

OPPOSITIONS BOOKS

Introduction by Aldo Rossi
Translation by Jane O. Newman
and John H. Smith

Adolf Loos

Spoken into the Void

Collected Essays 1897-1900

Published for the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies
in the Fine Arts, Chicago, Illinois, and
The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies,
New York, New York, by

The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England

1982



*1 Drawing of Adolf Loos. Oskar
Kokoschka, 1916.*

The Principle of Cladding

Neue Freie Presse, September 4, 1898

Even if all materials are of equal value to the artist, they are not equally suited to all his purposes. The requisite durability, the necessary construction often demand materials that are not in harmony with the true purpose of the building. The architect's general task is to provide a warm and livable space. Carpets are warm and livable. He decides for this reason to spread out one carpet on the floor and to hang up four to form the four walls. But you cannot build a house out of carpets. Both the carpet on the floor and the tapestry on the wall require a structural frame to hold them in the correct place. To invent this frame is the architect's second task.

This is the correct and logical path to be followed in architecture. It was in this sequence that mankind learned how to build. In the beginning was cladding.¹ Man sought shelter from inclement weather and protection and warmth while he slept. He sought to cover himself. The covering is the oldest architectural detail. Originally it was made out of animal skins or textile products. This meaning of the word is still known today in the Germanic languages.² Then the covering had to be put up somewhere if it was to afford enough shelter to a family! Thus the walls were added, which at the same time provided protection on the sides. In this way the idea of architecture developed in the minds of mankind and individual men.

There are architects who do things differently. Their imaginations create not spaces but sections of walls. That which is left over around the walls then forms the rooms. And for these rooms some kind of cladding is subsequently chosen, whatever seems fitting to the architect.

But the artist, the *architect*, first senses the effect that he intends to realize and sees the rooms he wants to create in his mind's eye. He senses the effect that he wishes to exert upon the spectator: fear and horror if it is a dungeon, reverence if a church, respect for the power of the state if a government palace, piety if a tomb, homeyness if a residence, gaiety if a tavern. These effects are produced by both the material and the form of the space.

Every material possesses its own language of forms, and none may lay claim for itself to the forms of another material. For forms have been constituted out of the applicability and the methods of production of materials. They have come into being with and through materials. No material permits an encroachment into its own circle of forms. Whoever dares to make such an encroachment notwithstanding this is branded by the world a counterfeiter. Art, however, has nothing to do with counterfeiting or lying. Her paths are full of thorns, but they are pure.

One could cast St. Stefan's Tower in cement and erect it somewhere, but then it would not be a work of art. And what goes for the Stefan's Tower also goes for the Pitti Palace; and what goes for the Pitti Palace goes for the Farnese Palace. And with this building we have arrived in the midst of our own Ringstrasse architecture. It was a sad time for art, a sad time for those few artists among the architects of that time who were forced to prostitute their art for the sake of the masses. It was granted to only a small number consistently to find contractors broad-minded enough to let the artist have his way. Schmidt was probably the luckiest. After him came Hansen, who, when he was having a rough time, sought solace in terra-cotta buildings. Poor Ferstel must have endured terrible agonies when they forced him at the last minute to nail an entire section of facade in poured cement onto his University.³ The remaining architects of this period—

with a few exceptions—knew how to keep themselves free of nightmarish agonies like these.

Is it any different now? Allow me to answer this question. Imitation and surrogate art still dominate architecture. Yes, more than ever. In recent years people have even appeared who have lent themselves to defending this tendency (one person, of course, did so anonymously, since the issue did not seem clear-cut enough to him); so that the surrogate architect no longer need stand diminutively on the sidelines. Nowadays one nails the structure to the facade with aplomb and hangs the “keystone” under the main molding with artistic authority. But come hither, you heralds of imitation, you makers of stenciled inlays, of botch-up-your-home windows and papier-mâché tankards! There is a new spring awakening for you in Vienna! The earth is freshly fertilized!

