

Interpretation and Abstraction in the Architecture of Adolf Loos

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Interpretation and Abstraction in the Architecture of Adolf Loos

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1 Adolf Loos, Steiner House, Vienna, 1910

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In this paper Adolf Loos' design for a gentleman's outfitter's shop and apartment house at the Michaelerplatz in Vienna is considered with respect to the question concerning the use of both interpretation and abstraction of history in architectural design. The history of Loos' design is reviewed and situated in the context of the development of early modern architecture. Then Loos' ideas on the character of Viennese architecture are examined. His claim to be both modern and traditional is introduced as a paradox and then elaborated. This leads to a description of the interconnection between interpretation and abstraction in architecture and to the proposition that both allow an architect to sustain culture by creatively reanimating it.

"Very deep is the well of the past. Should we not call it bottomless? For the deeper we sound, the further down into the lower world of the past we probe, the more do we find that the earliest foundations of humanity, its history and culture, reveal themselves unfathomable."

Thomas Mann,
*Joseph and His Brothers*¹

There are two ways we are commonly mistaken about history in architecture: one is to think that it can be avoided, like a large obstacle in one's path, and the other is to think that it determines one's action, like the force of gravity or the climate. In the first case history is seen as something which is distinct from architectural design, a past to which the architect can turn according to occasional interests, or for lack of interest simply ignore. In the second case history is seen as an inevitable framework for design which exercises a formative influence upon architectural activities. Historical study according to the first conception presents us with a surprising series of unique choices, the results of which designers may or may not find useful. In the second case historiography offers a list of explanations; that is, an account of the causes which allowed certain events to occur. Thus we are presented with evidence of either freedom or necessity, participation in history is either sporadic or constant, something arbitrary or something certain. In both, history is distinct from the affairs of everyday life: as a treasury of old achievements it is more or less irrelevant; as the cause of reflection and action it is internal and unknown. Transparent or opaque, history is separate from life and its requirements, design as the work of contriving accommodations is one thing and the story of styles is another. Albeit common, I believe that this distinction works to the detriment of both history and design. While I will have little to say about the second of these subjects, I will make a series of comments about history—not the history of architecture though, rather history *in* architecture. My point of focus will be the architecture of the early-twentieth century, specifically the buildings of Adolf Loos.²

Many historians and architects have described the early-twentieth century as a period when architects turned away from their historical past. This is a good example of the notion that history is something which can be avoided. We have been told that architects of this time witnessed the

dawning of a new age, a new epoch had unfolded in which the past as represented by the products of earlier times was differentiated into a clearly distinct former period. A line had become visible, a boundary marked out, the nineteenth century had been superseded by the twentieth and architects who found themselves on the modern side of the new boundary saw that a time of confusion and error had been replaced by a time of understanding, certainty and truth. Such was often implied and sometimes stated clearly in the writings of architects as different as Otto Wagner, Frank Lloyd Wright and slightly later Le Corbusier. Many others repeated this claim. But the repetition of an assertion is no evidence of its truth. In the post-war period, closer to our time, many architects and critics have come to doubt this account of the early-twentieth century and much of the current Wagner, Wright and Le Corbusier studies points to examples of historical continuity and survival in the architecture of this period. Kenneth Frampton's comprehensive book, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* illustrates many examples of similarity, if not sameness, between nineteenth- and twentieth-century architectural concepts and designs. This is, I believe, a more balanced view of the period. Moreover, I think that it could be used to introduce an alternative concept of history itself, one in which history is neither optional nor inescapable, simply meaningful. I shall try to elaborate this concept because it would have the two-part benefit of improving our understanding of the work of these architects and clarifying the possibilities of our own participation in history. As stated above, the subject of the present essay is the work of Adolf Loos. In Loos' designs and writings we can see how history acts as a matrix or medium *within which* design initiative works itself out. In particular we discover a critical relationship in Loos' work between abstraction and interpretation.

Having mentioned Le Corbusier, let us start with his description of the historical significance of Loos' architecture. In 1930, Loos' sixtieth year, three years before his death, and the same year that he received both an annual stipend from the Czechoslovakian government and a volume of testimonials to his built works and writings, Le Corbusier was quoted in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* as saying that

"Loos swept beneath our feet, and it was a Homeric cleaning—precise, philosophical

and logical. In this Loos has had a decisive influence on the destiny of architecture."³

