15. Architecture (1910)

May I take you to the shores of a mountain lake? The sky is blue, the water green and everywhere is profound tranquillity. The clouds and mountains are mirrored in the lake, the houses, farms and chapels as well. They do not look as if they were fashioned by man, it is as if they came straight from God's workshop, like the mountains and trees, the clouds and the blue sky. And everything exudes an air of beauty and peace . . .

But what is this? A discordant note in the tranquillity. Like an unnecessary screech. Among the locals' houses, that were not built by them, but by God, stands a villa. The creation of an architect. Whether a good or bad architect, I don't know. All I know is that the tranquillity, peace and beauty have vanished.

Before God there are no good or bad architects, in His presence all architects are equal. In the cities, in the presence of Belial, there are subtle nuances, as is the nature of vice. And therefore I ask, why is it that any architect, good or bad, desecrates the lake.

The farmer doesn't. Nor does the engineer who builds a railway along the shore or scores deep furrows in its clear surface with his ship. They go about things in a different way. The farmer marks out the site for his new house in the green meadow and digs out the trenches for the foundations. Then the mason appears. If there is clay in the area there will be a brickworks delivering bricks. If not, then he can use the stone from the shores of the lake. And while the mason is laying brick upon brick, stone upon stone, the carpenter arrives and sets up his tools. His ax rings out merrily. He is making the roof. What kind of roof? A beautiful or an ugly one? He has no idea. It's just a roof.

And then the joiner measures up the doors and windows, and all the other craftsmen come and measure up and go back to their workshops and work. Finally the farmer mixes up a large tub of whitewash and makes the house nice and white. He cleans the brush and puts it away. He'll need it again next Easter.

His intention was to erect a house for himself and his family,

or for his animals, and that is what he has done. Just as his neighbor or his great-greatgrandfather did. Just as every animal does when it is guided by instinct. Is the house beautiful? Yes, just as beautiful as a rose or a thistle, as a horse or a cow.

And I repeat my question: why is it that the architect, no matter whether good or bad, desecrates the lake? Like almost all city dwellers, the architect lacks culture. He lacks the sure touch of the farmer, who does possess culture. The city dweller is rootless.

What I call culture is that balance between our physical, mental and spiritual being which alone can guarantee sensible thought and action.

I intend to give a lecture soon entitled, "Why do the Papuans have a culture and the Germans not?"

Until now there has been no period of non-culture in the history of mankind. This was reserved for the urban society of the second half of the nineteenth century. Until then culture developed in a steady flow. People responded to the demands of the moment and looked neither forward nor back.

Then the false prophets appeared, saying, "How ugly and joyless are our lives!" And they gathered together everything from all cultures, set it up in museums and said, "See, that is Beauty. You, however, were wallowing in ugliness."

So then there came household goods decorated with columns and cornices, like houses, there came silks and satins. Then, above all, there came ornamentation. And since the craftsman, as a man of modern culture, was incapable of designing ornamentation, schools were set up in which healthy young people were gradually warped until they were capable of it. Just as in China children are put into a vase and fed for years until they burst out in all their monstrous deformity. Like their Chinese counterparts, these deformed mental monstrosities were duly marveled at and had no difficulty earning a living, thanks to their deformity.

At that time there was no one to call out, "Stop and think. The path of culture leads *away* from ornamentation to unadorned

plainness." The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use. The Papuan covers everything he can lay his hands on with ornament, from his face and body to his bow and canoe.

But today tattoos are a sign of degeneracy and only seen on criminals and degenerate aristocrats. For people of culture, in contrast to the Papuans, a face without tattoos is more beautiful than one with tattoos, even if they had been designed by Michelangelo or Kolo Moser. The nineteenth-century person wants not only his face but also his suitcase, his clothes, his household goods and his house protected from these artificially generated Papuans. Gothic art? We are more advanced than the people of that period. The Renaissance? We are more advanced. We have become more sensitive, more refined. We lack the robust nerves necessary to drink out of an ivory tankard with a battle of the Amazons carved on it. Old techniques have vanished? The Lord be praised. We have been given Beethoven's music of the spheres in exchange. Our temples are no longer painted blue, red, green and white like the Parthenon, we have learned to appreciate the beauty of bare stone.

