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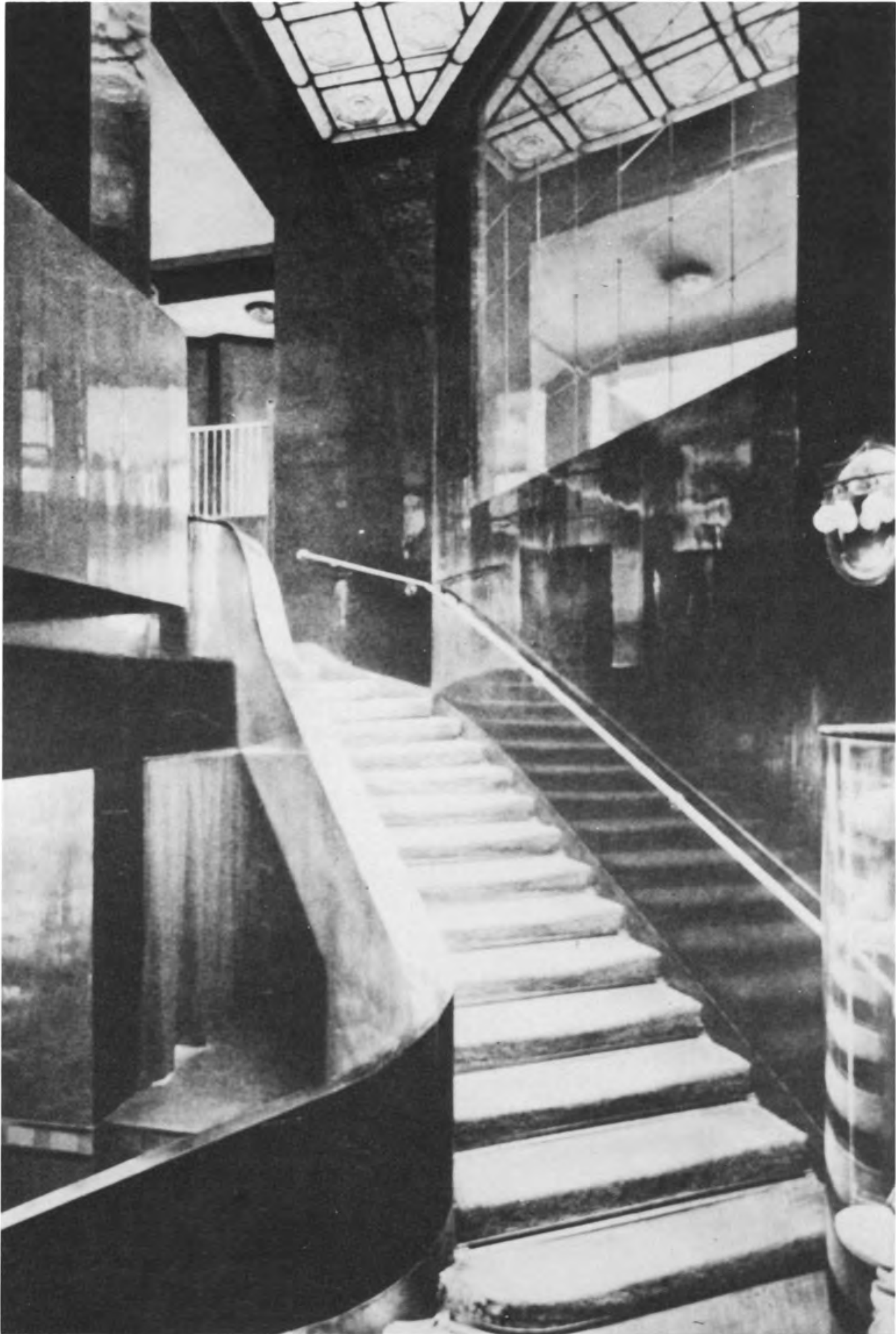
Stanford Anderson
Critical Conventionalism in Architecture

Stanford Anderson is Director of the Ph.D. Program for History, Theory and Criticism of Art and Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

An interpretation of the works of Alois Riegl and of Adolf Loos illumines the concepts of convention, canon, and criticism in architecture. Attending to such issues as they are manifested in architecture facilitates a more general epistemological and historiographical inquiry that I wish to advance, an examination of the reciprocal relations between the constraints exerted by "external reality" and the theoretical constructs developed to interpret that reality.

Various positions on the issues of conventions and canons have emerged in recent times. These positions respond both to an awareness of the problematic, theoretical status of knowledge (brought about largely by philosophers and historians of science) and to an awareness of the coercive as well as productive pressures of particular cultural norms and values (brought about by anthropologists, historians, and intellectual historians).

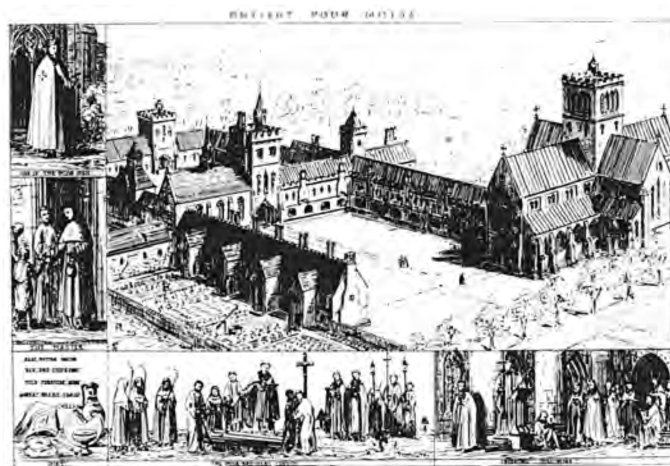
To avoid the proliferation of meanings surrounding these concepts, I shall reject those views of cultural conventions and canons, to be found in many fields, including architecture and the history of architecture, that see culture either as autonomous and self-referential or as being completely determined by external circumstances.[1] My wish is, rather, to approach conventions and their systems of authority and self-perpetuation as *semiautonomous*: neither completely determined by the reality within which they exist, and therefore beyond criticism, nor so completely arbitrary, so unrestricted by any constraints on their explanations that, once again, criticism has no hold. Such



Frontispiece: Adolf Loos, Haus am Michaelerplatz, Vienna, 1909, main stair.

