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'Joseph Masheck wears his erudition with wonderful wit. His ambition to reclaim Loos for art comes across with vigor and passion. To paraphrase Adolf Loos, a monument isn't an everyday occurrence but something that makes you stop and take notice. Masheck's new book is a monumental contribution to the Loos literature – ambitiously conceived, thoroughly provocative, and deeply insightful.'

Joan Ockman, Distinguished Senior Fellow,
School of Design, University of Pennsylvania

'Masheck's fresh interpretation of the work of Adolf Loos places the emphasis on the specific nature of his architecture rather than on the cultural scope of his critical writing. In so doing he demonstrates not only how Loos's work was influenced by very varied traditions ranging from Biedermeier to Art Nouveau, but also how his abstract approach to form anticipated in a specific way the discourse of American minimalist art.'

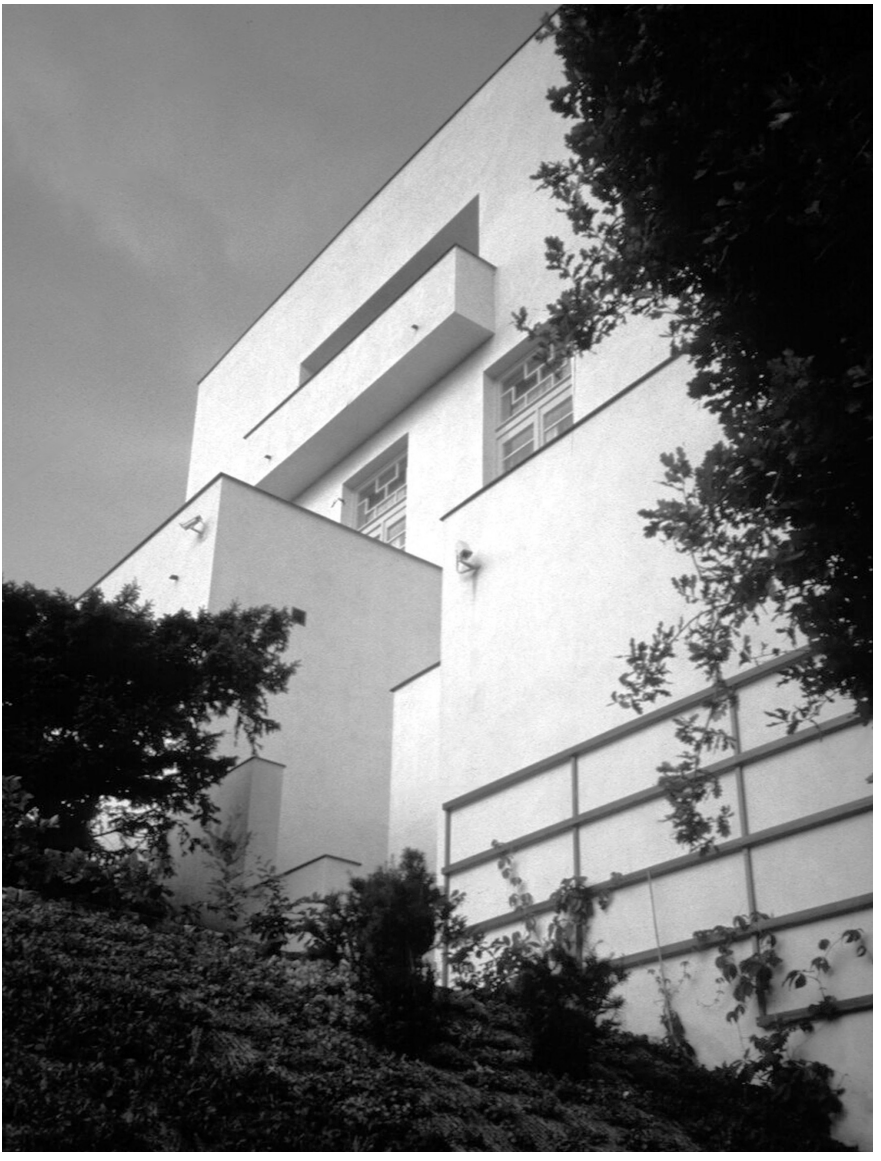
Kenneth Frampton, Ware Professor of Architecture,
Columbia University

'This is a provocative take on Adolf Loos at a time when criticism has exhausted its theoretical resources, and the near past seems almost out of reach. Each chapter of the book disbands the established interpretive canons if only to proclaim a diachronic affinity between Loos, Constructivism and Minimalism of the 1960s. Joseph Masheck is cogent and persuasive.'