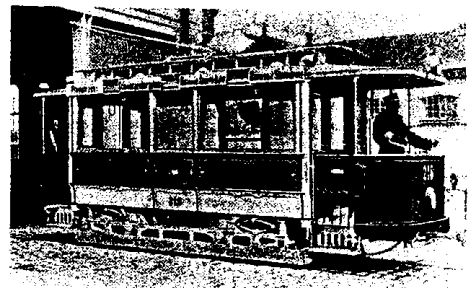
But is the living space that has been constructed entirely of rugs not an imitation? The walls are not really built out of carpets! Certainly not. But these carpets are meant only to be carpets and not building stones. They were never meant to be taken as such, to imitate them in form or color, but rather to reveal clearly their own meaning as a cladding for the wall surface. They fulfill their purpose according to the principles of cladding.

As I already mentioned at the outset, cladding is older even than structure. The reasons for cladding things are numerous. At times it is a protection against bad weather—oil-base paint, for example, on wood, iron, or stone; at times there are hygienic reasons for it—as in the case of enameled tiles that cover the wall surfaces in the bathroom; at times it is the means to a specific effect—as in the color painting of statues, the tapestries on walls, the veneer on wood. The principle of cladding, which was first articulated by Semper, extends to nature as well. Man is covered with skin, the tree with bark.

From the principle of cladding, however, I have derived a very precise law which I call the law of cladding. Do not be alarmed. It is usually said that laws put an end to all progressive development. And indeed, the old masters got along perfectly well without laws. Certainly. It would be idleness to establish laws against thievery in a place where thievery is unknown. When the materials used for cladding had not yet been imitated, there was no need for laws. But now it seems to me to be high time for them.

The law goes like this: we must work in such a way that a confusion of the material clad with its cladding is impossible. That means, for example, that wood may be painted any color except one—the color of wood. In a city where the exhibition committee decided that all of the wood in the Rotunda should be painted “like mahogany,” in a city in which wood graining is the exclusive type of painted decoration, this is a very daring law. There seem to be people here who consider this kind of thing elegant. Since the railway and tramway cars—as well as the entire technique of carriage building—come from England, they are the only wooden objects that display pure colors. I now dare to assert that this kind of tramcar—especially one of the electric line—is more pleasing to me with its pure colors than it would be if, according to the principles of beauty set out by the exhibition committee, it had been painted “like mahogany.”

But a true feeling for elegance lies dormant, although deep and buried, even in our people. If not, the railway administration could not count on the fact that the brown color of the third-class cars painted to look like wood would call forth a



60 Vienna tramcar at the turn of the century. From Paul Kortz, Wien am Anfang des XX Jahrhunderts. Ein Führer in Technischer und Künstlerischer Richtung, hrsg. vom Österreichisches Ingenieur- und Architekten-Verein, Vienna, 1905-1906.

lesser feeling of elegance than the green color of the second- and first-class cars.

I once demonstrated this unconscious feeling to one of my colleagues in a drastic manner. On the first floor of a building there were two apartments. The tenant of the one apartment had had his window bars, which had been stained brown, painted white at his own expense. We made a bet according to which we brought a certain number of people to the front of the building and, without pointing out to them the difference between the window bars, asked them on which side they felt that Herr Pluntzengruber lived and on which side Prince Liechtenstein—these were the two parties that we told them rented the apartments. All of those who were taken to the building unanimously declared that the wood-stained side was Pluntzengruber's. Since then my colleague has only painted things white.

Wood staining is, of course, an invention of our century. The Middle Ages painted wood bright red for the most part, the Renaissance blue; the Baroque and Rococo painted interiors white, exteriors green. Our peasants still retain enough good sense to paint only with pure colors. Don't the green gate and the green fence of the countryside, the green jalousies against the freshly whitewashed wall, have a charming effect? Unfortunately several villages have already adopted the taste of the exhibition commission.

One will still recall the moral indignation that arose in the camp of the surrogate arts and crafts when the first furniture painted with oil-base paint came to Vienna from England. But the rage of these good men was not directed against the paint. They painted with oil-base paints in Vienna too as soon as softwood came into use. But the fact that the English pieces dared to display their colors so openly and freely instead of imitating hardwood provoked these strange fellows. They rolled their eyes and acted as if they had never used oil-base colors at all. These gentlemen presumably thought that everyone hitherto had assumed their stained-wood furniture and buildings were actually made of hardwood.

I trust I can be assured of the Association's gratitude if, after such observations, I name no names among the painters at the exhibition.