1. Bronze buckle, provincial late Roman (Museum of Linz, Austria).

2. Trier, Porta Nigra, from the northeast, end of the third century A.D.



3. A. W. N. Pugin, ancient poor house. From his *Contrasts,* 2d ed. (1841).

a position entails a reciprocity of epistemic conventions and empirical data that opens a field for criticism and thus the selection and change of conventions in nonarbitrary ways. It is the versions and problems of such a critico-conventional attitude that interest me here.

These issues are obviously general; neither their form nor their importance need rest on the significance of the work of the two figures introduced here, the historian Alois Riegl and the architect Adolf Loos. Yet these thinkers are central to our theme. From their time and place, turn-of-the-century Vienna, to ours, the works of Riegl and Loos markedly influenced the history, criticism, and practice of art and architecture. The nature of Riegl's claims and his theoretical power extended his influence into the study of culture quite generally, through such notable contributors as Walter Benjamin. Adolf Loos, a younger contemporary of Riegl, provides both arguments and an architectural practice that may be interpreted as an implicit criticism of Riegl. I thus propose to tell a story of Riegl and Loos in order to arrive at a consideration of the general issues I have raised.

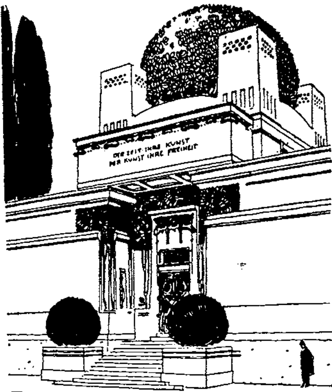
Riegl's Evolutionary Relativism

In one fundamental sense, Riegl denied any hierarchy among the arts. His most famous study, *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie,*[2] drew the most general consequences for our understanding of cultural history not from the monuments of the most esteemed periods of classical antiquity, but from an examination of the minor arts of a provincial region in a historical period previously taken to be one of decline and decay.

It was Riegl's view that any of these works, be it a belt buckle, a painting, or a building, could be viewed as evidence of an earlier people's creative struggle with nature, of their confrontation with the material conditions of their world. Yet Riegl's emphasis was on what he described quite laconically in the latter part of the following passage:

> . . . appreciating works of former generations as evidence not only of man's creative struggle with nature, but also of his peculiar perception of shape and color.[3]

4. John Ruskin, drawing of the Palazzo Dario, Venice, pencil and watercolor, 1846 (The Brantwood Trust, Coniston).



5. Joseph Maria Olbrich, drawing for the exhibition hall of the Viennese Secession, 1899. The motto is: "For the age, its art; for art, its freedom."

6. Gustav Klimt, "Nuda veritas," ink drawing, 1898.

This "peculiar perception of shape and color" is, according to Riegl, as unique to a time as is that time's struggle with nature — but this temporally characteristic perception also has an autonomy that must shape the material conditions it encounters. According to Riegl, the "peculiar perception of shape and color" of a time is one unique stage in the autonomous development of artistic form. This evolution of artistic form allows us to write a history of art, but the uniqueness of each stage denies any standards from the past and thus also denies any such concept as "decadence." To understand any work, we must understand where it is situated in the autonomous development of artistic form or, to use Riegl's term, we must understand the *Kunstwollen* of the time in which the object was produced. For a full understanding of the work we may then return to an examination of it as evidence of man's creative struggle with nature; but we must not expect to find form and material conditions in any easy balance, still less that material conditions should have determined the form. On the contrary, the autonomy of the *Kunstwollen* assures that its formal demands will be fulfilled even in contradiction of material conditions.

Riegl agreed with earlier commentators that the people of late Roman times did not follow the standards of classical antiquity, but he also absolved them of any such demand. No, more; he asserted the importance of the late antique *Kunstwollen*, which had perforce to deny the authority of classical antiquity — had to prepare the way for medieval achievements free of the classical canon and, later, for the relativism of his own time.

Nonetheless, Riegl observed the Europeans, from the Renaissance down to the nineteenth century, constructing "an inviolable canon,"[4] a canon binding upon themselves, but presumed to have been more nearly realized in classical antiquity than at any other time. In the nineteenth century the exclusivity of this canon had been destroyed, and finally the very concept of canon had been rejected. In his own time, at the beginning of this century, Riegl asserted that one could no longer entertain any claim for absolute artistic value. Today's artist, as that of any other period, could only work according to the *Kunstwollen* of his time. And it is this *Kunstwollen* that gives the contemporary

7. Relief from the Ara Pacis Augustae, Rome, 13–9 B.C.

8. Relief of the enthroned Emperor, Arch of Constantine, Rome, A.D. 315.

artist his only artistic standard. According to Riegl:

Everything of the past is irrevocably of the past and therefore is in no way canonically binding.[5]

However, Riegl's assertion that "everything of the past . . . is in no way canonically binding" seems, on his own evidence, not to be a matter of evolutionary inevitability. Even if he seems to argue that the evolution of the *Kunstwollen* has brought us to this point, one notes that Riegl made a quite similar claim for late, versus classical, antiquity. Yet between these late antique and modern periods of relativism, we have seen that Riegl himself recognized four centuries, the fifteenth to the nineteenth, when Western culture reconstructed that classical canon and considered it "inviolable."

I would not like to pronounce on what the *Kunstwollen* may be conceived to do, but this alternation of acceptance and rejection of a canon suggests that some models other than evolutionary ones might better have served Riegl's explication of the history of art and architecture. In general, Riegl presents his concept of generalized artistic volition with such necessity, and to cover such a range of phenomena, that his version of cultural evolution appears one of the more vulnerable of such constructions.

The Autonomy of the *Kunstwollen*

Even though Riegl recognizes an inviolability in the Renaissance canon and arrives at a twentieth-century relativism, we must not think that he sees a shift from a false belief in canonically embodied positive knowledge to a fully relativistic modern position. Riegl's relativism has a peculiar authoritarian base that ties it even to that which it has displaced.