Gevork Hartoonian, Professor of Architecture,
University of Canberra

'Proto-minimalist or Architectural Dadaist? The enemy of ornament or the last "classicist"? Who better than Joseph Masheck in this penetrating book to guide us round the paradoxes of this dandified enemy of ornamental invention, whose most prominent masterpiece is a bronze-and-marble colonnaded gentlemen's outfitter!'

Joseph Rykwert, Cret Professor of Architecture Emeritus,
University of Pennsylvania



Frontispiece: Adolf Loos, Müller Villa, Prague, 1928–29. Rear of the house seen from below. Photograph by the author.

ADOLF LOOS

The Art of Architecture

Joseph Masheck

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In memoriam

OTTOKAR UHL

(1931 Wolfsberg in Kärnten–2011 Vienna)

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PREFACE

The buildings and writings of Adolf Loos (1870–1933) are now often enough taken, or mistaken, in the cultural sphere, as exemplary of an early modern iconoclasm which, if not downright nihilistic, was out to deny art as such, as if with some Dadaist form of anti-architecture. In spite of a longstanding interest in Duchamp, I always suspected that Loos was something more than simply the Duchamp of architecture; but how so? Considering aspects of his contribution, the present book offers makings of an answer. Not that Loos wasn't iconoclastic; but his was the witty and knowing iconoclasm of the believer, on behalf of the great art of architecture. Against the commonplace of Loos as mere ironist, part of the history of architecture possibly only as a critical curmudgeon clearing the way to modernism rather than as building and advancing it, the following thematic essays take off from the assumption that as a practitioner Loos belongs as much to the history of art as any other great modern artist.

Kenneth Frampton offers a uniquely qualified double negative, speaking of the "dissolution of classical aesthetics" by "both the positive and the negative avant-garde," sometimes to perversely sublime effect, of "Duchamp's anti-painting painting or Adolf Loos's anti-architecture architecture." He points up how Loos "makes a distinction between architecture and art" in his 'Architecture' essay of 1910, "oscillat[ing] between describing the house as conservative and the art work, art, as subversive," only to end "with this beautiful and ironic passage, 'and so the man loves his house and hates art.'"[1] Indeed there is irony there, and it is not at odds with art. 'Architecture' also salutes the great romantic-classicist of a hundred years before, Karl Friedrich Schinkel; and if the Loos of 1910 seems not to

vie with Schinkel in sublimity, his genuine artfulness has been sufficiently forgotten, notwithstanding his latter-day cultural celebrity, for him to deserve in his own right, now a century later still, some of the honor of his own memorable salute to Schinkel: "May the light of this towering figure shine upon our forthcoming generation of architects!" It doesn't matter that Loos never got to build the projected public buildings which to his mind might have justified that; his informal modern formalism was the lesson which was needed, and may well be again.

In New York, Loos had to wash dishes for pocket money, and part of the time he slept in a YMCA: what a waste it would have been to struggle through that just to make jokey, one-liner art. No; Loos's sarcasm never got the better of his wit, nor his wit of his intelligence. He did as much as any other architect after Otto Wagner, the grand old Viennese master of the prior generation, to bring forth modernism at the opening of the twentieth century. A relative youngster who took to calling himself Le Corbusier was one whose art this supposed non-artist influenced. Loos showed how the end of the established academic tradition, far from implying the end of what was entitled to be considered the art, might allow the new modern architecture to inherit what truth of the old tradition deserved to survive.

Philosophically, his skeptical outlook and blunt eschewal of obfuscation sometimes affiliate Loos with the tougher-than-thou logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, which sought to clean up modern life by taking out the presumed rubbish of metaphysics. Extreme architectural functionalism, which Loos made possible but to which he himself was not constrained, was similarly framed as a truth of which only those strong enough to live value-free were worthy. However, the more one considers even his most radical architecture, the less like a standard functionalist Loos seems. If anything, he parallels less the logical positivist Rudolf Carnap than the Ludwig Wittgenstein who actually drew back from the Vienna Circle which he had helped to make possible. Even where Loos notoriously states that at least the private house should not be a matter of art, it would be as dangerous as with Nietzsche, not to mention Loos's friend Karl Kraus, to lose track of the ironist's deft control of meaning. Loos's standing caricature was inevitably encouraged by his delight in playing the outrageous avant-gardist: the posture which this really very much 'true' architect's most famous text, 'Ornament and Crime,' perpetrated to the distraction of all else.