Applied to stuccowork, the principle of cladding would run like this: stucco can take any ornament with just one exception—rough brickwork. One would think the declaration of such a self-evident fact to be unnecessary, but just recently someone drew my attention to a building whose plaster walls were painted red and then seamed with white lines. Similarly, the type of decoration so beloved in kitchens—imitation stone squares—belongs in this category. In general, any and all materials used to cover walls—wallpaper, oilcloth, fabric, or tapestries—ought not to aspire to represent squares of brick or stone. It is thus easy to understand why the legs of our dancers when covered with knit stockinets have such an unaesthetic effect. Woven underclothing may be dyed any color at all, just not skin color.

The cladding material can keep its natural color if the area to be covered happens to be of the same color. Thus, I can smear tar on black iron or cover wood with another wood (veneer, marquetry, and so on) without having to color the covering wood; I can coat one metal with another by heating or galvanizing it. But the principle of cladding forbids the cladding material to imitate the coloration of the underlying material. Thus iron can be tarred, painted with oil colors, or galvanized, but it can never be camouflaged with a bronze color or any other metallic color.

Here *chamottes*⁴ and artificial stone tiles also deserve mention. The one kind imitates terrazzo (mosaic) paving, the other Persian carpets. Certainly there are people who actually take the tiles for what they are imitating—for the manufacturers must know their customers.

But no, you imitators and surrogate architects, you are mistaken! The human soul is too lofty and sublime for you to be able to dupe it with your tactics and tricks. Of course, our pitiful bodies are in your power. They have only five senses at their disposal to distinguish real from counterfeit. And at that point where the man with his sense organs is no longer adequate begins your true domain. There is your realm. But even here—you are mistaken once more! Paint the best inlays high, high up on the wood ceiling and our poor eyes will have to take it on good faith perhaps. But the divine spirits will not be fooled by your tricks. They sense that even those intarsia decorations most skillfully painted to look “like inlay” are nothing but oil paint.

I recently got into a quarrel with an acquaintance of mine. He did not dispute what I had written about the arts and crafts. But the essays on fashion and clothing had rubbed him the wrong way. He reproached me for wanting to put the whole world into uniform. "What would become of our splendid national costumes?"

Here he became poetic. He thought about his childhood, the lovely Sundays in Linz; he thought of the local folk who assembled for church in their festive attire. How glorious, how beautiful, how picturesque! How different everything is now! Only the old people cling to the old costumes. The young ape the ways of city people. One ought instead try to win the people back to the old costume. That would be the task of the cultured and literate man.

"So you think they liked this old costume?" I interjected. "Certainly." "And so you wish that this costume would be retained forever?" "It is my most ardent desire."

Now I had him where I wanted him. "Do you realize," I said to him, "that you are a truly base and egotistical man? Do you realize that you want to exclude an entire class, a large, wonderful class, our peasant class, from all of the blessings of culture? And why? So that your eyes will be picturesquely titillated as soon as you make your way into the countryside! Why do *you* not run about dressed that way? No thank you, you say, I would just as soon not. But you demand that other people oblige you by gadding about in the countryside like figures in a landscape just so that your drunken intellectual's eyes will not be offended. Well then, why don't you take their place there sometime, serving up country sausages to His Excellency the Commerce Minister who wants to enjoy the untainted mountain pastures? The peasant has a higher mission to fulfill than to populate the mountains stylishly for the holiday visitor. The peasant—so the saying has already gone for a hundred years—is not a plaything!"

I too admit that I really take pleasure in the old costumes. But this does not give me the right to demand from my fellow man that he put them on for my sake. A costume is clothing that has frozen in a particular form; it will develop no further. It is always a sign that its wearer has given up trying to change his circumstances. The costume is the symbol of resignation. It says, my wearer must give up seeking to gain a better position for himself in the struggle for existence; he must give up trying to develop himself further. When the peasant still fought with vim and vigor, when he was still full of the greenest hopes, he would never even have dreamed of putting on the same suit that his grandfather had worn. The Middle Ages, the Peasants' War, the Renaissance—these eras knew no rigid adherence to clothing styles. It was only the different ways of life that caused the distinction between the clothing of the city dweller and the peasant. City dweller and peasant at that time related to one another like today's city dweller and farmer.

