The Order of Ornament, the Structure of Style

Theoretical Foundations of Modern Art and Architecture

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For my parents,

Merriam and Richard Zanuzoski

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I

Introduction

The traditional idea of modernism as an essentially Western European phenomenon that erupted from a collective rejection of academic standards and independent searches for new and innovative means of expression held sway for nearly a hundred years.[1] At the core of conventional accounts of the Modern Movement is the concept that historical and representational values were abandoned in exchange for increasingly subjective, symbolic, and truthful forms of expression. In the same narratives, the Art Nouveau/*Jungendstil,* Symbolist, and craft revivalist movements are generally positioned as transitional bridges between early-nineteenth-century academic practice and the "high modernism" of the twentieth century. Here authors have identified connecting formal and conceptual traits among works produced by a broad range of artistic personalities, enabling them to arrange large bodies of art and architecture into concise and manageable trends.

Studies of modern art, architecture, and theory produced in the past several years have challenged such convenient but unsupportable oversimplifications and, increasingly, have dismantled many of the assumptions, chronologies, and hierarchies firmly affixed to standard narratives of art's presumed progressive march through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With greater frequency they have exposed the diversity, complexity, and pan-European nature of modern art, architecture, and design, particularly in the earliest phases of their development.[2] This examination of early modern art, design, and theory embarks on a similar pursuit of reassessing many basic assumptions entrenched in studies of modernism. At its center is an evaluation of the underlying organization of nineteenth-century stylistic theories, wherein new notions regarding the function and meaning of artistic forms arose from extensive investigations of materials from previously unknown or neglected periods and cultures. Contrary to the concept that modern art and design developed from an ahistorical search for purer form and more personal modes of expression, this study proposes that it was precisely within a more discriminating study of tradition and a keener observation of style (eventually, from lesser-known cultures) that theo-

rists devised new concepts regarding how art functions and obtains meaning. In addition, this examination observes the role that late-nineteenth-century theories (and the sources on which they were based) played in the emergence of modern form in central European art, architecture, and design. Objects derived from early or *archaic* stages of art- and shelter-making in the ancient Near East and throughout the European West embodied for theorists (and, subsequently, for artists and architects) a particular vitality and purity lost in the periods traditionally upheld as the inculpable standards of Western art and architecture, in particular, the classical Greek, the Italian High Renaissance, and the Baroque.[3]

This project identifies *archaisms* as one of the key factors that contributed to the advent of modern expression in the visual and applied arts produced outside the most prominent western European centers of modernism. Also, it seeks to unravel central European artists' incentives for adopting ancient motifs and shaping them into meaningful compositions. More important, it also recognizes that archaisms took a very specific form – that of ornament – in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century art, and explores the significance of the alliance between archaisms and ornament as it supported both the rational and the decorative intentions of artists and architects.[4] In the ornamental compositions associated with ancient art and vernacular objects, central European architects and artists discovered rational designs for articulating form and structure, residual evidence of artistic and architectural development, and visually complex patterns that suggested new perceptual possibilities for both the constructed facade and the painted surface. Hence, the concept of "archaizing" as it is examined here extends beyond mere replication of early art forms to the ongoing search for structural sources, functional origins, and the psychological roots of the fine and applied arts.

The revelation that ornamental form could operate with such force and variety was not the unique discovery of early modern painters, builders, and designers, however. Rather, these perceptions of ornamental function may be traced back to the numerous inquiries into the basis and meaning of style that began in England in the 1840s. Ornament represented the central topic in studies of stylistic development emerging just before the second half of the nineteenth century, since it was perceived as the most conventionalized manifestation of style in architecture and the applied arts. More specifically, applied sculptural decoration, ornamental patterns, and highly stylized motifs produced in remote locations and in primal stages of object-making presented the distinct advantage of revealing stylistic roots in their purest and most legible state.