What confuses modernists without consoling conservatives is how his obvious radicalism allowed of perpetuating some essence of the sacrosanct classical tradition 'without portfolio,' as it were, literally in his own little

school, quite independently of the academic system. This must be why the less insightful moderns and the more insecure conservatives shy away from major cases where Loos was close to the gravitational center of canonical fine-art architecture but decidedly on his own, inevitably idiosyncratic-seeming terms. Thus his early remodeling of the Villa Karma, near Montreux in Switzerland, in 1904–06, is a modernist equivalent – how dare it be! – to one of the masterworks of the aristocratic Renaissance palatial type, Giuliano da Sangallo's Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano, of the early 1480s. Anyone who juxtaposes the two works can develop a list of surprising similarities. Here and now the details are not significant: what is significant is that if a house – yes, the supposedly excluded Loosian category – looks so much like a great work of architectural art, perhaps the burden of proof that it is non-art does not lie with the artist, ironist or not. The more one considers the art-historical embeddedness of his work, the less satisfied one can be with the working stereotype of Adolf Loos as anti-artist pure and simple.

To some extent the problem concerns the development of understandably anti-aesthetic 'functionalist' thinking, in more extreme form than whatever stemmed from Le Corbusier (himself ever respectful of French classical tradition), especially in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in Central Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. But though the Czech-born Viennese Loos was eventually taken as a prophet of functionalism, he was never prepared to reduce architecture to mere functionalist-utilitarian determinism himself. His ingenious notion of the *Raumplan* ('spatial plan'), though architecturally clever, obviously had its impracticalities, including the complication and expense of an engineer collaborator, just so as to have the floors of rooms occur on discontinuous levels, not to mention the additional complexity of any subsequent alteration in response to changing needs: hardly the economy and efficiency generally advertised by functionalism. Comparing buildings by Loos with buildings by dyed-in-the-wool Czech functionalists also tends to show up the art in Loos which otherwise grateful functionalists supposedly so bravely eschewed. And still people who should know better take Loos's de-ornamentalized simplicity as simple point of origin of a general-purpose 'Bauhaus functionalism.' As may become clear by the end of the present reconsideration of Loos as an artist-architect, to extrapolate further from Loos as proto-functionalist to Loos as grandfather of 'minimalism,' meaning now, however, not the best sculpture of the 1960s and 1970s but merely a fashionably frigid decorative mannerism in repressively up-tight 'luxury' architecture and design *c.* 2000, can only betray ignorance of Loos – as if all 'degrees zero' were the same.

The present reading of the master's work should go some way to redressing a sense of Loos as not having an artistic 'personality' – ironically that was precisely how his early disciple and earliest advocate, the contemporary Loosian art historian Franz Glück, sought to introduce him to the cultural world. Ultimately, however, a few comments of the cultural critic Theodor Adorno (noted in chapter 7), possibly deriving from vexed expressions of Walter Benjamin's fairly remedial interest in Loos in the last years of the architect's life, have issued in a vague sense of Loos's being diminished as accessory to a conclusive juridical 'failure' of the modernist architecture he did much to bring about; that he must surely have gone down with the ship of modernism, except insofar as postmodernism managed to secure him a theoretical afterlife on the basis of his writings alone, above all 'Ornament and Crime' – and that's *not* 'Ornament *as* Crime' (chapter 4).

The turn against architectural modernism inevitably implicated Loos, however mistakenly. But far from incidental in this matter is a standing caricature of modernist architecture as definitively committed, whether idealistically or materialistically, to glass, whether as potentially transcendent, in line with the light-mysticism of German expressionist architects – notably in *Glasarchitektur*, by Bruno Taut's associate Paul Scheerbart (1914) – or else as, so to speak, a materially transparent material capable of rendering naked the tectonics of structure (something which has always troubled conservatives, making odd company for Adorno to keep). If Adorno preferred to oppose the latter, he doesn't seem as prepared to frame it as wittily as André Breton's Corbusian caricature of glass architecture connoting coldness and lack of privacy in his surrealist novella *Nadja* (1928): "Me, I'll continue to dwell in my glass house … where I rest all night on a glass bed with glass sheets …"[2] Eventually Adorno and his many followers will seem dismayed, spiritually affronted, by expanses of glass in (later) modern architecture as inhospitable toward human presence: presumably rejecting by virtue of slickness and reflexivity anything like 'dwelling.'

Some analysis is in order, of the critical situation in which this architect and his reputation have been implicated in this in preparation for moving on with a fresh look at Loos and his work. By 1933 Walter Benjamin might even seem to have set out some such terms, as in the section 'To Live Without Leaving Traces,' in his text 'Short Shadows II' (1933; 701–02).[3] If anything, however, Benjamin had been attracted to just such slickness as promising a fresh modern start, free of 'aura,' though a certain *topos* which he employs seems confusingly ambivalent. How Adorno, in as it were the slipstream of Benjamin, would seem not to mind effectively pinning what today is too easily taken for anti-

modernist moral distaste on Adolf Loos, it would fall to Massimo Cacciari to straighten out. Let us briefly look at the critical situation more closely.