But then the peasant lost his independence. He became a serf. And a serf he had to remain, he and his children and his children's children. To what purpose should he strive to raise himself above his surroundings by means of his clothing, for what should he modify his style of dress? For it was of no use at all. The peasant class became a caste; the peasant was deprived of every hope of leaving this caste behind. Peoples that have separated into castes all have one trait in common: they all cling rigidly for thousands of years to their native costume.



Nightdresses, Chemises
Combinations. Skirts

TAUSKY & MANDL

WIEN, I. WIPPLINGERSTRASSE 16
ECKE SCHWERTGASSE

MEINE HERREN!

Es gereicht mir zum Vergnügen, Ihnen mitteilen zu können, daß ich Gelegenheit hatte, die von Ihrer Firma erzeugten Wäschestücke zu begutachten. Ich finde, daß dieselben in praktischer Ausführung und hygienischer Hinsicht den Anforderungen höchster Kultur entsprechen. Durch den Bestand Ihrer Firma ist man nicht mehr genötigt Night-gowns and Combinations in England zu bestellen. ©©©

WIEN, 12. August 1902.

Hochachtungsvoll ADOLF LOOS

61 Advertisement by the firm of Tausky & Mandl for women's nightdresses, chemises, combinations, and skirts. Adolf Loos's endorsement reads, "Gentlemen! It gives me great pleasure to be able to inform you that I have had the opportunity to evaluate articles of underclothing

manufactured by your firm. I find these articles to be of serviceable quality and hygienic with respect to the requirements of the highest standards of culture. Because of your firm's existence, it is no longer necessary to order nightgowns and combinations from England." From Das Andere, no. 1, 1903.

Then the peasant became free. But only externally. Internally he still felt inferior to the city dweller. The latter was the master. The hundreds of years of servitude were still too much in the peasant's bones.

But now a new generation arises. It has declared war on the costume. In doing so it has a good ally—the threshing machine. Wherever the threshing machine wages its campaign, it is over forever for the picturesque old clothes. They now are going just where they belong: to the costume-hiring agency.

These are heartless words. But they must be spoken, for there have even been clubs formed in Austria out of false sentimentality that endeavor to preserve for the peasant the stigma of his servitude. Clubs that supported exactly the opposite would be much more indispensable. For even we city dwellers are still at a very far remove from the clothing that the great civilized nations wear. Of course on the outside we look quite passable. There we could hold our own with the others. We could manage, if we allowed ourselves to be dressed by one of the top Viennese tailors, to be taken for civilized Europeans on the sidewalks of London, New York, or Peking. But woe to us if the top layers of our clothing fell off piece by piece and we stood there in our underclothes! Then everyone would realize that we simply put on our European clothes like a mask, and that underneath we still wear the national costume.

But it is either/or. We have to decide. Either we have the courage of our convictions to differentiate ourselves from the rest of mankind and dress in a national costume, or we want to cling to the rest of humanity and dress as they do. But it certainly lacks refinement to play the cultivated individual only on the outside, to seek to dissimulate by means of the articles of clothing that are within the stranger's view.

While our top layer of clothing separates us by a whole world from the peasant, our undergarments, our underclothes, are exactly the same as those of the peasant. In Budapest they wear the same underpants as the *csikos*,¹ in Vienna people wear the same underpants as the Lower Austrian farmer. What is it then that so much separates us in terms of our underwear from the rest of the civilized nations?

The fact is that we lag at least fifty years behind the stage in which England finds itself at present. There, knit underclothes have vanquished woven underclothes. We have had no great revolutions to take note of in the course of this century in terms of the top layers of clothing. All the more decisive have they been in underclothes. A century ago people still wrapped themselves entirely in linen. But in the course of this century we have gradually set about restoring to the knitwear manufacturer his proper domain. We proceeded step by step, from one part of the body to the next. We began with the feet, and then moved upward. At present, the work of the knitter is directed to the whole lower portion of the body. Meanwhile the upper body must still put up with the fact that a linen undershirt takes the place of a knit one.

We began with the feet. In this area we have also made progress. We no longer wear foot wrappings but stockings. Yet we still wear linen underpants, an article of clothing already extinct in England and America.