But, as I said, at that time there was no one around to remind people of this, and the enemies of our culture, those who sang the praises of foreign cultures, had it all their own way. They were, moreover, wrong. They had misunderstood earlier epochs. Since only those objects were kept which, thanks to their pointless ornamentation, were of less practical use and therefore did not wear out, only objects *with* ornamentation have come down to us. Consequently people assumed that in the past all objects had ornamentation. Also, it was easy to use ornamentation to classify objects by age and origin and cataloguing was — amongst other things — one of the most edifying pastimes of those goddamned times.

All this was beyond the honest craftsman. On one and the same day he was supposed to make everything that had been made throughout history in all nations and produce new inventions as well. But these things were the expressions of their

culture and were produced by the craftsmen in the same way as the farmer builds his house. The craftsman of the present worked in the same way as the craftsman of the past. A contemporary of Goethe was no longer capable of making ornament. Therefore the warped product of the schools was brought in and the craftsman placed under his tutelage.

The mason and the master builder were also placed under tutelage. The master builder just built houses and that was called building in the style of his own times. The one who took control was the man who could build in the style of every past age, the man who had lost contact with his own times, the rootless man, the warped man, in a word, the architect.

Books meant little to the craftsman. The architect took everything from books. An abundance of works of reference provided everything and anything worth knowing. People have no idea of the way this mass of slick publishing ventures has poisoned our urban culture, the way it has prevented us from remembering who and what we are. It made no difference whether the architect had internalized the forms so that he could draw them from memory or whether he had to have the sourcebook open before him on the table while producing his "artistic creations," the effect was always the same: an abomination. And there was no end to the abomination. Everyone was desperate to see their things perpetuated in new publications and a large number of architectural periodicals appeared to satisfy the vanity of architects. And so it has remained to the present day.

There is another reason why the architect has ousted the craftsman. He has learned draftsmanship, and since that is all he has learnt, he is good at it. The craftsman is not. He has a heavy hand. The plans of the old master builders are clumsy, any student of building can do *that* better, not to mention the so-called "fluent hand" so keenly sought and handsomely paid by every firm of architects.

The architect has reduced the noble art of building to a graphic art. The one who receives the most commissions is not the one who can build best but the one whose work looks best

on paper. There is a world of difference between the two.

If we were to range the arts in a row starting with the graphic arts, we will see that there are connections from them to painting. From there we can continue through colored sculpture to sculpture proper and from there to architecture. The graphic arts and architecture are polar opposites, at either end of the row.

The best draftsman can be a poor architect, the best architect a poor draftsman. Nowadays those entering architecture are expected to show a talent for graphic art. All our new architecture has been created on the drawing board, these drawings then being exhibited three-dimensionally, like paintings in a waxworks.

But for the old master builders the drawing was merely a means of communicating with the craftsmen who carried out the work. Just as a poet has to communicate through writing. However, we are not so totally devoid of culture as to get a boy to take up poetry just because he has a calligraphic hand.

It is a well-known fact that any work of art obeys such powerful inner laws that it can only be carried out in that one form.

A novel that can be made into a good drama is poor both as a novel and a drama. How much more starkly, then, does this come out when we take two different arts, even if there are points of contact between them. A painting that can be represented as a waxworks group is a bad painting. A presentable Tyrolean can be seen at Kastan's waxworks, but not a sunrise by Monet or an engraving by Whistler. What is really terrible, however, is to see an architectural drawing, which, given the medium, one has to accept as an example of graphic art — and there are genuine graphic artists among the architects — carried out in stone, iron and glass. The sign that a building arises from a genuine feel for architecture is that it makes no impression as a two-dimensional representation. If I could erase the most powerful architectural statement, the Pitti Palace, from people's memory and enter it for a competition, drawn by the best draftsman, the adjudicators would have me put away in a lunatic

asylum.