I have identified four general functions assigned to ornament in the many theses on style that emerged in England and on the European continent in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The nomenclature established to distinguish between the various emphases in ornamental applications, though derived primarily from the vocabularies of the nineteenth-century theorists themselves, is also a matter of analytic convenience. In the most literal sense, ornament could

operate as a reflective *emblem,* capable of communicating a complete concept to its audience by means of its representational nature. The fact that it resembled a natural element or an image allowed the emblem to convey meaning independent of its context. The term *emblem* was used in the nineteenth century to refer specifically to representational and iconographic decoration.[5] By contrast, ornament functioning as a *sign* distills from natural forms a vocabulary of conventionalized motifs, the arbitrary character of which permits the ornamental composition to define and order an object by transferring the rational laws of nature (proportion, balance, unity) to the man-made article. Ornamental signs, unlike emblems, are entirely dependent on their context for meaning. Ornament can also operate as *symbol,* in which case it reflects neither the appearance nor the structure of nature, but rather designates an underlying concept. The spectator senses a comprehensive order in a building or object when he understands the function of its parts. The symbols supplied by ornament designate the functional operation of the part by recalling artistically how the work of architecture or art was made. As a result, symbols mediate between the whole of a building or object and its parts.

The designations *sign* and *symbol* were used interchangeably in the nineteenth century, as they often are in the present, but for the theorists examined here they had specific connotations. While *sign* referred to a conventional mark that stood for a more complex notion, in ornamental theory it shared its formal structure with the natural forms it replaced. Symbols in nineteenth-century stylistic theories, on the other hand, often referred to a concept rather than a physical object and, therefore, whether representational or abstract, were not directly reflective of the idea they presented. Last, ornament acting as a perceptual *signifier* can convey the essential characteristics of a constructed object by appealing directly to the senses of the viewer. In this role, ornament stimulates optical and tactile sensations by recalling past sensory events and, consequently, helps the viewer understand formal elements and their relationships. Though the "signifier" represents only one half of the "sign" in Saussurean linguistics, its specific use in this study is intended to designate ornament that could trigger in the viewer a perceptual memory of past sensory activity.

These four definitions of ornamental function are evaluated primarily through the writings of four prominent theorists: John Ruskin (1819–1900), Owen Jones (1809–74), Gottfried Semper (1803–79), and Alois Riegl (1858–1905). Each author produced a corpus of theoretical work that exemplifies one of the four functions of ornament assessed here and identified in turn-of-the-century art and architecture. The work of all four authors emerged from a growing body of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literature on the visual arts determined to expand notions of art beyond archaeological questions of fact (patronage, purpose, techniques, and contemporary conditions and ideals). These increasingly critical approaches treated art as autonomous matter, exhibiting an independent vitality and displaying legible marks that allowed

authoritative judgments of works from the past. As such, each author examined here drew from a vast compendium of emerging ideas regarding artistic function, internal logic, and audience response.[6] What was unique about the theories of Jones, Semper, and Riegl in particular, however – what draws them together as the focus of this study – was the way in which they intentionally departed from the traditional emphasis on Western material in order to build their treatises. Whereas Heinrich Wölfflin, Konrad Fiedler, Adolf Hildebrand, Adolf Göller, and August Schmarsow, among others, focused on the western European tradition so as to absorb styles from antiquity, the Renaissance, and the Baroque into the artistic present, Jones, Semper, and Riegl put all art on an equal footing as the subject for discussion.

Of central interest is how each of the four writers structured the material of his inquiry and consequently arrived at a certain perception of ornamental and stylistic meaning. By investigating the underlying organization (as opposed to the content alone) of stylistic doctrines, we discover how Ruskin, Jones, Semper, and Riegl obtained their investigative approaches from other areas of inquiry. Past and current ideas of how the natural world was ordered and how language acquired meaning dominated the methods by which each of these theorists defined style and understood ornament. The task at hand, however, is not one of showing how one area of knowledge came to mirror another, but rather to demonstrate that the stable structures defining particular modes of scientific and linguistic inquiry suggested (both intentionally or unintentionally) the means by which to assess the development and implications of style. Presented here is a model of theoretical assessment that attempts to broaden the reader's understanding of the conceptual context in which nineteenth-century perceptions of style were framed. This examination of the configuration of stylistic doctrines allows a more comprehensive understanding of the positions of the four key writers at its center and, consequently, clarifies the intentions, diversity, and meaning of the unique formal and compositional factors that define the nascent stages of modern art, architecture, and design in central Europe.