Art-historically, the problem is that, though in a developmental sense Adolf Loos's architecture did make Le Corbusier's architecture possible, and the different but still glassier architecture of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and others, Loos simply never built or even projected any building with an unconventionally large area of glass. Hence he should not be blamed for this major feature of an increasingly hostile anti-modernist caricature of all modernist architecture as so much 'functionalism' (a category in the development of a special strain of which, the Czech, Loos had in fact played an inspiring part). Indeed, the domestic architecture of Loos, which comprises the major part of his production, is sufficiently closed unto itself to be marked, all parties agree, by a strong sense of privacy. Now if we ask where the dubious anti-modernist Loosian caricature came from, the likely answer is Walter Benjamin, whose interest in architecture seems to have blossomed in 1927, as he reports in a letter of that August to Hugo von Hofmannsthal,[4] which is to say, during Loos's fluorescence of fame a few years before his death.

Loos and Karl Kraus, the great anti-journalistic journalist (1874–1936), were like two peas in a pod, as Benjamin knew when he wrote about them, possibly by the time of a fragmentary text called 'Karl Kraus,' of 1928, but definitely by that of the substantial article 'Karl Kraus,' of late 1931, which is actually dedicated to Glück, the Loos enthusiast. In the article Benjamin appreciates Loos's basic notion of "separat[ing] the work of art from the article of use" as akin to Kraus's campaign to separate "information and the work of art" in journalistic circumstances; hence "[t]he hack journalist is, in his heart, at one with the ornamentalist" (op. cit., in n. 3; 434), meaning, for his readiness to fill pages with such fluff that it hardly matters whether it's indulgent art-for-art's sake or the most artless functionalism. (Loos may have tended to be weakly accused of the latter by Adorno and others just because he couldn't possibly be guilty of the former.) Benjamin wants to support the uncompromising criticality of Kraus towards "a society that is in the process of building houses with glass walls, and terraces extending far into the living rooms that are no longer living rooms" (438). However, no house whatsoever by Loos even approximates to this characterization, and Benjamin may even have had in mind Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's new and splendid, and broadly Loosian-boxy, Tugendhat Villa, of 1930, at Brno, Loos's home town, in the Czech Lands of the Austrian empire, with its living room wall of mammoth glass plates that in good weather could be lowered into the basement at the press of a button. A couple of years later,

in 1933, 'Experience and Poverty,' in 'Short Shadows, II,' includes another critical barb against Scheerbart's "culture of glass" where Benjamin speaks quite far-fetchedly of "adjustable, movable glass-covered (*sic*) dwellings of the kind since built by Loos and Le Corbusier" (733). To read Benjamin with scrupulous scriptural attention, in search of insight into Adolf Loos's architectural art, would seem to be quite mistaken.

The Kraus essay mentions as borrowed from Goethe a memorable figure of the philistine, would-be art connoisseur running his hand over the surface of an engraving or a relief in order to feel it by gross physical sensation instead of by the sublimated detachment of sight, as the Benjamin who eschews the aura of bourgeois art and is inclined to favor the very slickness of caricaturally modernist glass architecture, would agree (even if detachment might for Adorno become a question of alienation). From an unpublished fragment dating to 1931 or 1932 it is evident that the Goethean *topos* was borrowed from the first serious book on Loos, just recently published: "While reading Goethe's rebuke to philistines and many other art lovers who like to touch copper engravings and reliefs, the idea came to him [Loos] that anything that can be touched cannot be a work of art, and anything that is a work of art should be placed out of reach" (554).[5] The source quoted and cited is the 'Outline of the Personality' of Loos by Franz Glück, prefaced to the young Loosian architect Heinrich Kulka's *Adolf Loos: Das Werk des Architekten* (Vienna: Schroll, 1931). Whether or not Loos himself ever employed the figure,[6] it relates to his despised 'graphic-art' approach to architectural design and perhaps even of scarification as a form of tattoo.

On the part of Theodor Adorno, any sense of antipathy toward Loos as straw-man of a dehumanizing architectural functionalism does seem likely influenced by Benjamin's portrayals. By the time of the posthumous *Aesthetic Theory* one might almost be reading reactions to modernist church architecture by Catholics who regret the reforms of Vatican II. If this has not been reckoned, perhaps it is only because the low-intensity engagement of both major critics with actual modern architecture acted as a passive cause, lowering critical resistance to iconoclastic anti-modernism under postmodernism. It was a wholesale postmodernism, essentially literary in thrust, that caused much 'cultural' excitement by locating architecture for the first time in the forefront of a comprehensive shift in master style, with probably the most brutal anti-modernism abroad since the ruckus that Adolf Loos caused with his 'Ornament and Crime' lecture-essay of 1909.