If we leave Homer out of this (I doubt he belongs) we can see three points in Le Corbusier's account: 1) that Le Corbusier and others apparently were unaware of Loos' work while it was being undertaken, 2) that his work involved a sort of cleaning operation, and 3) that it had had or would have great influence. The significance and truth of the first and third of these propositions rests upon the meaning of the second, and it is on that that I would like to focus. "A cleaning . . . which is logical, philosophical and precise." I take it that the precision and logic that is being referred to here is that about which Le Corbusier himself had written in earlier years in the Purism articles. Le Corbusier is seeing his own ideas and aspirations in Loos' work. The cleaning is a work of hygiene whereby the soiled surface of architecture—the stylistic and ornamented surface—is transformed into a skin which is simple and naked. Here Loos' "Ornament and Crime" is being translated as ornament is crime. And with this washing away of ornament comes a laundering of historical existence: Loos' modern architecture is unsoiled by marks of the past—apparently. Loos' architectural fabric is white, presumably Le Corbusier would want it starched too.

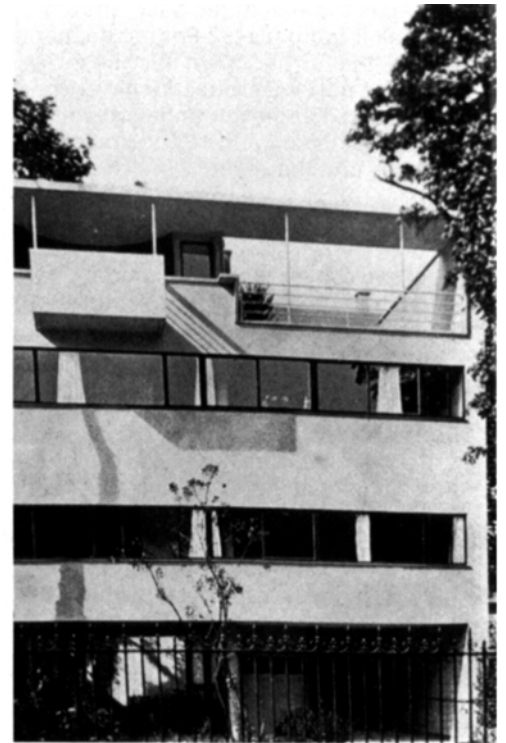
All of this seems obvious in consideration of the exterior surface of Loos' buildings, perhaps the most famous, certainly then the most notorious example, is the Steiner Villa of 1910. (Fig. 1) This building has been cited often as a precursor of modern architecture, especially of the Corbusian modern architecture, in consideration of its roof profile, horizontal top storey windows, flat exterior surfaces and whiteness. These qualities exist in Le Corbusier's buildings of a decade and half later: the Maison Cook (Fig. 2), Villa Stein and Villa Savoye. By the early 1930s, however, Le Corbusier himself had begun to reconsider and redefine, I think, the relationship between modern architecture and its past. The fact that he organized an exhibition of primitive art after his return from America is symptomatic of his reconsideration of the radical autonomy of the modern period. In the late 1920s and the early 30s Le Corbusier turned from Purism to Surrealism, an example being the Beistegui apartment in 1931. This coincided with a turn from the white architecture to an

architecture of color, texture and material richness. An example of this is the Mandrot Villa of 1931 (Fig. 3), which shows a very different attitude towards finishing—less precision in joining, a wider range of materials, and discontinuity and variation in the treatment of both internal and external surfaces. In short, he turned from the qualities and technical means of Modern architecture to those of more ancient or traditional buildings. It is important to observe that such a turn does not exist in the work of Loos; the Steiner Villa was preceded by Villa Karma and followed by the Scheu (Fig. 4), Moller and Müller houses. Loos never took up an interest in primitive art, as did many of his contemporaries. In fact he argued against such an interest in his famous "Ornament and Crime" article. A turn back towards traditional art was neither necessary nor possible for Loos because his work was never modern in the Corbusian sense, it was never clearly distinct from the art of the past, old Vienna; he could not turn away from what he stood within. The whiteness and abstraction of surface of Loos' buildings emerge out of concerns which are as much traditional as they are modern. The idea of being both traditional and modern is paradoxical from the Corbusian point of view, but we shall see that it was both persuasive and productive from Loos' point of view.