The earliest of these writings, appearing in mid-nineteenth-century England, reflects a lingering dependency on the medieval perception of universal order; the arrangement and meaning of ornament, like that of nature and language, was derived from biblical concepts. As a result, John Ruskin conceived ornament as a reflective *emblem,* representing a divinely ordered natural world and the fundamental tenets of Christian doctrine.

Ruskin's meditations on style present an illuminating contrast to studies of ornament that aligned their methodologies with those of modern science in the hope of claiming equal validity for their results. By 1860, natural science, biblical criticism, and comparative philology all contributed to the realization that the Bible was not historically true. Geology proved the earth was much older than biblical accounts implied, Darwinism challenged biblical explanations of Crea-

tion, and a comparison of Hebrew with other languages revealed that it was not, as many evangelists had thought, "a unique tongue created by God as the medium of his truth."[7] What constituted a natural science also underwent transformations in the course of the nineteenth century and, as a consequence, art and architectural theorists were forced to reevaluate the defining characteristics of style. For Ruskin's compatriot Owen Jones, ornament should display the rigorous order that dictated surface structure in nature and, accordingly, permitted a system of botanical classification. The process of assessing nature systematically employed in botany had its linguistic parallel in the field of General Grammar, which in a similar manner sought universal rules for organizing linguistic signs or words.

German architect Gottfried Semper, working in London at the same time as Ruskin and Jones, took heed of the scientific approaches to applied ornament incorporated into current design curricula and exemplified in Jones's writing. Semper, however, modeled his inquiries into proper ornamental construction on the more recent "comparative" methods of investigating natural phenomena (comparative anatomy and biology) and language (comparative philology). Consequently, understanding underlying functions and the creative roots from which they emerged became the focus of Semper's architectural theory, the operations of which he proposed should be symbolized by ornament.

As a result of Semper's work, interpretive vision replaced the activity of reading surface information in order to understand structure. Herein lay the essential meaning of ornament in the writings of Austrian art historian Alois Riegl. Rather than presenting the reflective emblems of a divinely inspired message, the structural signs of nature, or the functional symbols of the creative process, Riegl defined the perceptual signifiers comprising ornamental compositions. In doing so, he identified varying psychological dispositions that dictate stylistic schemas and proposed transitional stages in how various cultural groups throughout history have ordered and perceived visual information. Riegl was particularly interested in the transformation of "universal laws" that determined ornamental compositions; as a consequence, his method of investigation is closely aligned with that of his contemporaries in the field of language study, the "Neogrammarians."[8] As Riegl gradually became more interested in the psychological antecedents that dictated stylistic transformations, his final contribution to the history of aesthetic development anticipated the core principles of structural linguistics.

In *Mots et les choses* (1966; translated as *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*), French thinker Michel Foucault defined parallel strategies by which humankind ordered information across natural, linguistic, and economic science at four stages in history, beginning in the Middle Ages and extending into the modern era.[9] The parallels between Foucault's models of ordering knowledge and my assessment of stylistic theories, however, are more frequently a result of convergence than of construction. From numerous points

of intersection, I have attempted to locate each theoretical model in terms of its contents, boundaries, and relationships to other systems of inquiry. If the approach presented here appears "structuralist" in nature, it is perhaps due to the inherent truth in a statement Foucault made in a later text, *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* that "humans retrace their own ideas and their own knowledge."[10] At the same time I am mindful of the potential artifice in trying to create associations across disciplines. The goal is not to demonstrate within each model some type of a "face of the period" with a united aim, but rather to open up our reading and understanding of these key theoretical positions by creating vertical systems of associations, thereby creating new unities that erase the limits and limitations of traditional constructions.

Although in a few instances the theorists themselves openly acknowledged parallels between their work and models of natural and linguistic science, it would be false to claim that the strategies they employed were ever intended to imitate directly other modes of inquiry. I would argue instead that the authors of note responded either intentionally or coincidentally to the fixed structures offered by natural science and linguistic studies, and from them assumed particular schemes for prioritizing perceptual and conceptual activities. More important, then, what this project shares with other investigations of varying conceptual dispositions are questions of how and why certain structures of ordering information are selected over others.[11] Toward the final goal of comprehending the roots of early modern art, architecture, and design principles more completely, I would propose that the *construction* of theoretical accounts as much as their *content* figured prominently in the development of modern ideas and modes of perception that emerged in central Europe.