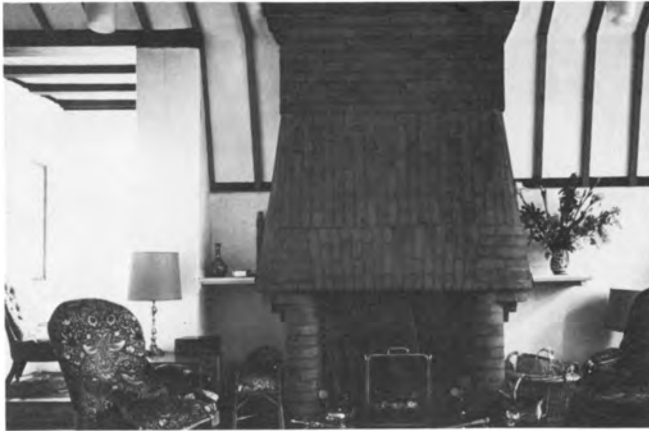
Whether Riegl looks at antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, or his own time, what he sees is the necessity and the positivity of the *Kunstwollen* of that time. If Riegl's predecessors still yearned for authoritative texts, a canon, they might see his theoretical (or historiographical) innovation as relativism pure and simple. But for Riegl there is an unfolding of contextual constraints where our relativism acts upon us with an authority no less binding

9. Gustav Klimt, *Medicine,* ceiling panel for the Festsaal of the University of Vienna, oil on canvas, 1900–07 (destroyed 1945).

than that of the canons of another time. There being no absolute artistic value, we can only judge the works of other times relative to our *Kunstwollen* — positively, if and to the (necessarily limited) extent that they share in our *Kunstwollen;* negatively if they do not. Today we might criticize Riegl's construction for its peculiar mix of absolutism and relativism based on an evolving cultural and temporal chauvinism. Indeed, it was a theory not fully in correspondence with Riegl's own time; Riegl found himself, for example, rather weakly acknowledging and even defending the seemingly too catholic appreciation of older works by his contempories (and by himself).[6]

Despite these criticisms, there were clear advantages to the theory proposed by Riegl. Riegl himself made much of the fact that his system liberated the historian and the artist from naïve "materialistic" theories that would explain works of art solely according to the material conditions of their making.[7] Riegl's theory had the advantage of giving a coherent account of works that were, or appeared to be, in contradiction of material conditions.

On another front, one should consider that it was not Riegl who introduced the more relativistic standards of critics and artists in the nineteenth century; rather he proposed a theory that could give an account of, and support, that relativism. In this way, one could recognize not only neglected historical periods — in Riegl's own work, late antiquity and the Baroque — but also contemporary artists who were perceived, or claimed, to be independent of past standards. It has been noted that the formal qualities that Franz Wickhoff and Riegl recognized in the works of noncanonic late antiquity bear comparison with those of the antiacademic Impressionists and of Cezanne.[8] In his own time, Riegl noted the motto of the artists of the Vienna Secession — "For the age, its art; for art, its freedom" — as one in accord with his theory.[9] Wickhoff defended the principal Secessionist artist, Gustav Klimt, from attacks that cited Klimt for a loss of standards and the ugliness of his works.[10] It is perhaps not wholly disjoint that Riegl, in the summary pages of *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie,* notes that St. Augustine was among the first to recognize the relativity of the beautiful and the ugly.[11]



10. Philip Webb, fireplace in "The Red House" for William Morris at Bexley Heath, 1859–60.

11. Peter Behrens, music room of Behrens house, Darmstadt Artists' Colony, 1900–01.

Finally, just as modern relativism does not originate with, but is given an intellectual validation by, Riegl, so one may also point to Riegl's affirmation of the elimination of hierarchy among the arts. At least since the Arts and Crafts movement, a higher artistic dignity had been claimed for handicrafts. Similarly, one characteristic that binds most, if not all, Art Nouveau artists together — not least those of Austria and Germany — is attention to the entire range of art and artifacts. However, in contrast to the initiating role of the crafts within the Arts and Crafts ideology, the Art Nouveau version of nonhierarchic arts saw the artist/maker as the one who brought a larger, formal vision to the whole of material production. The artists subsumed the design of crafts by claiming precedence over the craftsman who was assumed to be locked in his sound, but merely material traditions. Again Riegl's theory accounted for an emergent attitude and, in this case, entered as one of the protagonists for this position in which art controlled crafts. The producers were hierarchically organized even if the products were not.[12]

In summary, Riegl denies that works of art are based on a rational confrontation with material conditions. He can, therefore, give an account of works that do not stand in a logical relation with material conditions; he can show the control of artistic form over the plasticity of material conditions. He denies the authority of the past. Yet he invokes another authority in the unfolding stages of the *Kunstwollen*. Since no such stage has priority over another, Riegl succeeds in giving positive accounts of formerly neglected periods. But the artistic value — even of these newly appreciated past works — can only arise from the chauvinistic base of each moment of the *Kunstwollen*.

What then is Riegl's image of knowledge? It is certainly not inductivist. Neither the historian nor the artist builds up general conclusions from attention to individual facts. On the other hand, Riegl also rejects an overriding canonic authority, or any form of authority through tradition, in favor of the necessity and the authority of a formal system that unfolds over time. Riegl's history thus reveals that any number of formal systems have enjoyed undifferentiated levels of authority and each has been capable of giving man a creative grasp on nature.

12. Ford Madox Brown, bedroom furniture made by Morris & Co., the early 1860s.

13. Otto Wagner, Hofpavillon of the Vienna City Railway, 1894–95.

14. Hans Schlechtag (a student of Otto Wagner), design for the façade of an apartment house (detail), 1900. This is a student design, but the master built apartment houses in these years that show a similar conflation of radically simple fenestration with elaborate modern surface ornament.

With this last statement, I come close to assessing Riegl's position as being conventionalist. The arbitrariness and yet the importance and the control of formal systems over a surprisingly malleable nature can be accommodated to radical versions of conventionalism, and this is, I think, the source of the strengths of Riegl's theory. But the autonomy of Riegl's *Kunstwollen*, this linear evolutionary course, the necessity of every person's lockstep with this *Kunstwollen* insist on an authoritarianism that is inconsistent with conventionalism and are, I think, the source of the weaknesses of Riegl's theory. I wish to advance this line of thought by now turning to the work of Adolf Loos.