Loos was, like Le Corbusier, a great critic of late-nineteenth-century style architecture. His acidic comments about the buildings of the Vienna Ringstrasse are a good case in point. In his essay called "Potemkin City" he likened the facades of Hansen, Ferstel and Semper to props made out of canvas and pasteboard—figurative surfaces applied to buildings.⁴ The stylistic range of facade types, as they were presented for judgment in the design competitions, substantiates his argument. Consider for example the range of styles which were proposed to cover the *Rathaus*: the round- and the pointed-arch German Renaissance styles, the Norman and German Gothic styles and a version of the north Italian late-Renaissance palazzo style.⁵ (Fig. 5) Loos was, like many of his contemporaries, greatly impressed by the precision and archaeological exactitude of these reproductions. Contemporary relevance, however, was another matter. He described designs such as these as examples of a swindle, where the poor and inferior was passed off as the rich and superior—houses were portrayed as palaces.⁶ The

swindle is dishonest and this is the chief problem with the architecture of the Ring—not that it is historical, that it is not modern. Loos did not criticize history as such. It is wrong to say that he rejected the past in favor of the present, rather he criticized the desire to use reproductions of non-Viennese ancient styles to portray Vienna as something which it was not—something Greek, Roman or French. As a matter of fact he criticized the buildings of the Ring for not being properly historical. In his view Vienna had its own building and stylistic traditions which emerged out of the Viennese way of life. This fact made them both familiar and recognizable—in a word, meaningful. The application of foreign motifs and figures onto Viennese buildings was a way of over-looking or forgetting this local and lived tradition. Moreover, these applied motifs were distracting and disorienting—unfamiliar. The application of figures and patterns from the great architecture of old Europe was seen as a mechanical appropriation and transfer of shapes which, from the point of view of architectural design, short-circuited honest consideration and inventive rearticulation of typical Viennese figures. From the point of view of architectural experience this sort of appropriation and transfer misrepresented and confused civic symbols. Even worse, the designs were undertaken on the basis of a very generalized understanding of what the symbols represented. This made the possibility for intelligent transfer, which involves understanding motivating conditions and interpretative transformation, very unlikely. Perhaps it is possible at this point to introduce a distinction between history and historicism, or better, working within a tradition and working with all traditions, the latter being a procedure of appropriation and transfer, the former being the work of rearticulation and modernization. This is really a problem of decorum not modernity, the architecture of the Ring misrepresented Viennese civic life.

Loos' Ring critique can be turned into a question about the role of history in architectural design: how is it possible for an architect to work within a cultural tradition while acknowledging modern developments? Does not periodization, that is, the identification of a modern period, work against this? Are not ages, styles and epochs distinct? Can an architect design buildings which are both familiar



2 Le Corbusier, Maison Cook, Paris, 1926



6 Adolf Loos, Michaelerhaus, Vienna, 1909–11



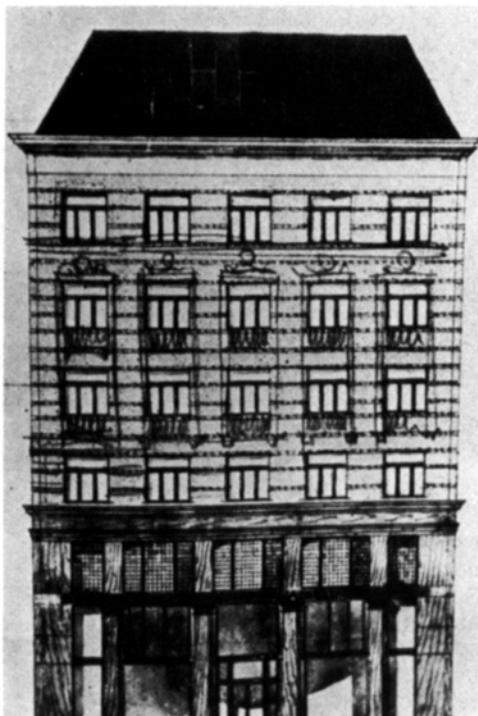
4 Adolf Loos, Scheu House, Vienna, 1912



3 Le Corbusier, Mandrot Villa, near Toulon, 1930-1



5 Alois Wurm, Vienna Rathaus, competition entry, 1869



7 Adolf Loos, Michaelerhaus, preliminary facade design, Vienna, 1910

and original, old-fashioned and contemporary? Or is this a logical and practical contradiction? This question, or set of related questions, was never stated this clearly nor forcefully in Loos' writings. Nevertheless I believe that it motivated many of his assertions and more importantly his designs. We will see that the problem of the white surface of his buildings can be handled quite easily in consideration of this question. Before taking up that topic I would like to consider one of his most controversial buildings as an example of a design motivated, or at least partly motivated, by the force of the questions we have just posed.