It would be imprudent to claim (as well as impossible to prove) that all, or even a large share, of the artistic and architectural works produced in central Europe and exhibiting archaizing traits reflect the direct influence of the English, German, or Austrian stylistic theories examined here. Proof of such a postulate is further hindered by the dearth of theoretical and interpretive writings left by the artists and architects themselves.[12] At best, we can examine some of the cultural conditions that initiated interest in ancient artistic sources and made artists and architects receptive to reevaluating the formation and meaning of visual material. To do this, we turn to one particular cultural center that stood at the crossroads, absorbing stylistic theory from the West and disseminating artistic and architectural principles throughout central Europe. The cultural milieu of turn-of-the-century Vienna, examined in Chapter 1, provided an intellectual atmosphere that prompted searches for more honest and meaningful forms of expression. Simultaneously, the stylistic philosophies analyzed in Chapters 2 and 3 had the critical effect of supplying conceptual and perceptual understanding to the less familiar visual material from the archaic past with which artists and architects teaching, training, and working in Vienna had been recently confronted.[13] In Chapter 4, I will show that theoretical inquiries sug-

gested to practitioners how principles derived from archaic vocabularies of ornamental forms could intensify iconography, define structural parts, elucidate underlying function, and condition new perceptual experiences within their own work. Seen through the lens of late-nineteenth-century stylistic analyses, archaic arts not only presented a refreshingly honest alternative to academic procedures but acted analogously to scientific pursuits that also attempted to define and interpret the world.

Invoking the art of the past in order to intensify iconographic and compositional meaning in the visual arts dates as far back as the appearance of archaisms in classical Greek sculpture and painting.[14] More recently, scholars have revealed that even the most "progressive" architects of the nineteenth century continued to work out new structural and functional concepts within a vocabulary of historical devices and iconographic symbols.[15] What was unique to the late-nineteenth-century perception of ancient art was the fervent desire to tap some potent authenticity that seemed lacking in academic arts of the present and absent in the canonical Western styles on which they were based. At the same time, the work of the past represented the raw material to be absorbed and transformed by its adaptation to new works. Theorists writing in the latter half of the nineteenth century carefully analyzed the idiosyncrasies of historical detail and, consequently, revealed art as a particular response to a certain attitude toward the world. Once discovered and systematically understood, the *emblem, sign, symbol,* or *perceptual signifier* could be applied to new material, constructional, and pictorial problems. As such, the phenomenon of "archaizing" prepared the way for modern movements of the twentieth century. In assuming this critical position, its appearance, paradoxically, defines an archaic stage of twentieth-century modernism.

Cultural Context: Vienna at the Crossroads

It is necessary to appreciate the cultural environment in which some of the earliest signs of archaizing appeared in order fully to comprehend its wide appeal. In Vienna during the last decade of the nineteenth century, the phenomenon surfaced in virtually every artistic medium and, without exception, functioned as some form of ornament. Situated at the center of the Habsburg Empire, Vienna holds a significant place in this study. As the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it was strategically positioned between artistic trends and aesthetic theories taking root in England and western Europe *and* was establishing innovative and distinct arts institutions of its own. Here, many of the most prominent central European artists, architects, and designers trained and worked. To understand how interest in primal forms functioned and contributed to a modern artistic perception, we should first consider the process through which Vienna, although somewhat reluctantly and sluggishly, engaged modern culture as a whole.

While modernity arose elsewhere in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, the Viennese bourgeois population of the 1860s and 1870s embarked upon an urban redevelopment of the city's urban core by constructing an array of public and private buildings along a newly created grand boulevard in a mélange of revivalist styles.[16] Though recently scholars have identified progressive proto-modernist ideas at work beneath the stylistic facades of many of these monuments, the Ringstrasse's opulent and eclectic display of historical styles also furnished important symbols of aristocratic values that linked the liberal bourgeoisie to the ruling class of the Habsburg dynasty, the history of which in Austria extended back to the thirteenth century.[17]