As things are then, the "fluent hand" holds sway. Architectural forms are no longer created by the craftsman's tools, but by the pencil. From the elevation of a building, from the manner of a piece of ornamentation, one can tell whether the architect was using a no. 1 or a no. 5 pencil. And what terrible havoc the compass has wreaked on our taste! Since architects have taken up the ruling pen, architectural drawings have come out in a rash of little squares and no window embrasure, no marble slab is uninfected. The tiniest details are drawn in on a scale of 1:100 and the bricklayer and stonemason have to chip out or build up the graphic nonsense by the sweat of their brow. If the draftsman happens to have colored ink in his pen, then the gilder has to be called in.

But I repeat: a true building makes no impression as a picture, reduced to two dimensions. It is my greatest pride that the interiors I have created are completely lacking in effect when photographed; that the people who live in them do not recognize their own apartments from the photographs, just as the owners of a Monet would not recognize it at Kastan's waxworks. The honor of seeing my works published in the various architectural journals is something I have had to do without. I am denied the satisfaction of my vanity.

Does this perhaps mean I am working in a vacuum? Nothing of mine is known. But this is where the power of my ideas and the rightness of my teachings become apparent. I, the unpublished architect, I, the man working in a vacuum, am the only one among thousands who has real influence. I can give an example. When I finally had the chance to create an interior — it was hard enough since, as I have said, my kind of work *cannot* be represented graphically — the response was very hostile. That was twelve years ago when I did the Café Museum in Vienna. The architects called it "Café Anarchism." But my Café Museum still stands today while all the modern joinery of the thousands of others has long since been consigned to the junk room. Or they are ashamed of it. That the Café Museum has had more

influence on modern joinery work than all previous projects put together can be proved by a quick glance at the 1899 volume of the Munich journal, *Dekorative Kunst*, where this interior was reproduced, presumably due to a mistake by the editor. But these two photographic illustrations had no influence; at the time they were completely ignored. Thus, as you can see, it is only the power of the example that has influence. It was by this power that the influence of the old craftsmen spread more rapidly to the most distant corners of the earth despite or, rather, because of the fact that there was no postal service, no telegraph or newspapers.

The second half of the nineteenth century was filled with the sound of the false prophets, men without culture, crying, "We have no architectural style!" How wrong, how incorrect. That was the very time that had a more distinct style, one that differed more distinctly from the preceding period, a change unparalleled in cultural history. Since, however, these false prophets could only recognize a product by the varying ornamentation, this orna-mentation became a fetish for them and they substituted it for the real thing, calling it "style." Style we already had, but no ornamentation. If I were to chip off all the ornamentation from our old and new buildings, leaving only the bare walls, I would certainly find it difficult to distinguish fifteenth-century from seventeenth-century buildings. But even the man in the street would recognize those of the nineteenth century at a glance. We had no ornamentation and they moaned that we had no style. So they kept on copying ornaments from the past until even they found it ridiculous, so when they had gone as far as they could go in that direction, they started inventing new ornaments. That is, they had sunk to such a low cultural level that they were able to do that. And now they congratulate themselves on having created the style of the twentieth century.

But that is not the style of the twentieth century. There are many objects which show the style of the twentieth century in its pure form, and these are objects produced by craftsmen who were not working under the tutelage of one of the warped graduates of the schools. First and foremost they are the tailors,