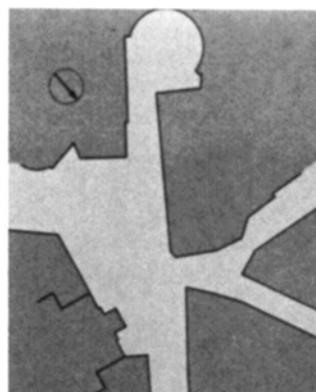
The building I wish to consider is Loos' design for an apartment house and shop for the Goldman and Salatsch gentleman's outfitters in the Michaelerplatz in Vienna, the building now commonly referred to as the Looshaus.⁷ (Fig. 6) The project was begun late in 1909 and completed in 1911. The fact that the building became the subject of a great and well publicized controversy came as a surprise to both Loos and his clients. Loos wrote at the time that no one expected that the civil authorities would call a halt to the construction of the building at the point when its exterior surface was being finished. A problem and disagreement had arisen over the need to decorate the surface of the building with the kind of decorative sculpture, relief work and formal patterns that had become common in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century public buildings in Vienna—the buildings of the Ring, for example, or designs for other shops and department stores. In consideration of the building as it stood and Loos' design drawings (which incidentally he did not sign), certain city officials together with leading figures in the construction industry, academics and journalists launched a campaign against the building. Critical publications appeared in contemporary journals and newspapers and public lectures were held. Loos was compelled to submit alternative, more decorative, designs for the facade (Fig. 7), and a competition to obtain other alternatives was proposed. After architects of the stature of Otto Wagner refused to participate in the competition, other would-be contenders, following his lead, dropped out and nothing came of the competition. Loos was eventually compelled to add flower boxes at the base of some of the windows of the facade—a modest covering of the naked

body. The construction history of the building points to disagreements about what is necessary in the figuration of important civic buildings. This subject was as important to Loos as it was to his critics. But Loos did not see it as a problem of style or ornament—or he did not see it in these terms primarily—especially if one considers ornament as the kind of surface treatment the buildings of the Ringstrasse were given. His design can be understood better when his ideas about the design of the whole urban space are considered.

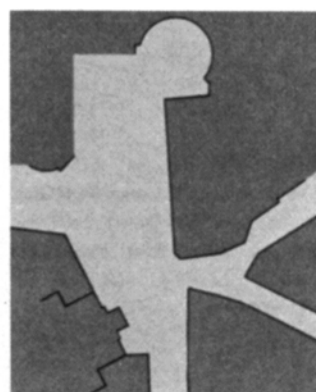
The Looshaus was sited on the location of a building called Dreilaufferhaus. A comparison of the plans of the *Platz* in the decades before Loos' design shows that part of his project involved redefining the limits of the site. (Fig. 8) As a matter of fact he did not use a triangular piece of ground in front of his main facade, but established a 16 meter frontage which redefined the perimeter of the *Platz*. Giving up land in the center of the city might seem an odd move. I believe his intention was to unify and order the public space.

As the preexisting triangular frontage prevented or at least interrupted this unity, the 16 meter line stabilized the circular continuity of the enclosure of the *Platz*. Loos wrote that the Michaelerkirche formed the pendant of the urban place, his building with the others formed a circular chain.⁸ (Fig. 9) This statement, together with the fact of his redefinition of the limit of the site, points to a suggestion that the facade was as much a problem of urban design as it was an issue of architectural figuration, or, to avoid the choice between volume and surface, architectural figuration was part of the problem of urban design—the order of urban space was made manifest in architectural surfaces.

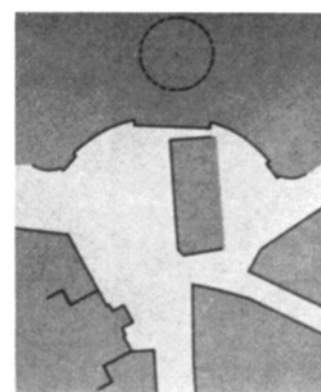
A closer study of the elements that compose the facade substantiates this suggestion. Let us start with the entry portico. (Fig. 10) There are three significant facts about the columns that mark the entry. The first is that they are non-load-bearing. They appear in the early sketches but were never intended to be part of the structural system, which is a self-supporting and integral, reinforced concrete frame. The columns were placed into this frame, effectively hung, when the building was nearing completion (not by design though, they arrived to the site later than



15 Vor 1888



16 1888–1890



17 1891

8 Michaelerplatz, Vienna, historical plans, after Czech and Mistelbauer

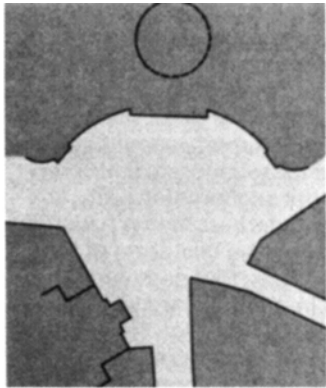


9 Michaelerplatz, Vienna; Michaelerkirche at the right

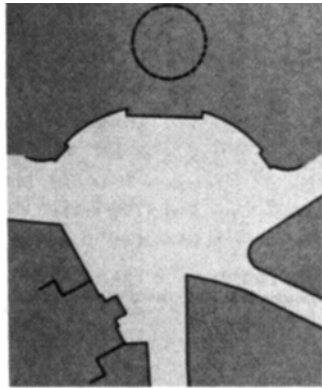
expected). They are not structural, but decorative, figures of civic symbolism. Secondly, the columns or the entry space as a whole is really an extension of the space of the *Platz* itself; the steps into the main commercial space within are separate from each column's base. The columns are literally within the public realm. Finally, the columns are in scale with those of the Michaelerkirche, both sets are similarly proportioned to their respective facades. Here again we see them as pieces that work with the others to make