If a man came to Vienna from the Balkan states, where they still wear foot wrappings, and went in search of a lingerie shop where he could buy his customary

foot covering, he would be met with the news—incomprehensible to him—the foot wrappings cannot be bought in Vienna. He could, of course, order them “Well, what do people wear here then?” “Socks.” “Socks? Why, they are very uncomfortable. And too hot in the summer. Doesn’t anyone wear foot wrappings anymore?” “Oh, yes, the very old people. But the young people find foot wrappings uncomfortable.” And so the good man from the Balkans decides with a heavy heart to make the attempt to wear socks. In doing so, he arrives at a new rung of human culture.

Philippopolis² is to Vienna as Vienna is to New York. In the latter city, then, let us try to buy—not foot wrappings, for no one would understand us at all—but rather linen underpants. I must ask the reader to reread the preceding conversation once again and for “the man from the Balkan states” substitute “the Viennese man,” and for “foot wrappings” substitute “linen underpants.” For the conversation would wind up exactly the same way! I am speaking from personal experience. I have heard the original of this conversation, the one concerning the foot wrappings, so spoken that it is comprehensible only in the Viennese context.

Whoever finds woven material more comfortable than knit material, let him continue to wear it forever. For it would be foolish to impose a form of culture on someone, a form of culture that does not correspond to his innermost essence. The fact is that for the man of high culture, linen has become uncomfortable. And so we must bide our time until it begins to become uncomfortable for us Austrians too. It was the increasing participation in physical exercise, in sports activities that came from England, that resulted in the growing aversion to linen underclothes. The starched dickey, collar, and cuffs also are a hindrance to the sportsman. And the unstarched dickey is the forerunner of the unstarched collar. Both of them have the sole task of paving the way for the knit shirt and the flannel shirt.

Knit underclothes, however, do signal one great danger. They are really only meant for people who want to wash for the sake of their own cleanliness. But many Germans see in the wearing of knit underclothes a *carte blanche* for not having to wash anymore. All inventions designed to cut down on washing originate in Germany. From Germany came cellulose-fiber underclothes, the fake shirtfront, and the tie with an attached dickey made out of the same fabric. In Germany originates the lesson that washing is not beneficial to one’s health and that one can wear the same knit shirt for years—so long as one’s acquaintances do not positively forbid it. An American cannot imagine a German without his fresh white but fake dickey. This is manifested in the caricature of the German which the American comic strips have correctly presented. The German can be recognized by the tip of his dickey, which always peeks out from his waistcoat. It is only the second-class citizens in American comics who wear fake shirtfronts: the tramp, the vagabond.

The false dickey is truly no symbol of angelical cleanliness. It is all the more unpleasant that this article of clothing, which so pitifully testifies to the cultural position of a people, is to be found in the section of the exhibition in which our best tailors have their displays. It lowers the level of that entire elegant section.

A new commercial type is represented by the “tailors and outfitters.” The outfitter stocks everything that pertains to a man’s attire. It is no easy task. He is responsible to the buyer for creating a fashionable impression with every article



64 Joseph Olbrich in characteristically stylish suit and tie, circa 1900.

that he sells. One can demand from a well-run fashion shop that one be able to grab from its shelves at random without coming up with anything tasteless or unrefined. The outfitter must make no concessions to the masses. The excuse that other kinds of tastes must be attended to as well should never be used by first-rate businesses. They should never make a mistake. Once the outfitter does happen to make a mistake, he is obligated to his customers no longer to carry the article in question.

It is difficult to win the leading role in the fashion business, but it is still more difficult to keep it. And yet only the minority of goods are manufactured in the outfitter's workshop. He is primarily a retailer. His relationship to the craftsman is very similar to that of the collector or museum director to the artist. It is incumbent on each alike to pick out the very best from the abundance of what is made. That alone is mental work enough to fill a person's existence.

One must state this clearly if one is inundated, as I am, with anonymous missives which usually express the "suspicion" that a businessman whom I have recommended does not manufacture his own goods. Even if I were to see something improper about this situation—and I do not—I could not spend my time verifying the origin of goods. I am not a detective. It is a matter of indifference to me where they have come from. The main thing is that the businessman be in a position to deliver these particular goods of this particular quality. It makes no difference relative to the objects whether they are at present made in his own workshop or the work is distributed among several outside workshops. This is the only thing that concerns me here.