The principal institutions defining the appearance and intentions of the fine arts were dominated by the same motives and personalities responsible for projecting the monumental historicism in the architectural projects of the period. August Siccards von Siccardsburg (1813–68) and Eduard van der Nüll (1812–68), both leading revivalist architects of the day and codesigners of the Ring's Hofoper (Imperial Opera House), also acted as *Meisters* at the Akademie der bildenden Künste (Academy of Fine Arts). Siccards was also founder and president of the principal exhibition society serving the fine arts, the Künstlerhausgenossenschaft (Genossenschaft bildender Künstler Wiens), or Vienna Society of Fine Artists, founded in 1861.[18] Vienna's foremost artist of the era, Hans Makart (1840–84), perhaps the most acclaimed history painter in central Europe in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, produced the painted equivalent to the historical and theatrical spectacle of Ringstrasse architecture. In a style distilled from Titian, Veronese, and Rubens, Makart presented the Viennese public with grand moments from history and captured the events of the day with a singular bravura that made them seem equally viable to his contemporary audience.[19]

It is a well-worn precept in most studies of Vienna's modern period that architectural and artistic displays such as these represented the gross vulgarity of bourgeois taste to which the next generation of artists and architects so vehemently objected. But the development of a modern stylistic idiom in art and architecture did not occur (as is often implied by the same authors) as some sudden leap from the decorative eclecticism ensconced in the Ringstrasse to the reductionism espoused by and exhibited in the works of Viennese architect Adolf Loos.[20] Rather, it evolved gradually over an approximately thirty-year period during which the possibilities and limits of artistic meaning were tested and cultivated within a vocabulary of historical devices and iconographic programs. In acknowledging this arrested course of development, one can gradually untangle the web of contradictions associated with the emergence of modern concepts in Vienna and throughout central Europe.

One of the most notable institutions to oppose the traditional standards upheld by the Akademie der bildenden Künste and the Künstlerhausgenossenschaft was the Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie (Austrian

Museum for Art and Industry). The museum, founded in 1864, and its affiliated Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Applied Arts), established in 1868, were modeled after London's Normal Training School of Design, attached to the innovative South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum).[21] By instruction and example, founders of the Österreichisches Museum had hoped (as had their British counterparts) to promote and support a happy union of the decorative arts and industry.[22]

Initially under the direction of Rudolf von Eitelberger (1819–85), the museum furnished Kunstgewerbeschule instructors, such as art historians Moritz Tausing (1835–84) and Franz Wickhoff (1853–1909), with original examples of applied arts drawn from all periods and nations as models for the decorative arts. It is important to consider the cultural significance of the broad range of artifacts contained within the museum's holdings. As the heirs to classical Roman civilization and located in the southern marches of central Europe, citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire owed their artistic heritage to western and eastern European factors alike. Ennobled arts of the Roman Empire, as well as the craft objects of regional manufacture, exhibited the extent of these forces.

As the University of Vienna's first professor of art history (a position he accepted in 1852), von Eitelberger's ardent promotion of the applied arts based on the study of historical artifacts had a powerful impact on his colleagues and followers. In addition to Tausing and Wickhoff, successive instructors at the university included Alois Riegl, the museum's curator of textiles from 1887 to 1898. These four scholars, each of whom devised an approach to the visual arts demanding precise, firsthand observations of craft objects from an unusually broad range of historical periods, formed the foundation of Vienna's "school" of art history.[23] With reference to the Viennese school, Udo Kultermann notes: "Art historians there demanded both extreme historical precision and personal familiarity with original works. Horizons well beyond the bounds of traditional art history opened up in the process, including new attention to the practical question of the preservation of monuments."[24]

With the reins of the directorship turned over to Arthur von Scala in August 1897, the museum's program, previously devoted exclusively to the promotion of contemporary Austrian designs, underwent immediate rejuvenation with the exhibition of English furniture from the nineteenth century.[25] Von Scala's intention was to revitalize Vienna's decorative arts by comparing them with modern English design, in order to "follow up and keep pace with the progress and development of taste in the fine and applied arts, which lead to new styles and fresh discoveries in all directions."[26]