There is eventually a recovery from dismissiveness in the challenging but sympathetic writings of Massimo Cacciari, after Adorno's death. In

the text known as 'Loos and His Angel' (1981), while certain unspecified exterior "compositional details" of the Steiner, Horner and Strasser houses, of 1910–19, seem somehow unpleasantly mechanical, even if "strictly connected to the interior rooms," the 1922 Rufer House's fenestrational "eurythmy" pleases with a "finished, classical presence" that counters modern cultural deracination (171).[7] (One hopes this claim does not owe too much to the classical figural reliefs embedded in the façade, because the fenestration of the earlier Horner House, for one, is already beautifully eurythmic.) Adorno the musicologist would have noticed the point which Cacciari makes, by means of specifically modernist music, of the happy parataxis of the Rufer fenestration: even modern "dissonance must be composed: even the extreme dissonances must be the object of composition" (172); and how he proceeds to speak of "the polyphonic dissonances of Loosian composition" (192). The facing of the Rufer House is neither a concealment nor a reflection of "the truth of the interior" (173), but is taken as an essentially linguistic disposition; and further on, where the Loosian house is typically boxy (*but opaque*), Loos's calculated perfection of the exterior is likened to Kraus as *linguistically* transparent. Moreover, there is outright denial of the openness found so alarming when mistakenly ascribed to excessive glazing: "This exterior does not express, does not produce, does not have transparences – and for this very reason it may (perhaps) enclose an interior, an authentic place of the collected. It leaves open, so to speak, the possibility of an interior" (182) – a reading which entails the essentially modernist conception of *volume* over and against mass. How mistaken even great critics have been to sloganize against Loos for a caricaturally inhuman modernist architecture of steel and glass: Cacciari is quite right to insist that "Loos cannot in any way be seen as part of Scheerbartian Glaskultur" (187).

All told, it seems risky to take as definitive Adorno's late comments on architectural modernism in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), which are too abbreviated by over-familiarity, and possibly crabbed by disappointment, to hold up in changing circumstances – as if they stood ready to serve the undialectical abolition of modernist 'utopian' idealism by a postmodernism with nothing better – surely not capitalist materialism – to offer.[8] Better to read back through Adorno's challengingly subtle essay 'Functionalism Today' (1965), which acknowledges as point of departure a Loosian distinction of the purposeful and the artistic – which Benjamin had seen as affiliating him with Karl Kraus.[9] Surprisingly enough, in view of the position eventually imputed to Adorno, this most famous Adorno architectural text actually makes no

mention of glass or steel at all, only a single theoretically useless mention of stone and concrete.

Looking back further, to Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (1951), we can see what the later anti-modernist caricatures were based on, that is, the actually more Corbusian than Loosian notion of a 'machine for living' as a supposed dehumanization of architecture by reduction to mechanical utility. By rights that should even be ruled unfair to Le Corbusier, whose call for artistic awareness has so often been conveniently, or cynically, ignored (assuming that calls for formal value are calls for a human benefit, *pace* extreme 'productivist' functionalism). "The functional modern habitations designed from a *tabula rasa*," Adorno writes here, "are living-cases manufactured by experts for philistines, or factory sites that have strayed into the consumption sphere, devoid of all relation to the occupant ..." (38; note the theme of 'bad' detachment).[10] Even forms originating by mechanical determination could be fetishized as superficial style: "From a distance the difference between the Vienna Workshops and the Bauhaus is no longer so considerable. Purely functional curves, having broken free of their purpose, are now becoming just as ornamental as the basic structures of Cubism" (39). Adorno must have faced something like the affective loss of the reactionaries. He even employs an affirmative variation on the Goethe *topos* of the caressing sweep of an appreciative hand, saying of American roads, "they are without the mild, soothing, un-angular character of things that have felt the touch of hands or their immediate implements. It is as if no-one had ever passed their hand over the landscape's hair" (48). Instances of a modern corporate architecture of glass as bourgeois-liberal charade of 'transparency' are found as well, as "the old injustice is not changed by a lavish display of light ... but is in fact concealed by the gleaming transparency of rationalized big business ..." (58). Thus it is by tracing back almost to Benjamin's demise that Adorno connects, however unreliably, with him on Kraus and, as if by induction, Loos.[11]

Without pretending that this complex affair concerning the reputation of the artist-architect Adolf Loos has been exhaustively plumbed, this account is enough to illuminate the problem of Loos as a major case of cultural critique all too estranged from art history.