up an urban setting. Moreover, the Cippolino marble out of which they are made is as elegant, rare and precious as would seem appropriate for the public realm by comparison with the materials of the subordinate buildings. The columns, like the site line, are elements of urban design—figures of civic decorum, suitable to a specific place.

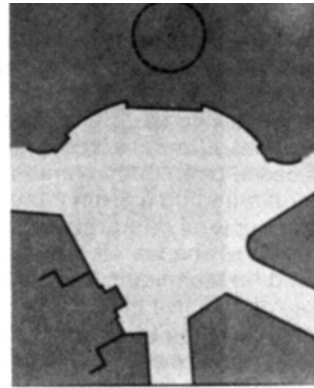
The same is true for the openings in the facade at the height of the mezzanine level. Czech and Mistelbauer have pub-



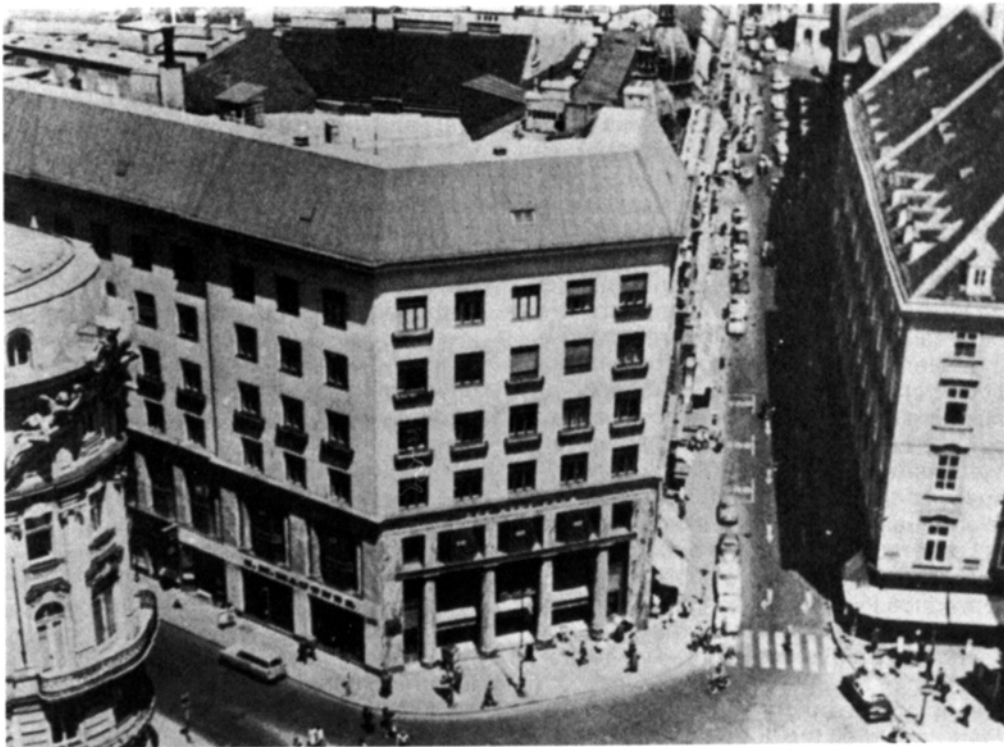
18 Vor 1897



19 1898–1909



20 Nach 1910. 1:2000



10 Adolf Loos, Michaelerhaus, Vienna, 1909–11

lished photographs of views which juxtapose Loos' window designs with the openings in the church facade as well as the palace on the opposite side of the space.⁹ Correspondences in scale, dimension and articulation are clearly evident. In all three cases the columns are coupled, non-load-bearing and reduced in size when compared to those at the ground level. Here again Loos is working within the typical figuration of the local context. But he is not mechanically reproducing its forms, shapes and motifs. He

was not a historicist. Design within an urban setting is not a matter of appropriation, transfer and reproduction.