Vienna also witnessed in 1897 the formation of Austria's main opposition association of artists, the Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs (Union of Austrian Fine Artists), more commonly known as the Secession.[27] The organization was established as a result of the increasingly conservative and isolationist stance of the Künstlerhausgenossenschaft, which forced the resignation of thir-

teen of its younger members in May 1897.[28] The dissenting young artists adamantly demanded a more active exchange "with the continuing development of art abroad."[29] The catalog preface to the first Secessionist exhibition, in March 1898, stated the association's desire to form an alliance with foreign artists:

> Since the greater part of our public has hitherto been allowed to remain in blissful ignorance of the powerful movement which has taken place in art in other countries, we have been especially concerned, in our first exhibition, to offer a view of modern foreign art, in order that the public may be provided with a new and loftier criterion for the assessment of what is produced at home.[30]

Both the formation and the goals of the Viennese association of artists paralleled contemporary dissenting arts organizations in other urban centers, which were also slow to experience the wave of modernism crossing western Europe. In addition to the formation of the Munich and Berlin secession movements (founded in 1892 and 1898, respectively), more minor artistic associations were created in Dresden, Karlsruhe, Düsseldorf, Leipzig, Weimar, Rome, Budapest, Prague, and Kraków.[31] Most appealing to the Viennese Secessionists were the alternatives to representational realism (in painting and sculpture) and historicism (in architecture and the decorative arts) being explored throughout the Continent, particularly the ornamental stylization exhibited by English design reformers, members of the Glasgow School, and adherents of the Art Nouveau and Jugendstil trends in France and Germany.

The fact that many founding members of the Viennese "Union" adopted numerous aspects of the new Jugendstil earned the association its own stylistic appellation, Secessionsstil, though the manner by no means defined the artistic philosophy of the association as a whole. From its origins, artists defined as "Impressionists," "Naturalists," and "Stylists" broadly represented the Viennese Secession; at the same time, the association brought together painters, graphic artists, architects, and designers.[32] The craft-oriented members, the *Stilisten,* represented adherents of avant-garde trends in design promoted by the Kunstgewerbeschule and based on the English design curriculum. Their increased opposition to the more traditional painters of the Secession, the "Naturalists" (or *nicht-Stilisten*), initiated the establishment of a decorative arts and crafts collective, the Wiener Werkstätte, in 1903, and eventually the departure of the *Stilisten* from the association altogether in 1905.[33]

When one of the Secesssion's earliest members, Felician von Myrbach, became acting principal of the Kunstgewerbschule in 1899, a critical link was established between the applied arts institution and the emerging avant-garde.[34] Von Myrbach wasted little time in appointing Secessionists to the school's faculty, and the Kunstgewerbeschule quickly assumed the role of instructing emerging avant-garde artists. Already, Secession members Alfred Roller and

Josef Hoffmann had joined the school's faculty as professors of drawing and architecture in 1893 and 1898, respectively. In 1899, Koloman Moser entered the institution as a professor of painting; in the following four years Arthur Strasser (1900), Leopoldine Guttmann (1901), Carl Otto Czeschka (1902), Rudolf von Larish (1902), and Franz Metzner (1903) also joined the faculty.[35] By the time Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser had established the Wiener Werkstätte in 1903, the applied arts school had become the principal training ground for workshop employees as well.

All of the ingredients necessary to launch Vienna's unique, yet paradoxical, brand of modernism were in place. The desire to counter the stylistic eclecticism exhibited in Ringstrasse architecture and decoration in order to move beyond "debased" Western style, encouraged architects and artists to seek out fresh sources of inspiration in both innovative contemporary trends from abroad and in their own cultural past. The first aspiration was demonstrated by the exhibitions of current British arts and crafts at the Österreichische Museum für Kunst und Industrie. The appeal of more recent artistic movements on the Continent was evident as well in the Secessionists' immediate embrace of Jugendstil and, to a lesser degree, Symbolist agendas.[36] Shortly after its foundation, the Secession also assumed the role formerly performed by the museum in providing a forum for current European design. As early as its second exhibit in the winter of 1898, the association displayed applied-art designs from foreign countries. Its eighth exhibition, held in late 1900, included work by Paris's Maison Moderne, Charles Robert Ashbee's British Guild of Handicrafts, Belgian designer Henry van de Velde, and the Mackintosh-MacDonald-McNair group (the so-called "Glasgow School").[37]