It is distressing to find so many ready-made, pre-tied ties in the numerous women's fashion displays. Even on men these bow ties look very ordinary. The necktie that displays a knot or a ribbon in front and is fastened in the back belongs under the rubric of paper underwear and paste diamonds. I will pass over in silence that kind of tie which is wound twice around the neck, attempting to attain its pretty effect with the aid of a piece of cardboard covered with silk fabric and some "patented" details; it is the favorite necktie of our suburban dandies. But the fact that our Viennese girls and women make use of such surrogates for the tying of a bow shows that the often celebrated Viennese chic is in the process of dying out. I wish there were a shop in Vienna whose owner would proudly be able to answer every seeker of pre-tied ties, "Pre-tied ties? No! We do not carry them!"*

*The desire for a firm that does not carry any pre-tied ties has long since been fulfilled a hundred times over! Josef Hoffmann writes in *Querschnitt*, December 1930, concerning these ties with cardboard insets which he too wore at that time and which I have criticized that they were self-tied. That is a lie. I have been wanting to lodge a complaint against this reproach of his. Hoffmann believes that I further slander Olbrich's memory by criticizing him for wearing stylish suits along with these cardboard-inset ties. This is, of course, a criticism that I cannot make of Hoffmann, even if I would want to. 1931. [Hoffmann's comments in *Querschnitt* appear on p. 848 under the heading "Complaints." The text is as follows: "Dear Editor-in-Chief! In the last issue of *Querschnitt* . . . I read a reply by *Adolf Loos* in answer to what was in a certain sense a directly intended mockery of the excessively objective Gretor. Weeks later, he finally takes advantage of this opportunity thoroughly to slander me and my long dead friends Olbrich and Moser. If it is in fact true that Loos always wore self-tied ties, if he did not deliberately make up the story about them himself, then he must know, were his memory a little bit better, that we did the same. But his tale of the checkered frock coat with the velvet collar is surely one of his real fabrications, and has sprung from his never-dying hatred. I would gladly have kept silent if Olbrich and Moser were still alive and could defend themselves. Moser and I at one time felt the duty—since there was nothing in the whole world but copies and bad imitations of all past styles—to free ourselves from ornament and above all to begin with the simplest means so as to finally bring about a complete stylistic transformation in building. Our reasons for this may perhaps seem superfluous today, but nevertheless it must have been necessary at the time."—Ed.]

Who does not know of Potemkin's villages, the ones that Catherine's cunning favorite built in the Ukraine?¹ They were villages of canvas and pasteboard, villages intended to transform a visual desert into a flowering landscape for the eyes of Her Imperial Majesty. But was it a whole city which that cunning minister was supposed to have produced?

Surely such things are only possible in Russia!

But the Potemkin city of which I wish to speak here is none other than our dear Vienna herself. It is a hard accusation; it will also be hard for me to succeed in proving it. For to do so I need listeners with a very fine sense of justice, such listeners, unfortunately, as are scarcely to be found in our city nowadays.

Anyone who tries to pass himself off as something better than he is is a swindler; he deserves to be held in general contempt, even if no one has been harmed by him. But if someone attempts to achieve this effect with false jewels and other imitations? There are countries where such a man would suffer the same fate. But in Vienna we have not yet come so far. There is only a small circle of people who would feel that in such a case an immoral act has occurred, that they have been swindled. But today it is not only by means of the fake watch chain, not only by the furnishings of one's residence (which consist of outright imitations), but also by one's residence itself, the building in which one lives, that everyone wants to make himself out to be something more than he is.

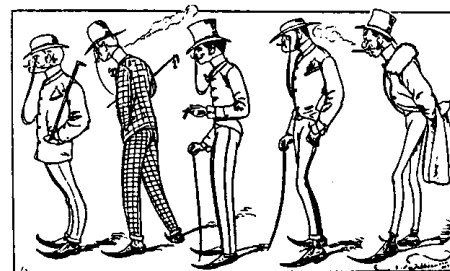
Whenever I stroll along the Ring, it always seems to me as if a modern Potemkin had wanted to carry out his orders here, as if he had wanted to persuade somebody that in coming to Vienna he had been transported into a city of nothing but aristocrats.