The top of the building is a slightly more tricky issue. Here we see Loos departing radically from local figures and motifs. But questions which emerge in consideration of the roof and cornice can be answered by considering what Loos put forward in his writings. Loos argued that cities in Austria could be distinguished from one another according to typical,

and hence identifying, materials and figures.¹⁰ The plain and simple roof and cornice was typical in old Vienna—even from medieval times. This was not the case in Danzig or Salzburg, for example.

Loos' unwillingness to use the heavy cornice and high roof was based upon his fidelity to what he understood to be the Viennese way of finishing buildings. This means that the other buildings in the *Platz* were out of context in Vienna, they ignored the tradition, and were therefore ill-suited for modern interpretation. Certain aspects of an urban site should be ignored in modern design.

Loos approached the figuration of the upper storeys of the building—the white wall—similarly. He wrote that Vienna is a *kalkputzstadt*.¹¹ He reminded his readers and critics of the old way of using lime wash to finish masonry in buildings. He suggested that this was still a viable tradition, even in a concrete frame building. Elsewhere he said that there is no need to reinvent the shoe—it works fine as it is, shoes should change when walking does, "the form is received via tradition and the changes which take place during the life of a craftsman are not dependent upon his will,"¹² technical activity is subordinate to the way people live. Loos complained about the overdecoration of the surface of buildings because it put them out of context in Vienna. He concluded his essay on the Looshaus by saying that he believed that he had learned from the old masters, and that his greatest desire was to preserve his inherited tradition.

How did Loos learn from the old masters? The elimination of ornament from the surface of his building seems tantamount to the elimination of any reference to the work of the old masters, to the buildings of times gone by. Laundering removes stains. In the absence of certain well-known objects we sense a loss of history. But this assumes a notion of ornament which is both misleading and different from Loos' conception. I believe that Loos' writings allow us to distinguish different kinds of ornament, not different ornamental shapes, nor different ornamental styles; but two kinds of ornament which, in fact, could be called quite simply good and bad ornament, the first being indicative or capable of pointing away from itself towards something necessary but otherwise unrepresented, and the second being ornament which dis-

tracts or fails to represent and is unnecessary. Unnecessary ornament is what is exemplified on the surface of the buildings of the Ringstrasse and was criticized in the "Ornament and Crime" article. It is like idle talk. As is obvious in the range of stylistic facade types presented in the Ringstrasse competitions, the surface treatment of these facades was a matter of choice, preference or opinion—certainly not a matter of necessity. For this reason the facades were described by Loos as canvas props—insubstantial and insignificant chatter. Very different are the surfaces of the Looshaus. The white lime wash, the marble columns, the roof; these finishes identify the building, they articulate its relationship to the church, the *Platz* and to the city as a whole; these surfaces bring the building into being as a visible and recognizable presence. In so doing they represent the order of the city as symbolized in the pendant and chain hierarchy. Ornaments of this kind finish or complete both the internal spatial distribution of the building and the external spatial order of the *Platz*. Here ornament is not a matter of covering up but a matter of indicating, pointing or revealing; in this case revealing civic hierarchy and the public character of the ground storey and mezzanine level of the Looshaus. From the old masters Loos had learned about the order of the city and the use of ornaments in the articulation of that order.

What then about Loos' modernity, his visit to America, or his great affection for modern England? He wrote that Germany needed a good bath. American plumbing received his praise.¹³ How is it possible to reconcile his fidelity to old Vienna with his great interest in modern technical developments? The term I would like to introduce here in order to clarify my earlier usage is interpretation and, in what follows, abstraction. Considering the Looshaus, it is possible to differentiate the work of reproducing the products of the past from the work of creatively transforming them. In no case did Loos reproduce local motifs. He stated that the marble was from a quarry which had been recently reopened. The columns of the facade were similar to those of the other buildings on the *Platz* but not identical. Similarity or likeness as opposed to sameness presupposes difference, at least some small degree of difference from an original, and this difference needs to be understood as something other than formal variation or distortion because Loos' difference also serves the purpose of re-