they are the shoemakers, the makers of bags and saddles, carriages and instruments and all those who avoided the fate of being uprooted from our culture because their craft seemed too ordinary to the false prophets to be worth reforming. What good fortune! From such scraps as the architects left me I was able, twelve years ago, to reconstruct modern joinery work, the joinery we would have if the architects had never stuck their noses in a joiner's workshop. I did not approach the task like an artist, giving free rein to his creative imagination (as they doubtless put it in artistic circles). No. I went to the workshops, as timid as an apprentice, looked up respectfully to the man in the blue apron, and asked him to share his secrets with me. For many a piece of workshop tradition still lay there, bashfully hidden from the eyes of the architects. And when they realized what I wanted, when they saw I was not one of those who would deface their beloved wood with his drawing-board fantasies, when they saw I had no intention of defiling the noble color of their revered material with green or violet stains, they glowed with craftsman's pride, revealed their carefully concealed tradition and gave vent to their hatred of their oppressors. I found modern paneling in the cladding of the old lavatory water tanks, I found a modern solution for the problem of corners in the chests for silver cutlery, I found locks and metal fittings on suitcases and pianos. And I found out the most important thing, namely that the style of 1900 only differs from the style of 1800 to the same extent as the tail coat of 1900 differs from that of 1800.

By not very much, that is. The one was made of blue cloth and had gold buttons, the other is of black cloth and has black buttons. The black coat is in the style of our times, that no one can deny. In their arrogance the warped graduates of the schools had not bothered to reform our clothing. They were all serious-minded and felt it beneath their dignity to waste their time on such things. That is why our clothing has remained in the style of our times. The invention of ornament was the only activity deemed worthy of such dignified, serious-minded men.

When I finally received a commission for a building, I said to

myself, "In its external appearance a building can at most have changed as much as a tail coat. By not very much, that is." And I saw how our ancestors built and I saw how, century by century, year by year, they had freed themselves from ornamentation. So I had to go back to the point where the chain had broken. One thing I did know: in order to continue the line of this development I had to be appreciably simpler. I had to replace the gold buttons with black ones. The building had to look unobtrusive. Had I not once said, modern dress is that which draws least attention to itself. It sounded paradoxical, but there were good honest people who carefully collected it, like so many of my paradoxical ideas, and put it into print again. It happened so often people eventually accepted it as true.

But as far as inconspicuousness was concerned, there was one thing I had not taken into account. What was true of clothing was not true of architecture. If our warped graduates had left architecture in peace and reformed our clothing along the lines of old theater costumes or the *Sezession*, then presumably the reverse would have been the case.

Just try to visualize it. Everyone is wearing clothes from some past age or other, or from some distant, imaginary future. You see men from the mists of antiquity, women with piled-up hair-styles and farthingales, exquisite gentlemen in Burgundian hose. And among them will be a few roguish moderns in purple pumps and apple-green silk jerkins with appliqué work by Professor Walter Scherbel. And now a man in a plain overcoat appears among them. Would he not arouse attention? Even more, would he not cause offense? And would not the police come, whose job it is to remove anything and anyone that causes a public nuisance?

It is the reverse that is the case, however. Our clothes are right, the fancy-dress ball is in architecture. My building (the so-called "Loos Building" on Michaelerplatz in Vienna, which was built in the same year as this article was written) really caused offense and the authorities were on the spot in no time at all. That kind of thing was all right in the privacy of someone's

home, but not out in the street.

Some doubts will have crept in during these last remarks, doubts about the validity of comparing tailoring and architecture. Architecture is an art, after all. I grant you that, for the moment anyway. But have you never noticed the remarkable correspondence between people's appearance and that of buildings? Does not the Gothic style go with the extravagantly tagged and scalloped dress of the times? The Baroque with the full-bottomed wig? But do our modern buildings go with our dress? People are afraid of uniformity? Were not the old buildings of the same period and the same country uniform? So uniform we can sort them out according to styles and countries, nations and cities. This neurotic vanity, this vain neurosis of having to do things differently from one's fellow craftsmen at all costs was unknown to the old artisans. Tradition determined the forms. And it was not forms that changed it, but the craftsmen, who found conditions arose under which they could not remain true to the fixed, hallowed, traditional form. New tasks changed the forms and thus the rules were broken, new forms arose. But the *people* of those times were in harmony with the *architecture* of their times. The new building that had gone up pleased everyone. Today, however, most buildings only please two people: the architect and his client.