Whatever the Italy of the Renaissance produced in the way of lordly palaces was plundered in order to conjure up as if by magic a new Vienna for Her Majesty the Mob. A new Vienna where only those people lived who could afford to occupy an entire palace from socle to cornice line. On the ground floor were the stables; on the low-ceilinged, intermediate mezzanine level were the servants; on the first of the upper stories, with its rich and elaborate architecture, were the banquet and ceremonial rooms; above them were the residential and sleeping quarters. The Viennese landlord very much enjoyed owning such a palace; the tenant also enjoyed living in one. The simple man, who had rented only one room and a w.c. on the uppermost floor, was overcome with a blissful feeling of feudal splendor and lordly grandeur whenever he looked at the building he lived in from the outside. Does the owner of an imitation diamond not gaze fondly at the glittering glass? Oh, the tale of the deceiver deceived!

It will be objected that I impute false intentions to the Viennese. It is the architects who are at fault; the architects should not have built this way. I must defend the architects. For every city gets the architects it deserves. Supply and demand regulate architectural form. He whose work most accords with the wishes of the populace will have the most to build. And the most capable architect may depart from this life without ever having received a commission. The others, however, create schools of followers. Then one builds in a certain way because he has become accustomed to it. And he must build this way. The building speculator would most dearly like to have his facades entirely plastered from top to bottom. It costs the least. And at the same time, he would be acting in the truest, most correct, and most artistic way. But people would not want to

Potemkin City

Ver Sacrum, July 1898



79 Caricature from Figaro: Wiener Luft, depicting "the passing afternoon parade on the Kärntnerring." 1883.

move into the building. And so, in the interest of rentability, the landlord is forced to nail on a particular kind of facade, and only this kind.

Yes, literally nail on! For these Renaissance and Baroque palaces are not actually made out of the material of which they seem. Some pretend that they are made of stone, like the Roman and Tuscan palaces; others of stucco, like the buildings of the Viennese Baroque. But they are neither. Their ornamental details, their corbels, festoons, cartouches, and denticulation, are nailed-on poured cement. Of course, this technique too, which comes into use for the first time in this century, is perfectly legitimate. But it does not do to use it with forms whose origin is intimately bound up with a specific material simply because no technical difficulties stand in the way. It would have been the artist's task to find a new formal language for new materials. Everything else is imitation.

But this was not even a matter of concern to the Viennese of the last architectural epoch. He was delighted, in fact, to be able to imitate with such lowly materials the more expensive material that served as the model. Like the authentic parvenu that he was, he believed that the others would not notice the deception. That is what the parvenu always thinks. At first he is sure that the false shirt dickeys, the false fur collars, all of the imitation objects with which he surrounds himself fulfill their roles perfectly. It is only those who stand above him, those who have already surmounted the parvenu stage and are among the initiated, who smile at his futile exertions. And in time the parvenu's eyes too open up. First he recognizes one inauthenticity among his friends, then another, in things he had earlier thought were authentic. Then, resigned, he gives them up for himself as well.

80 View of the north side of the Kärntnerring, Vienna, as it appeared in 1873. Wood engraving by F. W. Bader, after a drawing by L. E. Petrovits.

81 View of the south side of the Kärntnerring, Vienna, as it appeared in 1873. Wood engraving by F. W. Bader, after a drawing by L. E. Petrovits.

Poverty is no disgrace. Not everyone can come into the world the lord of a feudal estate. But to pretend to one's fellow men that one has such an estate is ridiculous and immoral. After all, should we be ashamed to live in a rental apartment in a building with many others who are our social equals? Should we be ashamed of the fact that there are materials that are too expensive for us to build with? Should we be ashamed to be nineteenth-century men and not men who want to live in a building whose architectural style belongs to an earlier age? If we ceased to be ashamed, you would see how quickly we would acquire an architecture suited to our own times. This is what we have anyway, you will object. But I mean an architectural style that we will be able to pass on to posterity in good conscience, an architectural style that even in the distant future will be pointed to with pride. But we have not yet found this architectural style in our century in Vienna.

Whether one tries to create out of canvas, pasteboard, and paint the wood huts where happy peasants dwell, or to erect out of brick and poured cement would-be stone palaces where feudal lords seem to reside, it is the same in principle. Potemkin's spirit has hovered over Viennese architecture in this century.



80



81