articulating the civic symbolism of the place. The columns were different than those of the Michaelerkirche but still figures which embodied the idea and experience of public entry. If the term interpretation is helpful here it is because it names a kind of difference (a formal or material difference from an original) that is based upon understanding; specifically, understanding a given cultural situation. Architectural interpretation is not the distortion of shapes. Design technique, like building technique, is subordinate to the way people live their lives. Every interpretation is taken from a particular point of view, what I would like to call the modern point of view (not modern in the sense of the early-twentieth century but in the sense of a contemporary point of view). Therefore every interpretation betrays limited interests, prejudices and contemporary values.¹⁴ It is precisely these interests that animate the creativity and originality of each interpretive act. We know very well from his writings that Loos was a man of his times. It was his critical participation in his own time that sustained his difference or distance from his cultural inheritance. When we consider Loos' statements on tradition we should not forget his sharp-edged cultural criticism. Yet he tried to learn from the old masters. We have called this the work of understanding. Interpretation relies upon both invention or creative imagination and understanding. In the case of the Looshaus we can see how the architect studied typical Viennese materials, details and public spaces only to redefine and remake them in a modern way. Another example of this is Loos' redefinition of the building site line. He certainly had the opportunity to reproduce the already existing (or historical) volumetric character of the *Platz*. But we have seen that this is not what he did. The idea of the church as the pendant meant that the other buildings of the *Platz*, including the Looshaus, had to be seen as links that together formed a necklace chain. With this image in mind we can understand why Loos reinforced the unity and circularity of the space with his new site line and relatively plain facade. Circular unity is a spatial quality which may have been suggested by the given historical context but it was hardly existing in fact. Loos' invention and interpretation appeared at this point, he studied the space and then remade it—improved it! We can say that the site was not given as a simple fact, rather it was given as a possibility. Latent in the material and historical presence of the *Platz* was an idea of its best form, a better site appeared in the design of the project. This occurs in all

creative designs and is possible in all given settings—all locations stand as suggestive possibilities which require understanding. Interpretations are inventions which are always more or less likely, each is convincing to a greater or lesser degree. Loos' interpretation of the spatial order of the Michaelerplatz should be considered as a more or less truthful representation of that section of the city, the preexisting Dreilaufferhaus being a historical distraction from the best form of the place. If we can agree that commercial and residential institutions are subordinate to sacred buildings, that the pendant and chain symbolism makes sense, we should conclude that his interpretation is convincing. Furthermore, if we can understand this spatial hierarchy as something manifest in certain materials and architectural figures—the columns and the lime wash—we can also say that the design of the facade is a convincing interpretation of a building type. In both cases—the *Platz* and the facade—we are presented with attempts to restate or translate the given cultural situation into modern or at least contemporary terms by improving it. In both cases we can see how tradition or the past persists because it sustains its own redefinition. Reproduction prohibits both reanimation and improvement, invention is the unnamed accomplice in every design which participates in the life of a tradition. "A change with regard to tradition is only permissible if the change means improvement."¹⁵

I believe that the abstract character of Loos' facades is understandable according to this concept of interpretation. Many historians of the modern movement have cited this quality of Loos' architecture as an indication of his distance from the architecture of the past, from the nineteenth-century style architecture. There is obviously some truth in this assertion, but it misrepresents Loos' intentions and the meaning of his facades. Loos once wrote that facades should be dumb, and he wrote that an inhabitant's bad taste should be reserved for the articulation of interiors.¹⁶ Here again we see the force of the idea of decorum, and related to this the idea that an architect is responsible to a larger order, the political and ethical order that is embodied in the city. Abstraction in Loos' work is a result of the attempt to represent what is essential in an architectural inheritance, to avoid idle talk; abstraction is a technique of interpretation. It is wrong to see abstraction as merely the omission of details or figures, this process knows no limits and Loos did

not omit all historical figures. There was elimination in his process of interpretation, the elimination of distracting figures, but this was complemented by the articulation of ornaments which identified the building—brought it into being as a specific institution on that site. In this sense abstraction works itself out through a series of filters and distillations—the flat is made flatter, the black blacker. Abstraction tends toward an ideal or an essence. This is not a formal essence though, rather a representational content. We tend to think of abstraction and representation as polar opposites. This notion is unhelpful here. Loos abstracted the facade of the Michaelerkirche in his interpretation of the idea of public entry in that place by eliminating inappropriate and distracting figures. Doubtless other similar facades were considered too. However, it is the grounds for this elimination of figures that must be understood. When undertaking the work of abstraction an architect should not forget that buildings and urban settings are situations in which people live their lives. They participate in both typical or traditional and modern patterns of behavior which sustain their culture. The typicality of these patterns preserves the historical depth of a culture and their modernity ensures its contemporary relevance. Forgetting this cultural ground in the process of abstraction leads to formalism, which is not interpretation but mere shape distortion, and this creates nothing but an illusion of representation (the Ringstrasse swindle and all forms of formal historicism being good examples). To the degree that architectural settings can represent patterns of life by giving them visible, concrete presence, abstraction must be seen as a process which combines design technique (formal invention), ethical or political knowledge (recognizing dwelling habits) and theoretical vision (understanding the best form of a given situation). Abstracted ornaments bring architectural meanings into presence, the civic hierarchy of Michaelerplatz being the case we have studied. Loos' dumb facade is an abstraction which reveals his interpretation of good Viennese urban settings. The truth of his interpretation can be measured and should be measured by gauging the representational force of his abstractions—that is, simply, whether or not they can be seen as Viennese, urban and good. If so, if Loos had a better understanding of history than the historicists, then we have an example of how interpretation and abstraction can sustain tradition within modern culture.