Loos's Critico-Canonic Attitude Toward Culture

I have found no specific commentary on Riegl by the architect and critic Adolf Loos. Yet it appears to me that the essays, aphorisms, and architectural practice of Loos do make a challenging and still suggestive criticism of Riegl.

Loos shares with Riegl notions of cultural evolution and is still more emphatic in addressing what he understands to be the current state of that evolution. Nonetheless, their arguments immediately assume diametrically opposed positions. Where Riegl emphasizes the evolution of an autonomous *Kunstwollen* that must give form to an entire epoch, Loos recognizes a complex and disparate evolution to which the various arts and crafts stand in varying relationships.

Perhaps Loos stands closest to Riegl's evolution of form in his famous account of ornament. Loos saw the decoration of use-objects as a characteristic of primitive cultures. He polemically pronounced the "law" that the progress of culture is measured by the elimination of ornament from useful objects. Even here we must recognize that Loos's penchant for dramatic statement did not preclude a more nuanced argument. Loos's "law" refers to use-objects in contradistinction to art objects, and throughout "his" history he distinguishes the various arts and crafts. Loos argued that in the modern world (he thought particularly of Britain and America) craft objects, when they had not been perverted by the form giving of the likes of the Secession artists, were increasingly free of ornament and direct

15. Peter Behrens, hanging lamp for master bedroom, before 1912.

17. Adolf Loos, hanging lamp, 1900–10 (silvered bulbs not original).

16. K. J. Jucker, extendable lamp, an apprentice project at the Bauhaus, c. 1923.

in their relationship to use. He advocated this rule in architecture as well; for, in the hierarchy of the arts, Loos saw architecture as concerned with use and thus closer to the crafts than to painting or sculpture.

Loos looked at the city around him and saw no need for artistic fantasies about the forms of the future. The system of the city railway, the blocks of flats with identical floors made possible by modern construction and the elevator — such systems were already present, even if too often obscured by either historical or self-consciously would-be-modern detail. Loos invited his readers rather to look at how life had already changed in the modern city: the larger city, the greatly facilitated circulation through the city, the new social and spatial organization of the city, new urban activities. The problem was not for the artist to will a form that might be imposed on all these disparate phenomena; but rather that, within these changing conditions, artists and architects and engineers and craftsmen must open up the entire cultural field in which support is given to life.

Karl Kraus gave the most apt statement of the cause that he shared with Loos:

> Adolf Loos and I . . . have done nothing more than to show that there is a difference between a [memorial] urn and a chamber pot. It is in this difference that culture is given a space to play itself out. The others, those with [claims to] positive knowledge, however, divide themselves between those who would use the urn as a chamber pot and those who would use the chamber pot as an urn.[13]

This statement is the touchstone for the understanding of Loos. There is in this anecdote a very knowing intersection of use, convention, form, and criticism. The uses of the two vessels — urn and chamber pot — are extraordinarily different, and if this difference is not recognized both in the forms of the vessels and in their use, then the cultural field collapses on itself. The use of these objects is differentiated within the material necessities as well as the conventions of our society, and any tendency to amalgamate them — whether from the side of art and the monument or from the side of utility — must be critically engaged.

The argument may be shifted to architecture. The follow-

18. Loos, Villa Hans Moller, Vienna, 1927, view from garden.

19. Loos, Villa Moller, sitting/ circulation area.

20. Loos, Steiner House, Vienna, 1910, view from garden.

21. Loos, Steiner House, living room.

ing statement demonstrates that the Loos-Kraus criticism was determined to save the requisite cultural space but not blindly to reinforce received culture:

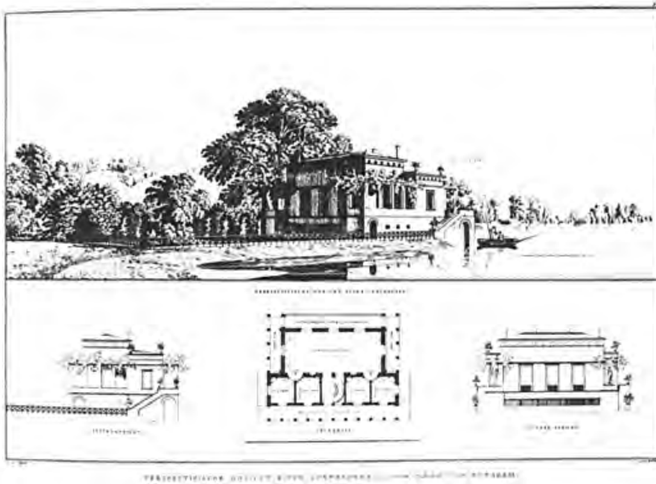
> The primary problem should be to express the three-dimensional character of architecture clearly, in such a way that the inhabitants of a building should be able to live the cultural life of their generation successfully.[14]

Clearly, Loos is not a functionalist. The first part of the statement reveals his sense for the relative autonomy that architecture can have as a formal discipline. The latter part shows that the inhabitants' "use" of the building is not simply utilitarian, but rather is the living of the cultural life of this time.

There is the relatively autonomous enterprise of "the three-dimensional character of architecture," but this is indeed only quasi-autonomous for it must be done "in such a way" not to *express* current culture, but so that the inhabitants may *live* the cultural life of their generation. Henry Kulka summed up Loos's attitude: "He aimed to create buildings in which a modern way of living could naturally develop."[15]

And the cultural life of this or any other time — the space opened up by the urn and pot — is highly complex and heterogeneous. Not only is there the hierarchy of arts and crafts, the advance of technology, reasonable use of materials, new and old, but also, and not exhaustively, the definition of public and private, the roles of men and women, the claims of past and future.