Rather than contend with the received wisdom, let us refresh the question by as it were standing back and allowing Loos's work and, to some extent, even his thought, to show itself as participating in fine art as such, on the principle that if it walks like art and talks like art it may be art, not to mention surprisingly beautiful as such. I put it this way because as a college

sophomore taking my first course in architectural history, with Everard M. Upjohn (grandson of Connecticut State Capitol Upjohn and great-grandson of Trinity Church Wall Street Upjohn), I could understand how Loos's work had an important place in the unfolding of architectural modernity, but I wondered if it would ever actually appeal aesthetically to me: maybe, like much Northern art, it must prove interesting *instead of* beautiful. I had seen the most accessible Viennese works as a student and liked and respected them. But I don't think I buckled down to study Loos until my thoughts were turned to Loos indirectly in confronting the eighteenth-century Berkeley House, near Newport, Rhode Island, just about a decade ago, and being inspired by it to ponder the relation of vernacular building to sophisticated architecture (and of modernism to generalized classicism), which put me squarely and firmly in mind of my never forgotten but theretofore admired only from a distance Adolf Loos.

My art-historical interest in Adolf Loos, along with my interest in Wittgenstein, and in the kindred pursuits by both of a bare-bones, uncompromised truth, had been stimulated, just as I finished an academic dissertation under Wittkower (and, when he died, Dorothea Nyberg) on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architecture, by Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin's then new *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (1973). There Karl Kraus, with his own terse rhetorical concision, also figures. Indeed, that is where many of us first encountered his most famous pronouncement: "Adolf Loos and I – he literally and I grammatically – have done nothing more than show that there is a distinction between an urn and a chamber pot and that it is this distinction above all that provides culture with elbow room. The others, those who fail to make this distinction, are divided into those who use the urn as a chamber pot and those who use the chamber pot as an urn."[12] Curious about what might be better than nihilistic in Loos and Wittgenstein, I wasn't yet sure that there was anything more in Kraus; but having grown to appreciate him made me wonder how the critical situation came about, as I became more familiar with Loos's work, stimulated in particular by Benedetto Gravagnuolo's *Adolf Loos: Theory and Works* (1982) and Yehuda Safran and Wilfried Wang's important Arts Council exhibition catalogue *The Architecture of Adolf Loos* (1985). These works initiated in me a sufficiently aesthetic awareness of Loos's architecture, almost without realizing it, to see that, whatever else they are, culturally speaking, his buildings definitely do not present themselves as self-evidently anti-artistic, let alone ugly, quite regardless of how charmingly naughty one might like to consider them if they did.

This book proceeds in nine thematic chapters, variously general and particular, theoretic and concrete. The first raises the problematic question of Loos as an artist-architect. While Loos might be both an artist and an anti-artist (or architect and anti-architect), any possibility that he might be exclusively an anti-artist is undermined by certain evident similarities of formal thinking with characteristically modernist works of art, including Cézanne's and other modernists' in painting. For this chapter a sense of the 'Biedermeier' is appropriate art-historical background for the bringing forth of Loos's live but unhampered awareness of tradition in architecture and design: a fine precedent of stalwart simplicity to which he was to some extent indebted without being at all beholden; and one can understand his apprehensions about its invocation, since what he was up to was anything but a stylistic revival of any sort. So let Biedermeier simplicity lend Loos's simplicity a dimension of historicity, but as nothing like a restraint or limit: on behalf of a liberating modernist formalism rather than in demure revival of a certain mode of respectable Congress-of-Vienna bourgeois-classic simplicity. That on the larger scale even such a distinction must entail art history and thereby art, means that, especially in view of commonalities with early modernist painting, our known ironist can no longer be taken so literally in asserting, for his own rhetorical purposes, that in his view almost no buildings rightly count as architectural art. Even his single most notorious executed work, the 'Looshaus' on the Michaelerplatz, in Vienna, has features in common with unqualified 'art' architecture, of both classic and modern ilk. And if it proves possible to find in the work of a disciple of Loos a direct stylistic evocation of the master, something considerably more than non-art is at stake.

The second chapter deals indirectly with the Loosian question of vernacular architecture, which, though not official fine-arts architecture, is nevertheless a problem of art at grassroots level. Whether something is architectural art or not implicates the question of classical orthodoxy as guaranteed architecture, always and everywhere, as against local homegrown vernaculars (especially with hand-me-down ornament to make them presentable). This question, which had abiding pertinence to Loos's work, is raised indirectly by centering the discussion on a pre-Loosian building, in British colonial America at that – one which would have interested the Anglophile Loos for its crafted character alone, and which may even seem broadly Loosian as one looks into its strongly vernacular aspect.