The second major source of inspiration for Secession artists, the arts of the past, were exhibited with quite different intentions in mind. They were to serve as examples of sound craftsmanship and fit design rather than as models for stylistic imitation. As a consequence, the extraordinarily broad array of materials displayed in the Österreichische Museum für Kunst und Industrie from its inception had a less predictable effect on artists, architects, and designers. By presenting products from western and eastern European antiquity, from peasant craft industry, and from Austrian decorative arts dating back to the earlier part of the century (most significantly, Biedermeier classicism), the museum introduced intriguing alternatives to the more exhausted styles exemplified by academic aesthetics.[38] This influential assortment of design prospects also highlighted for artists and art historians the significant relationship that existed between style and ornament, and encouraged both theorist and practitioner to reassess the boundaries separating the fine and applied arts.

As a result of the numerous and contradictory incentives that gave rise to the new styles emerging in turn-of-the-century art and architecture, a somewhat confused picture of central European modernism has emerged. Most authors struggle to explain the seemingly conflicting aesthetic philosophies found in

both the visual and technical arts that were directed simultaneously at reduction and clarity, and at ornamental complexity. That visual material derived from early Western sources supported both the *rational* and the *decorative* approaches identified with central European modernism may be partially attributed to the intellectual culture in which archaisms emerged. Consequently, by understanding the contributions that archaisms made to the fine and applied arts, we can also comprehend something of the philosophical positions of the contemporary artist, architect, and audience.

Carl Schorske observed that in Vienna the dominant middle class of the 1860s and 1870s "assert[ed] its independence of the past in law and science. But, whenever it strove to express its values in architecture, it retreated into history."[39] The discrepency Schorske notes is an important one. From the moment of their accession to political power in 1860, Vienna's liberal bourgeoisie, Schorske contends, "began to reshape the city in their own image."[40] More accurately, though, it was the image of their aristocratic predecessors that they sought to emulate. In terms of architecture, revivalist styles secured for the emerging middle class a viable image of its social and cultural aspirations. Conversely, the progressive state of law and scientific values (belief in rule by law and social progress through science) was an expected consequence of the "positivist" spirit that permeated nineteenth-century European thought as a whole, and was embraced wholeheartedly by Austrian liberalism. The paradox Schorske describes is perhaps not so simple. Law and science, no less than architecture, were dependent on past models as they formulated new theories, though, obviously, architecture displayed its historical sources more prominently. More recently, scholars have endeavored to disclose the complexity of the seemingly obvious rupture Schorske describes. Mallgrave and Ikonomou note: "If nineteenth-century art in general fell victim to the vast proliferation of knowledge and the exhaustion of historical themes, our familiar catchphrases often do not take into account just how these presumed failings at the same time fundamentally restructured the dialogue."[41] As science and law moved away from metaphysical speculation and toward scientific positivism, architecture was making its own transition from idealism to realism. The same authors point out: "We lose sight too easily of the fact that these diverse, even contrary tendencies were generally perceived as working together toward the same goal, and that the newly splintered disciplines of psychology, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, and aesthetics, for instance, were presumed to share a common methodological footing (Wilhelm Dilthey)."[42] When reactions toward the static state of the arts began to surface in the final decade of the century (long after liberalism was spent), advancements in scientific and linguistic understanding provided the necessary conditions in which artists and architects were able to frame alternatives to naturalism and historicism. More important to the present study, these methodological strategies offered a context in which to systematically assess the compositions and motifs of ancient and vernacular arts and force them to comply

with rational laws of construction and application. As a consequence, artists, architects, and designers discovered that objects from the distant past and the marginalized present were capable of resolving new material, constructional, and pictorial problems. The fact that they called upon archaisms to act in these various manners may be attributed in part to the transformations that positivism itself underwent in the course of the nineteenth century.