I have already suggested that Loos saw no demand on the artist or architect to intuit the forms of the future. The "modern" was already upon the Viennese of 1900; too many artists, whether conservative or would-be progressive, were only obscuring the new cultural life. But Loos's understanding of a correct relation to the past was more complex. As concerns objects for current human needs — tools or stools or musical instruments — Loos did not believe that every generation could or should make a unique contribution or bring these objects into forced alliance with new forms in other realms. With such objects, change should only come with improvement, not just as a matter



22. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, villa, near Potsdam, perspective view. From his *Sammlung architektonischer Entwürfe* (1819–40).

23. Schinkel, Neue Wacht, Berlin, unexecuted design. From his *Sammlung*.

of style. So, for example, he thought the ancient Egyptian three-legged stool with saddle seat had not been superseded. He would ask a craftsman to continue to make such objects.

> I have more affinity with truth, though it be centuries old, than with the lie strutting by my side.[16]

So, too, Loos felt there were artistic and architectural traditions with which Western society had not broken: he emphasized Rome for its architectural planning and organization and, most recently, the classicism of Schinkel. For Loos, there were conventions of architecture, and a canon, but these were examined and used critically. Traditional architectural elements were introduced, but other traditionally related ones were not. The use of the elements might follow rules or reveal transformation. Loos was tenacious in his underlying classicism and yet sufficiently critical of tradition and responsive to his own time that he was most often seen as a radical modernist. His entire enterprise was critically informed and turned on the fulcrum of the present.

The Fruitfulness of Critical Conventionalism

I return to the questions raised by our examination of Riegl. Between the Renaissance with its canons and the versions of modern relativism, should we recognize a shift from canonic authority to utter relativism or, with Riegl, shifts along the course of the constantly authoritative *Kunstwollen*? Have we escaped from a false claim for a source of truth only to fall into an authoritarian pronouncement of the necessary, self-validating truth of each present; or are there other choices still?

Riegl's position does encounter difficulties. Riegl himself constructed a bifurcation from ancient ornament into Islamic and Western ornament. Presumably we then have an independent *Kunstwollen* for each of these and still more remote cultures, with periodic retransmissions along the courses of their developments. Such would seem to be the case, but do not such multiple, cross-influencing cultural developments erode the autonomy of a dominant *Kunstwollen*? I have already noted that Riegl has some dif-

24. Adolf Loos, Haus am Michaelerplatz, Vienna, 1909, main façade.

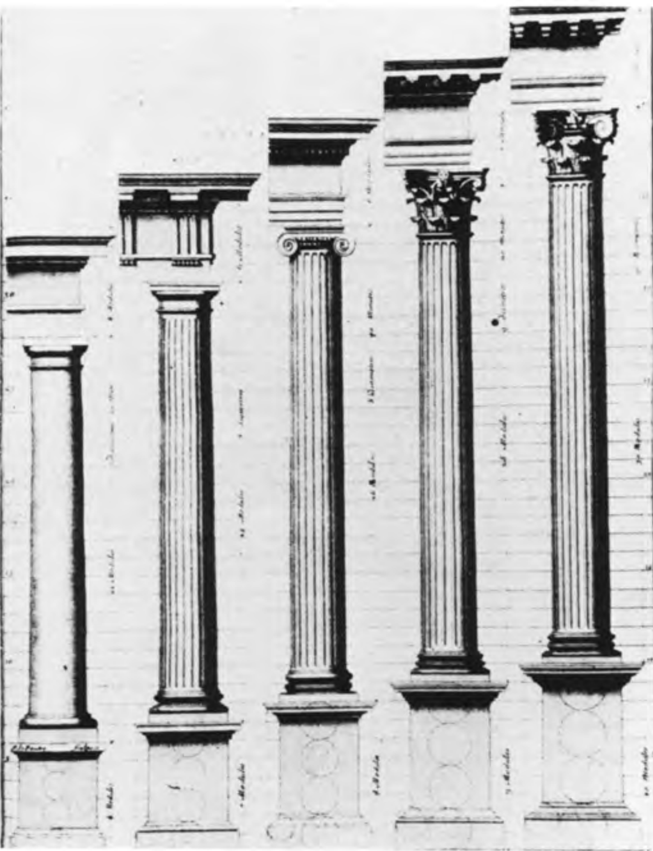
25. Loos, Haus am Michaelerplatz, main stair.

