, p. 114

ix. *Ibid.*, p. 59

x. *Ibid.*, p. 197

xi. *Ibid.*, p.199

xii. Kenneth Clark, "The Blot and the Diagram", *Art News*, December 1962): p. 31.

xiii. *Ibid.*, p.30.

xiv. Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), p.65.

xv. *Edmund Husserl's 'Origin of Geometry': an Introduction* by Jacques Derrida (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1989): p.158.

xvi. René Girard, *Evolution and Conversion, Dialogues on the Origins of Culture* (London, Continuum, 2007), p.76.

xvii. Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime, Selected Essays* (Riverside, Calif., Ariadne, 1998).

xviii. Girard, *op. cit.*, p.77

xix. Alan Colquhoun, *Collected Essays in Architectural Criticism* (London, Black Dog, 2009

xx. Girard, *op. cit.*, p.75

xxi. *Ibid.*, p.87

xxii. *Ibid.*, p.22