As a young architect-to-be, Loos actually lived in America for most of three years. The third chapter considers not only his origins and the complex, ambiguous ethnic identity of a young German-speaking Austrian, born in

Moravia, in the Czech Lands, and living by his wits in New York while taking in all he could about architecture; it also speculates on his relationship with the city in the mid-1890s. At the center of the discussion is his first significant building design after returning to Vienna, a projected Jubilee church for the emperor, Franz-Joseph as conceivably influenced by an important 'Beaux-Arts' classical building just rising as Loos left New York for home.

Chapter 4 takes up the ultimately Loosian question of ornament and its elimination from the new architecture. Loos the artist-architect comes into better focus as we begin to understand his theoretical opposition to ornament as not so simple after all. Yes, the people who thought that the way you make a building into architecture is by superadding ornamentation were wrong; but almost the only thing widely known about Loos is seriously flawed: that by referencing tattoo he supposedly equated ornament with primitivity and crime in the lecture-essay of 'Ornament and Crime.' Here fresh attention is given to that challenging text. Loos's second most famous text, 'Architecture,' figures in chapter 5, along with two executed architectural designs by Loos that turn out to employ ornament, contradicting any simplistic sense of its supposedly all-or-nothing theoretical elimination.

The sixth chapter concerns a project that by itself seems frankly ludic, but which might almost symbolize the encounter between the cosmopolitan but Old World classicism that was never far below the horizon of Loos's consciousness and the excitement of a new and extreme American building type, the skyscraper. We may speculate, in connection with Loos's American experience, on his understanding of Louis Henri Sullivan's role in the invention and promulgation of the skyscraper, especially through the essay 'The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered'; yet what could be more ornamental and less functionalist for the headquarters of a large urban American newspaper than to take the form of a single colossal classical column (punning, too, on the typographical meaning of that term).

The possibility of a willful 'architecturelessness' is raised in chapter 7 as a way of coming to terms with Loos's problematic theoretical denial that houses, at least, are or should be works of art, and that most buildings designed by people identified as architects (at least in his historical moment) amount to architecture at all. If in 1910 Picasso had written that because most paintings are not works of art and hence he was not going to consider himself a painter, would that have been taken at face value for the next fifty years as an effective denial that his work could be, or was ever really meant to be, art? Regrettably, this is just how the writings and buildings of Loos are still, *a hundred years later*, widely presented. Attention then turns from such grander claims to Loos's

surprisingly 'green' practice in the remodeling of existing houses in the period of the Great War, and in social housing during several postwar years. Here is a humbler Loos than is usually pondered, but perhaps no less an artist and certainly no less an architect.

Chapter 8 entertains a different Anglo-Austrian question, very much a matter of Loos's work as not so styleless after all: the house that the philosopher Wittgenstein, himself a specter of sorts in Loos's itinerary, built for his sister in Vienna. This building inevitably invites the not so simple question of what it has to do with Loos, as begun by Loos's favorite pupil yet purportedly the work of Wittgenstein himself. Problematic aspects of the project concern not only whether any work of art can stand *sui generis*, outside of art history but also how mere fastidious perfectionism can bring about art.

Finally, under the rubric 'Loos and Minimalism,' the ninth and last chapter reviews some of the historical background to the problematic of so-called 'minimalism' during the last decade. True Minimalism, which was a movement in sculpture in the 1960s and 1970s, had significant historical roots in the constructivism of the period between the world wars, whose architectural counterpart was orthodox functionalism. (Despite what one hears now, it had nothing whatsoever to do with the transcendental aesthetic of 'Less Is More' propounded in architecture by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.) Loos may in the end have a more integral affinity with original 'sixties Minimalism' – when his own work became newly appreciated – than with the 'minimal' as a critical free radical, more recently.

Other essays by the author bearing on Loos: 'Karel Teige: Functionalist and Then Some,' *Art in America* 89/12 (December 2001), 100–05, 128; 'The Vital Skin: Riegl, the Maori and Loos,' in Richard Woodfield, ed., *Framing Formalism: Riegl and the History of Art*, Critical Voices in Art, Theory, and Culture (Amsterdam: G + B Arts International, 2001), 151–82; 'The "One-Walled House": A New Facet to Loos's Dodgy Classicism?' *Word and Image* 23 (2007), 270–74; 'Stalking Loos in Bohemia in 2005,' *Kosmas: Czechoslovak and Central European Journal* 22 (2008), 100–06; 'The Anti-Architect,' *Art Monthly* (London), no. 348 (July–August 2011), 11–14.