26. Loos, Steiner House, garden façade viewed frontally.

27. Loos, Steiner House, dining room.

28. Joseph Maria Olbrich, Hermann Bahr House, Vienna, 1899–1900.

29. Adolf Loos, Loos apartment, Vienna, 1903, bedroom.



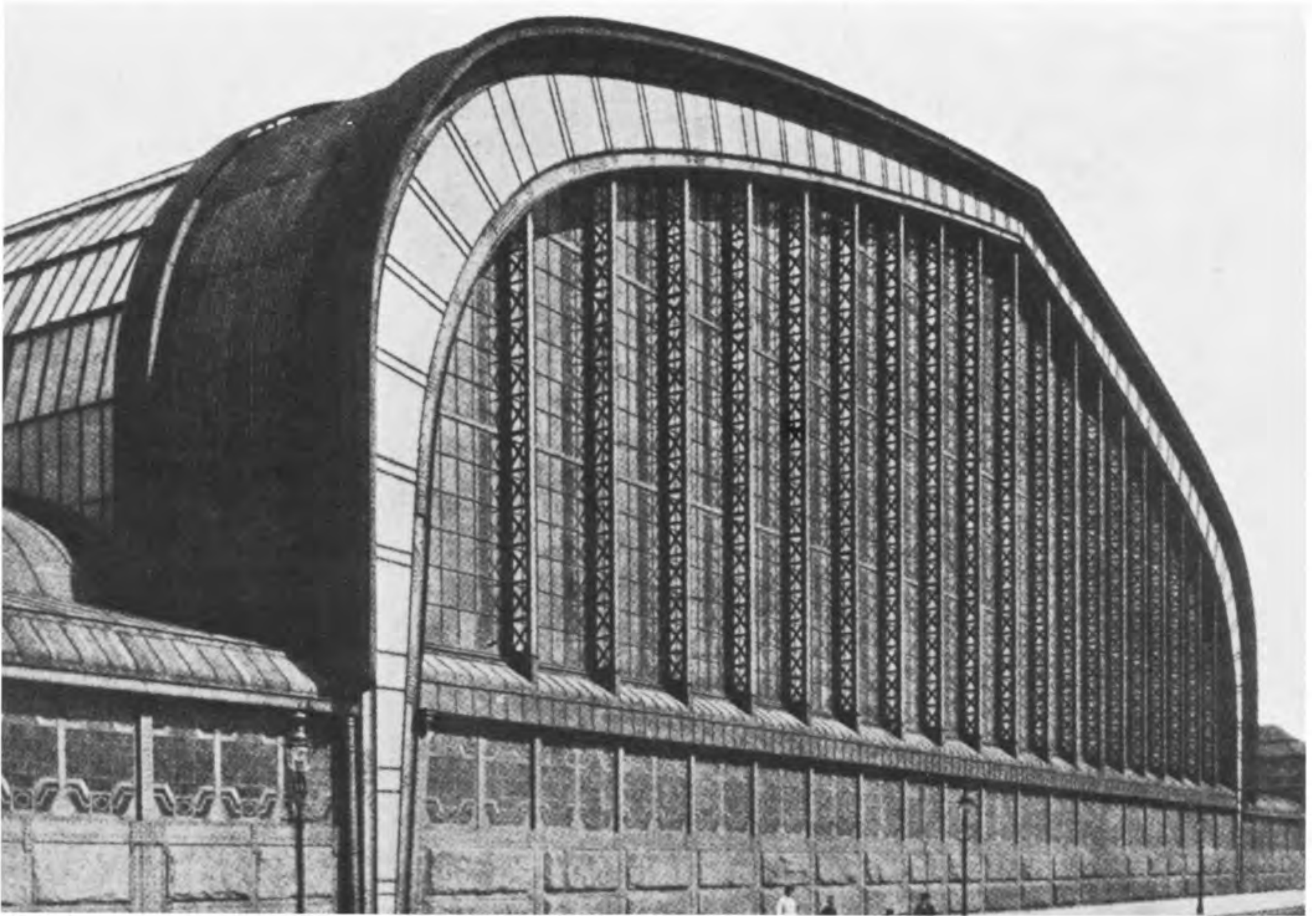
30. Claude Perrault, The Five Orders. From his *Ordonnance* (1683).

ficulty in containing the quite catholic appreciation of past cultures by himself and his contemporaries. Isn't this a different kind of relativism from that which relates all things to the current state of the *Kunstwollen*? Doesn't this just suggest that the artistic circles of Vienna around 1900 were more heterogeneous than Riegl's theory pretends? And the career of Loos suggests that this heterogeneity was not solely a matter of traditionalists who should be left behind by Riegl's vision. Loos made telling arguments against the Secession artists and recognized a highly articulated cultural world replete with hierarchies and value systems and the need for critical discourse. Should we expect four centuries of Renaissance-Baroque Europe to have been any less heterogeneous?

These are difficulties that Riegl's all-embracing volition must ignore or artificially reduce. These same difficulties can at least be addressed if we adopt a position close to that of Loos.

Perhaps there were Renaissance theorists who wished to assert the authority of the canon in the fullest sense of the word. We can accept this as a possible construction of knowledge and of the relation of knowledge to practice that can be articulated and debated. It seems likely that even more of the Renaissance-Baroque practitioners were fully aware of their activity in seeking to construct and lend authority to the canon not on an absolute base but within a cultural tradition. Certainly from the time of Claude Perrault there is a self-consciousness of the conventionalism of the enterprise.[17] Loos maintained the traditional canon but sought to use it critically. Others sought to enlarge the old canon or to construct a new one with works of modern architecture or engineering. How can one hold all these and other positions under one *Kunstwollen*? It seems to me more feasible to describe and criticize such positions as *competing architectural conventions.* (Elsewhere I have referred to "competing architectural research programs," but this is only a matter of emphasis, for I see such programs as initiated and controlled by a conventional core.)[18]

Is it too strong a claim to say "competing" conventions? Am I not, at best, describing a proliferating range of arbitrary positions; and is it not precisely in this arbitrariness



31. Reinhard, Süssenguth and Medling, Central Railroad Station, Hamburg (1903–06).

32. Adolf Loos, Villa Müller, Prague, 1928–30, living room, view toward dining room.

33. Loos, Villa Müller, women's sitting area.

that I come closest to revealing why I speak of conventions?

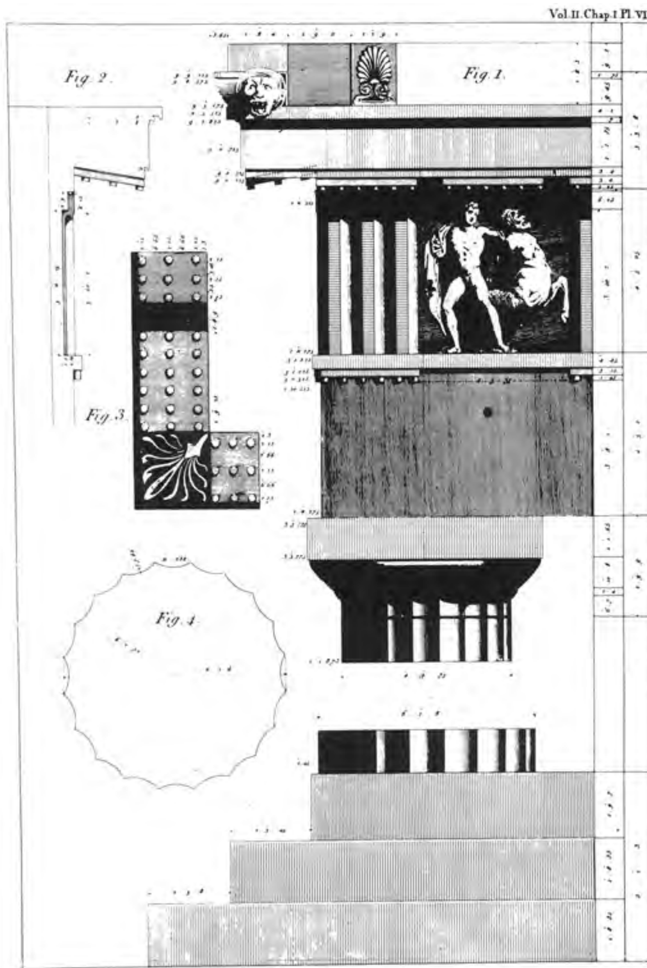
Let me first concede that in some radical or limited conditions — the Morse code, for example — a convention may be recognized as arbitrary. I will even concede that in the more complex conventions of which I wish to speak, there remains an important degree of arbitrariness. Ours or any other culture could be organized differently. It is just this about which Loos and his competitors contend. Yet there are controls on conventions from the two very different poles of conservation and discovery.