Notes

- 1 Mann, Thomas, *Joseph and His Brothers* Penguin (London) 1978, "Descent into Hell," p. 3
- 2 In the past few years a number of monographs, journals and exhibition catalogs on the work of Loos have appeared which are listed here for reference. The most thorough text to date is Rukschcio, B. and R. Schachel *Adolf Loos. Leben und Werk*, Graphischen Sammlung Albertina, no. 17 (Vienna) 1982. Less comprehensive but interpretative is Gravagnuolo, B. *Adolf Loos: Theory and Works* Rizzoli (Milano) 1982. In connection with a recent retrospective exhibition two helpful shorter publications appeared: *The Architecture of Adolf Loos* (foreword by Kenneth Frampton) Arts Council of Great Britain (London) 1985 and *9H*, no. 6 (London) 1983, which includes a number of helpful interpretative essays. In 1984 there was an exhibition of Loos' works in Berlin at the Akademie der Künste, which resulted in the publication of a very interesting catalog titled *Adolf Loos 1870–1933 Raumplan-Wohnungsbau*. The old book *Adolf Loos Das Werk des Architekten* by Kulka, H. (Vienna) reprint 1979, remains helpful. Loos' writings are collected in Loos, Adolf *Samtliche Schriften* (Vienna) 1962. A number of his essays have been translated into English and published in *Spoken into the Void*, (translated by J. O. Newman and J. H. Smith) MIT Press (Cambridge, MA) 1982.
- 3 Gravagnuolo, op. cit., p. 89
- 4 Loos, op. cit., *Spoken into the Void* pp. 95ff
- 5 This is described fully in Eggert, Klaus *Die Bauten und ihre Architekten*, 2, *Friedrich von Schmidt, Gottfried Semper, Carl von Hansenauer*, which is volume 8 of *Die Wiener Ringstrasse Bild Einer Epoche*, Wiesbaden, 1978; especially pp. 19–36 and pls. 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20 and 22.
- 6 Loos, op. cit., *Spoken into the Void* p. 95
- 7 All of the texts which treat Loos' building in the Michaelerplatz, as well as the account which follows, are indebted to Czech, H. and W. Mistelbauer for their thoughtful and insightful study titled *Das Looshaus* (Vienna) 1976.
- 8 "Der stil der kirche, welche das pendant zu diesem bau bildet, war für mich richtungsgebend." "Eine zuschrift" for "Wiener architekturfragen" in Loos, op. cit., *Samtliche Schriften*, p. 300
- 9 Czech and Mistelbauer, op. cit., pls. 135–8
- 10 Loos, op. cit., *Samtliche Schriften*, p. 296. "Es ist etwas besonderes um den baucharakter einer stadt. Jede hat ihren eigenen . . . Die danziger ziegelrohbauten verlooren sofort ihre schonheit, wenn man sie in den wiener boden versetzen wollte" and so on.
- 11 "Wien ein kalkputzstadt ist." *ibid.*, p. 296
- 12 "Die form wird durch die tradition ubernommen, und die veränderungen, die während des lebens des handwerkers sich vollziehen, sind nich von seinem will abhangig." "Arnold Schonberg und seine Zeitgenossen," *ibid.*, p. 399
- 13 "Die plumber," *ibid.*, pp. 70ff
- 14 This point has been made very clearly by Gadamer, Hans-Georg *Philosophical Hermeneutics* University of California Press (Berkeley, CA) 1976, especially in Chapter 2 "On the Scope and Function of Hermeneutical Reflection (1967)." Gadamer's *Truth and Method* and *The Idea of the Good in Platonic-Aristotelian Philosophy* explore and clarify other points being argued here. The significant contribution contemporary hermeneutics can make to architectural theory has been demonstrated by Vesely, D. in his introduction to *Themes 1, Architecture and Continuity* The Architectural Association (London) 1982, and in "Architecture and Hermeneutics: An Interview" in *Issue 4 Polytechnic of Central London* (London) March, 1984
- 15 "Eine veränderung gegenüber dem althergekommenen ist nur dann erlaubt, wenn die veränderung eine verbesserung bedeutet." "Heimatkunst," in Loos, op. cit., *Samtliche Schriften*, p. 335. Elsewhere in the same essay he stated flatly that "Die beste form ist immer schon bereit."
- 16 "Das haus sei nach aussen verschwiegen (discreet), im inneren offenbare es seinen ganzen reichthum." "Heimatkunst," *ibid.*, p. 339