A note on punctuation: all quotations here take double quotation marks except for quotations within quotations, which take single quotation marks, along with titles of less than book-length texts, and terms highlighted in 'scare quotes.'

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Finally: the Ariadne Press, of Riverside, Calif., has been most accommodating with respect to the many quotations from Michael Mitchell's translations of Loos's essays in *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays* (ed. Adolf Opel), of 1998, and *On Architecture* (ed. Adolf and Daniel Opel), of 2002, volumes which have rendered much more accessible the range of the architect's writings for English-speaking readers.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAL *The Architecture of Adolf Loos: An Arts Council Exhibition*, ed. Yehuda Safran and Wilfried Wang (1985), 2nd edn. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1987. Especially Loos's 'Architecture' as translated by Wang, pp. 104–09.

OA Adolf Loos, *On Architecture*, ed. Adolf and Daniel Opel, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, Calif.: Ariadne, 2002).

OC Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime*, ed. Adolf Opel, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, Calif.: Ariadne, 1998).

T Adolf Loos, *Trotzdem; 1900-1930*, ed. Adolf Opel (Vienna: Prachner, 1988). Especially 'Architektur,' pp. 90–104.

1

LOOS AND FINE ART

A new overview, reappraising and reinterpreting Adolf Loos (1870–1933) can begin and perhaps end with questions of art and artlessness. For the work of this early modern architect, in theory and practice, is often enough taken as only an extreme case of nihilistic early modern iconoclasm, out to deny art as such and prove all the braver for it. Ironically, Loos is often made to sound like a Marcel Duchamp of anti-architecture even though, ironically enough, he is somehow also cast as a patron saint of ultra-rational architectural functionalism. Different in theory but likewise negative is also a persistent view of the Viennese Loos as happily heartless architectural counterpart to the Vienna Circle of 'logical positivists' in philosophy, with its summary nullifications of whatever might be accused of not being empirical as hopelessly metaphysical – that circle from which Ludwig Wittgenstein, having in some measure made it possible, walked away. Scandalously enough, Loos did make something in the order of a claim that architecture, or, rather, the private house, should not be a matter of art; though as with Nietzsche, it would be dangerous to lose track of the ironist's twists. Rather than contend with the terms of the nihilistic view we might seek to open up the question by teasing out Loos's artfulness, taking Loos more artistically seriously in a variety of aspects.

Misconstrual of Loos has only worsened now that being all too well known an artist has come to imply being a media 'star,' identifiable by performing a role in an art world that is a realm of entertainment rather than by producing notable works of art. Here Loos himself does not help his case by having been a bon vivant who liked creating a stir while managing not to ruffle the basic persona of a scrupulously groomed Anglophile (and Ameriphile)

variety of the turn-of-the-century artist dandy. And as far as the art of architecture, specifically, was concerned, some ambiguity was inevitable. It had long seemed a commonplace that what made a mere non-art building into a work of architectural art was the superaddition of ornament borrowed from one or another canonical historical style (Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical), when Loos came along and claimed that such a conception was an affront to urbanity. The sophisticated modern city-dweller should know better: applied ornamentation, like tattooing, should be evidence of low civility. Surely it was wrongheaded to think that ornament was what made an otherwise unqualified building architectural art: if anything, in modern times ornament was vain and vulgar.

In line with William Morris in theory, if not with the Viennese 'Secession' as offshoot of the Morrisonian Arts and Crafts movement, for designer-artists to be handing over to craftsmen 'artistic' designs for servile execution, no matter how up-to-date, signaled the ruination of craft traditions which had otherwise held artistic authenticity. A valid architecture should be like unselfconscious, unpretentious, local vernacular building, the praises of which are sung in his text 'Architecture' (1910). No wonder confusion set in about it being a fine thing for a building to amount to art, and about what, if anything, was to be the role of an architect who agreed with what Loos was saying.

His signature building as architecture-as-such

Vital to the question of Loos as artist-architect is the case of his signature building, known as the 'Looshaus,' on the Michaelerplatz in central Vienna, designed in 1909 and built in 1910–11. It is true that in the time of this building he was already calling into question in 'Architecture' whether architecture as such, as some say, or at very least whether a house, ought to be conceived as a work of architecture and hence as a work of art. For the time being, we can accept Loos's 'masterpiece,' with the Goldman & Salatsch men's tailoring emporium on the lower two floors and private apartments above, as at least eligible to be counted as architecture. After all, a collective apartment house may have at least the dignity of an individual house (one might even say, 'of many mansions').

Because this heroic upstart of a modern building has stood like a bulwark against the notion that pseudo-historical ornamentation is what qualifies a building to count as architecture and hence art, and its author as an artist-