From the conservative pole, there are limits to the change of a convention if it is to continue to play its established role in the community — communication, for example, but other social relations as well. There are limits, too, in the plasticity of the material world.

Yet there is also a remarkable degree of plasticity. We can only wonder at the dramatic differences of cultures over time and space, and even at the changes experienced within our own culture. Even something that must needs occur in human society, that there be people of the ages of thirteen to nineteen, for example, can be conceived differently. "Teen-age" is a recent convention that has been constantly elaborated in a reciprocity between that convention and the constraints and potentials of the people and society which it evokes.

I wish particularly to emphasize this evocation of potentials through the criticism, change, and invention of conventions. Recall one of Loos's concerns: "express the three-dimensional character of architecture clearly, in such a way that the inhabitants of a building should be able to live the cultural life of their times successfully." Not a deterministic or expressionistic statement, this, but a challenge to reveal new potentials in architecture for the potentials of life. Thus the comparison of the fruitfulness of alternative conventions may be still more important than the study of the limits of convention, for a fruitful new convention may revise our understanding of limits.

This point can be illustrated in such a way as to engage, without relying on, the more restrictive notion of canon.



34. James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, the Parthenon, Athens. From their *The Antiquities of Athens* (1762 ff.).

35. Le Corbusier, the Parthenon from the Propylaea. From his "Voyage d'orient," 1911.

When the young Le Corbusier visited the Acropolis in Athens, he went neither to reinforce for himself older conventions of architecture nor to re-record what had already been emphasized about its canonical buildings. Rather he approached these buildings with new issues about the architectural site and about the active participation of the user/beholder. Le Corbusier thus became involved with such matters as movement and time in the comprehension of the site, and the play of light on materials and form. The canonic works were not found wanting; they had proven open to, and suggestive for, additional levels of interpretation. It is not always the canon that criticizes practice; new questions from practice may be addressed to the canon. The results, positive or negative, will affect not only practice but also the maintenance and possible additions to, or deletions from, the canon. We may look at this story in terms of the canon — one is now inclined to emphasize "the Acropolis of Athens" rather than "the Parthenon, the Erechtheum." One may also look at it in terms of altered conventions of the understanding and practice of architecture — an initiative to give more attention to site, to the abstraction of "pure forms," to the beholder in general and more particularly to experience through movement. In either case — revised canon or convention — we have gained new richness in the canon and in the understanding and practice of architecture. At the very least, a fruitful debate on such claims has been opened.

I would like at least to note that this example suggests the advantage of formulating a canon as a set of *exemplars* rather than as a set of rules. A set of exemplars is more readily adjusted in terms of contents; but more important, it provides a group of works that may survive and only be enriched over time by additional or transformed interpretations.[19]

I shall close this consideration of the fruitfulness of conventions by paraphrasing Christopher Ricks.[20] Ricks speaks of the "invention of symbols"; I shall say "construction of conventions." (One might also, with more pointed effect, read "canon-construction" if there is an inclination to engage that notion.) The paraphrase: A triumph in the

construction of conventions that is not simultaneously a triumph of discovery is less than the highest triumph of which the construction of conventions is capable.

That is to say, a convention is not to be valued primarily for its novelty, beauty, or internal consistency, or for its autonomy, or for the law and order it brings to practice, but rather for its (culturally framed) true or liberating relations to other conventions and to the nonconventional, the physical constraints of practice. This mitigation of the autonomy of the convention, this insistence of the convention's quasi-autonomous address to social practice is what protects the convention from the suspicion of being merely made up. It is only this reciprocity of convention and practice that can sustain the convention. But it is also only such a critically sustained convention that can guide practice without the appeal to arbitrary authority.

Perhaps I can now risk a summary answer to my initial questions. Alois Riegl's relativism was both too little and too much. Too little in that he continued to appeal to one monolithic source of societal form, the *Kunstwollen*; too much in that he discouraged critical reciprocity between the forms of a society and its practice. We may attempt a different formulation: Any social practice, such as architecture, takes place in a field of overlapping, often competing conventions. Sound practice recognizes the quasi-autonomy of these conventions and thus their claims on us for their own beauty and order and for their possible perpetuation. But sound practice also requires that these conventions recognize limits and discover potentials within their domain of practice. Conventions and practice criticize one another. They thus can sustain a reasoned and empirically based practice within societies that maintain discourse.

Notes

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Other papers presented at this conference and known to me to have been published are: Alvin Kibel, "The Canonical Text," *Daedalus* (Winter 1983): 239–54; Micha Bandini, "Typology as a Form of Convention," *AA Files* 6 (May 1984): 73–82; and K. Michael Hays, "Theory-Constitutive Conventions and Theory Change," in this issue of *Assemblage*.

1. Particularly in epistemology, "pure" conventionalism refers to the claim that knowledge is arbitrary, that we find ourselves in possession of unexplained pigeon-holes with which we order the world. If these categories approach an intellectualist innateness and unversality, it becomes difficult to account for the varieties of knowing displayed over time or in different cultures. Alternatively, if the multiplicity of these mental pigeon-holes is acknowledged and seen as an array of various patterns of enculturation, it is then possible to frame inquiries into the arbitrary, and therefore purely relativistic, differences in the mental sets and the social and cultural practices of different times and places. However, such relativism, in need of examination even in cross-cultural studies, is still more questionable if it is allowed to discourage inquiry into mechanisms of change within a society. Just as there are limits to the autonomy of conventions, so, on the other hand, the plasticity of empirical conditions and their interpretation should preclude any positivist solution of these problems through appeal to empirical fact.