Depending on the type of science it emulated and which aspects of a particular science it regarded as important, positivism assumed a number of forms. One variety attempted to ground intangible ideas in empirical evidence and, accordingly, associated moral issues with physical characteristics.[43] Inspired by botanical and biological science, another sort of positivism sought to establish methods of classification dependent on visible surface evidence and/or the rigorous ordering of causal relationships.[44] Increasingly, however, philosophers as well as scientists began to question the universal application of scientific systems and the consistency of empirical observations on which they were based. Adherents of a critical positivism pointed out the subjective roots of methodological structures and the varying psychological positions from which physical evidence was gathered.[45] Some critics went to even greater extremes and rejected scientific reasoning altogether; the antirationalist views of Schopenhauer were given a wider audience when expressed in the writings of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. The latter privileged subjectivity, creativity, and the "will" above the rational tenets of science, proposing an artistic model of history to replace the scientific one that had only just emerged in the eighteenth century.[46]

By 1890 a burgeoning interest in the role of the individual psyche began to challenge confidence in the benefits and progress of science and faith in rational structures of knowledge. Creating a sense of unity between *self* and *world* reached beyond the pursuits of natural science. Like the restrictions imposed upon perceptual knowledge, philosophers and writers also challenged the limits of linguistic communication. Language became a particularly important concern in late-nineteenth-century Vienna as a result of the diverse cultural basis of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Issues of national consciousness were raised across a broad cultural range and initiated revivalist interest in vernacular literature as well as philology.[47]

The concept that the splintered "personality" impeded communication had implications beyond the multicultural identity of the empire, however; the vacillating psyche of the individual could also thwart linguistic meaning and prevent language from expressing abstract experience. Writers sought solutions to the dilemma in two opposing extremes. Viennese author/journalist Karl Kraus advocated an approach that would strip away all verbiage in order to reduce language to its simplest and most factual form.[48] Novelist and poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal, on the other hand, proposed the redemption of language through the artistic, specifically the poetic word, drawing upon the multivariate moods of historical styles and periods in literature.[49] However, the artistic and

subjective approach to understanding the world and communicating its meaning did not suddenly replace positivist precepts. Rather, a transformation of positivist values occurred, aimed at reconciling externally verifiable factors with erratic, willful elements.[50]

Margaret Olin has observed that this new perspective attempted to "overcome the threat of subjectivity by embracing it and making it part of the theory of knowledge which remained basically rational."[51] Nowhere was the phenomenon Olin describes more evident than in the work of Sigmund Freud, wherein exploration of the unconscious mind was subjected to rigorous scientific investigation and rational rules of interpretation. In the last quarter of the century, German physiologist Hermann Helmholtz had established important precedents for applying a scientific approach toward understanding subjective experience in the domain of visual perception. He acknowledged the inability of perception to reveal reality, but maintained that it did yield "knowledge of a lawful order in the realm of reality" and contended that this order could be represented in the "symbol system of our sensory impressions."[52] In a similar manner, Ernst Mach, a professor of philosophy at the University of Vienna in 1895 (as well as a mathematician and scientist), argued that, while we have knowledge *only* of our sensations, with the aid of physics and mathematics we attain the ability to understand the "sense data" that we gather.[53]

The dubious nature of perceptual knowledge and the instability of linguistic signs had serious consequences in late-nineteenth-century Vienna. Increasingly, individuals in a number of disciplines attempted to separate the realm of reason from that of the subjective will. In the early twentieth century, this goal was pursued in linguistic philosophy by Ludwig Wittgenstein, in journalism by Karl Kraus, and in architecture by Adolf Loos. But, in the decades surrounding the turn of the century, models of analysis derived from scientific, mathematical, and linguistic structures provided the surest means of rescuing nature, language, and ornament from slipping into the type of private and complex fantasies evident in the irrational operations of the unconscious mind, the subjective newspaper commentaries know as *feuilletons,* and frequent overindulgence in decoration.[54]

This study begins by situating the stylistic theories of each of the four key authors within a particular intellectual current as expressed by specific scientific and linguistic strategies. Ruskin, Jones, Semper, and Riegl engaged the topic of style from very different viewpoints and, subsequently, defined ornament in a variety of terms. Nonetheless, evident in the stylistic analyses presented in the following two chapters is a nineteenth-century propensity for establishing systematic relationships among elements. These four theorists shared the notion that the natural world contains an irrefutable order; for each, identifying and understanding the arrangement, patterns, and conditions of nature was the first step toward establishing a rational function for ornament and devising a unified style for art and architecture.