A building should please everyone, unlike a work of art, which does not have to please anyone. A work of art is a private matter for the artist, a building is not. A work of art is brought into the world without there being a need for it, a building meets a need. A work of art has no responsibility to anyone, a building to everyone. The aim of a work of art is to make us feel uncomfortable, a building is there for our comfort. A work of art is revolutionary, a building conservative. A work of art is concerned with the future and directs us along new paths, a building is concerned with the present. We love anything that adds to our comfort, we hate anything that tries to pester us into abandoning our established and secure position. We love buildings and hate art.

So the building has nothing to do with art and architecture is not one of the arts? That is so.

Only a tiny part of architecture comes under art: monuments. Everything else, everything that serves some practical purpose, should be ejected from the realm of art.

Only when we have got rid of the great misunderstanding that art is something that can be harnessed to a practical purpose, only when the fallacious catchphrase "applied art" has disappeared from the vocabulary of all nations, will we have the architecture of our times. The artist has only himself to consider, the architect society as a whole. But combining art and craft has done immeasurable harm to both, and to mankind. We no longer know what art is. In blind fury we persecute the artist and prevent the creation of works of art. Hourly we commit the great sin, the sin that cannot be forgiven, the sin against the holy spirit. Murder, robbery, everything can be forgiven. But all those ninth symphonies, the creation of which mankind in its blindness has prevented through its persecution of artists — no, not even that, through its sins of omission — will not be forgiven us. It is thwarting God's design.

Mankind no longer knows what art is. "Art in the service of commerce" was the title of a recent exhibition in Munich and there was no one to score out the offending words. And no one laughs at that splendid expression "applied art."

But to anyone who knows that art is there to lead mankind on and on, higher and higher, to make us more and more like gods, combining art with a material function is a profanation of the great goddess. People do not leave the artist free to do as he thinks fit because they are not in awe of him, and craftwork cannot develop freely because of the weight of aesthetic expectations we place on it. It is not the business of the artist to have the majority of his contemporaries behind him, his realm is the future.

Since there are buildings in good and bad taste, people assume the former are designed by artists, the latter by non-artists. But building in good taste should be just as much a matter of course

as not putting your knife in your mouth or cleaning your teeth in the morning. People are here confusing art and culture. Can you show me one piece of bad taste from past times, that is from a cultured age? The buildings of the least master mason in a provincial town were in good taste. Of course there were great masters and lesser masters. Thanks to their profound knowledge, the great masters were in closer contact with the world spirit than the others.

Architecture arouses moods in people, so the task of the architect is to give these moods concrete expression. A room must look cozy, a house comfortable to live in. To secret vice the law courts must seem to make a threatening gesture. A bank must say, "Here your money is safe in the hands of honest people."

An architect can only achieve this by going back to those buildings of the past which aroused these moods in people. For the Chinese, white is the color of mourning, for us black. Therefore our architects would find it impossible to create cheerful moods with black paint.

If we were to come across a mound in the woods, six foot long by three foot wide, with the soil piled up in a pyramid, a somber mood would come over us and a voice inside us would say, "There is someone buried here." *That is architecture.*

Our culture is founded on the recognition of the all-transcending greatness of classical antiquity. Our manner of thinking and feeling we have adopted from the Romans, who taught us to think socially and discipline our emotions.

It is not mere chance that the Romans were incapable of inventing a new order of columns, a new ornament. The Greeks, who invented the moldings, were individualists, scarcely able to govern their own cities. The Romans invented social organization and governed the whole world. The Greeks applied their imagination to the elevation, which is individual, the Romans to the ground plan, which is general. The Romans were more advanced than the Greeks, we are more advanced than the Romans. The great masters of architecture believed they built

like the Romans. They were mistaken. Period, place, climate frustrated their plans. But whenever lesser architects tried to ignore tradition, whenever ornamentation became rampant, a master would appear to remind us of the Roman origins of our architecture and pick up the thread again.

The last great master arose at the beginning of the nineteenth century: Schinkel. We have forgotten him. But the light of this great figure will fall on future generations of architects.