The claim here is that alternative conventions eventually encounter testing and limiting empirical conditions which we may hypothesize as the sources of problems and thus as an impetus for change in, and selection among, conventions.

2. Alois Riegl, *Spätrömische Kunst-industrie*, 2d ed. (1901; Vienna: Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1927).

3. Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and its Origins," *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982): 20-51 (translated by Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo from its appearance in A. Riegl, *Gessamelte Aufsätze* [Augsburg-Vienna: Dr. Benno Filser, 1928]). The passage cited is from p. 47.

4. Ibid., p. 22.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., p. 47.

7. Often, but wrongly, it is Gottfried Semper who is cited for this materialism.

8. The reference to Wickhoff is to his *Wiener Genesis*, translated by A. Strong as *Roman Art: Some of its Principles and their Application to Early Christian* (London and New York, 1900). Commentary on the new perceptions of the works of late antiquity by Wickhoff and Riegl in the context of late-nineteenth-century artistic developments may be found in Otto J. Brendel, *Prole-*

gomena to the Study of Roman Art* (1953; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979).

9. Riegl, "Modern Cult of Monuments," p. 48.

10. Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1980), pp. 231 ff. Schorske notes that Karl Kraus sided with the philosophy professors against Klimt.

11. Riegl, *Spätrömische*, p. 394.

12. The German architect and industrial designer, Peter Behrens, whose early work also included the crafts, was a specific exponent of Riegl and of the domination of artistic will over material conditions in all of the arts. For discussion, see my "Modern Architecture and Industry," *Oppositions* 21 (Summer 1980): 82, and *Oppositions* 23 (Winter 1981): 56 ff.

13. Karl Kraus in *Adolf Loos. Festschrift zum 60. Geburstag* (Vienna, 1930), p. 27.

14. The words are those of Henry Kulka, a student and colleague of Loos, but are given in a reconstruction of Loos's thought. Kulka, "Adolf Loos," *Architect's Yearbook* no. 9 (1960): 10.

15. Ibid., p. 13.

16. Loos, as cited in Paul Engelmann, *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein* (New York: Horizon, 1968), p. 129.

17. In his *Ordonnance* (1693), Perrault supported classicism on two grounds other than authority. Perrault recognized a "positive beauty" derived from size, magnificence, symmetry, and fine materials and workmanship. "Arbitrary beauty" derived from societal agreement about the beauty and excellence of classical building and, in a narrower sense, an arbitrary codification such as he himself offered for the proportions of the orders. On Perrault, see Wolfgang Herrmann, *The Theory of Claude Perrault* (London: Zwemmer, 1973). See also my "Types and Conventions in Time: Towards a History for the Duration and Change of Artifacts," *Perspecta* 18 (1982): 108–17, 206.

18. Stanford Anderson, "Architectural Design as a System of Research Programmes," *Design Studies* 5, no. 3 (July 1984): 146–50.

19. Stanford Anderson, "Architectural Research Programmes in the Work of Le Corbusier," *Design Studies* 5, no. 3 (July 1984): 151–58.

20. Christopher Ricks, "The Tragedies of Webster, Tourneur and Middleton: Symbols, Imagery and Conventions," in Ricks, ed., *English Drama to 1710* (London: Sphere Books, 1971), p. 307.

Figure Credits

1. A. Riegl, *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie*, 2d ed. (Vienna: Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1927), pl. xx, no. 2.

2. Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Trier.

3. H.-R. Hitchcock, *Early Victorian Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), fig. 21.

4. Robert Hewison, *Ruskin and Venice* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), jacket.

5. Robert Schmutzler, *Art Nouveau* (New York: Abrams, 1978), fig. 236.

6. Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1980), fig. 38.

7. *FMR* 8 (1985): 104.

8. H. W. Janson, *History of Art* (New York: Abrams, 1962), p. 150.

9. Werner Hofmann, *Gustav Klimt und die Wiener Jahrhundertwende* (Salzburg: Galerie Welz, 1970), fig. 12.

10. *GA Houses 1* (Tokyo: A.D.A. EDITA Tokyo Co., 1976), p. 11.

11. Stoedtner, Düsseldorf.

12. Photograph by Peter Locke. From Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), fig. 17.

13. H. Geretsegger and M. Peintner, *Otto Wagner 1841–1918* (New York: Rizzoli, 1979), p. 53.

14. Otto Antonia Graf, *Die vergessene Wagnerschule* (Vienna: Jugend und Volk, 1969), fig. 46.

15. Lucius Burckhardt, ed., *The Werkbund: History and Ideology — 1907–1933* (New York: Barron's, 1980), fig. 17.

16. Diether Schmidt, *bauhaus* (Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1966), fig. 11.

17–19. Akademie der Künste, *Adolf Loos, 1870–1933: Raumplan Wohnungsbau* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste), figs. 2.74., 2.41.9, 2.41.11.

20. H. Kulka, *Adolf Loos* (Vienna: A. Schroll, 1931), fig. 40.

21. L. Münz and G. Künstler, *Der Architekt Adolf Loos* (Vienna: A. Schroll, 1964), fig. 67.

22–23. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *Collection of Architectural Designs* (Chicago: Exedra Books, 1981), pls. 66, 1.

24–27. Münz and Künstler, figs. 100, 104, 66, 68.

28. *Joseph Maria Olbrich, Die Zeichnungen in der Kunstbibliothek* Berlin (Berlin, 1972), no. 10202, p. 52.

29. Münz and Künstler, fig. 25.

30. Wolfgang Herrmann, *The Theory of Claude Perrault* (London: Zwemmer, 1973), frontispiece.

31. Die neue Sammlung, *Zwischen Kunst und Industrie: Der Deutsche Werkbund* (Munich: Die neue Sammlung, 1975), *p. 136.*

32–33. Münz and Künstler, pp. 138, 140.

34. James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens*, vol. 2 (1762 ff.), chap. 1, pl. VI.

35. *Le Corbusier: Selected Drawings* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1981), p. 23.