

Adolf Loos and Ornament

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Abstract

In this study, architectural style and "Ornament is Crime" motto of Adolf Loos, being against of the nineteenth century Vienna's architectural style, especially after the Industrial Revolution, will be examined. It is revealed that Adolf Loos's most known motto "Ornament is Crime" has deeper meanings and Loos designed various buildings throughout his career according to his evolution. When his designs analyzed chronologically it is understood that Loos had a great change that is Loos reflects his true thoughts more and more in his designs as time goes on.

When Adolf Loos said his famous motto, "Ornament is Crime" in Vienna's nineteenth century, Vienna was changing, urbanizing and developing very intensely with the effect of the industrial revolution. Loos and many architects, painters, artists opposed the mass production and devaluation of handmade materials brought by the industrial revolution, but Loos has always been in a different position than others.

Although Adolf Loos seems to advocate simplicity, he did not avoid the use of expensive materials in the interiors of the spaces he designed. In other words, Loos has supported the mask metaphor by simplifying its design that is visible to the outside world.

Keywords: Adolf Loos, Ornament, Otto Wagner, Raumplan, Vienna.

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INTRODUCTION

With the invention of steam-powered trains in the eighteenth century, rapid development occurred in European societies. Vienna is one of the cities that has experienced such a development to a great extent. Another factor that played a role in the rapid development and urbanization of Vienna is the industrial revolution. Mechanization and mass production led to development in Vienna, as in most cities. The bourgeois class, which is engaged in active trade with the development of the industry and the construction of railways, has become economically very strong in Vienna (Değirmenci & Pilehvarian, 2018). The eclecticism and historical revivalism that dominated the period are also present in Vienna, and the structures of the period were created with reference to the past.

However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, reactions against the changes and developments began in various parts of Europe. The handicrafts gave way to mass production and the reactions first emerged in England. On the other hand, the Arts and Crafts movement, founded by John Ruskin, attracted the attention of artists from different countries. In this way, different movements that were basically the same but changed in theory began to emerge. One of these movements emerged in Vienna as the Vienna Secession. At Vienna, the Vienna Secession group, led by Gustav Klimt, known as a painter, and consisting of Otto Wagner's students, supported the craft and handmade materials. This group of various architects and painters argued that it was correct to reflect the spirit of the period instead of past styles.

ADOLF LOOS

Adolf Loos was an architect, craftsman and critic who lived from 1870-1933. He was born in Czechoslovakia when the Austro-Hungarian empire still existed. Most of his projects are in Vienna. His passion for the use of materials in the interior comes to the fore, and this passion can perhaps be attributed to his father being a stonemason.



Figure 1. Adolf Loos, (URL 1)

Loos's early education was fraught with difficulties. It began in 1884 when he entered the Obergymnasium of the Benedictines of Melk; he left after only one semester and then entered the National School of Arts and Crafts in Reichenburg, in the hopes of becoming a mechanic. Finally, he found himself at the National School of Arts and Crafts in Brunn where he studied mechanical construction. In 1889 he turned to architecture and enrolled in the technical university in Dresden. During the next year Loos began a career in the military reserve. Within a year he had completed his training and was an Officer of the Reserve. In 1892 Loos returned to Dresden to finish his studies (Andrews, 2010).

Known with the motto "Ornament is a Crime", Loos' trip to America in 1893 greatly influenced his perspective on architecture and decoration. On this trip, he attended the Chicago World's Fair and met Luis Sullivan. Loos, who was highly influenced by Sullivan's ideas, began to see the changing face of Vienna from a different perspective when he returned to Vienna and reacted to these changes (Leatherbarrow, 1987).

As a misunderstanding, Loos, in the essay "Ornament and Crime" not rejected general use of the ornament, but non-cultural and past repetitions. It can be seen in his designs Looshaus and Villa Karma. According to Loos, since his architectural style did not appeal to the customer much and came up with his controversial words, he did not have the chance to build as much as other architects of the period.

VIENNA IN 19TH CENTURY

Urbanization and rapid development experienced throughout Europe in the 19th century are also experienced in Vienna, and the artists react to the instant development and due to mass production products. A movement that closely affected Adolf Loos and the prominent one among these reactions is the Vienna Secession.

As a result of the developments that took place in the nineteenth century, the prominent movements mentioned earlier were Arts and Crafts in England under the leadership of John Ruskin; supports crafts and handmade products. It appears as Judgenstil with Henry van der Velde in Germany, as Art Nouveau under the leadership of Victor Horta in France, and as the Vienna Secession with Gustav Klimt and his students in Vienna.

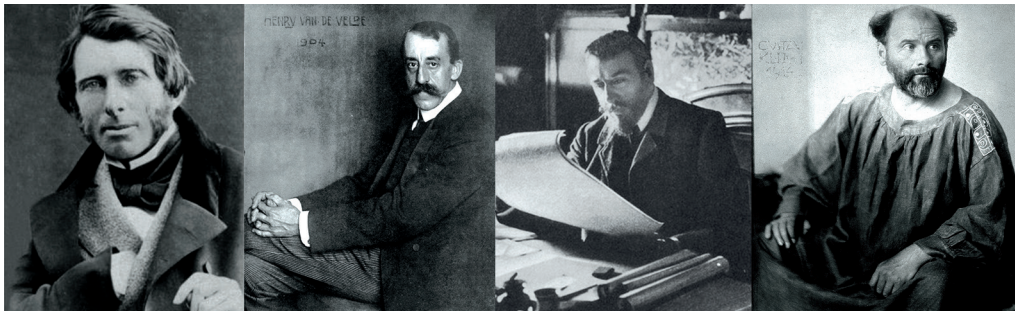


Figure 2. John Ruskin, H.V. de Velde, Victor Horta, Gustav Klimt, (URL 2.3,4,5)



Figure 3. Vienna Secession Group, (Değirmenci & Pilehvarian, 2018)

ADOLF LOOS AND OTTO WAGNER

Adolf Loos had an incredible admiration for Otto Wagner. According to him; Wagner was one of the best architects of the world. He even compares Wagner to Michelangelo and believes that when he reaches his age, he will do much bigger things. Adolf Loos mentions the ornamented façades of Otto Wagner and claims that he did not believe that these ornamented façades were designed by Wagner, and that they were out of the hands of Wagner's design office. Otto Wagner who was born in 1841 in Vienna's Penzing region, was an architect, academic and pioneer of new architecture in Vienna. Although he applied the common architectural styles of the period when he started his career, he thought that designs that refer to the past should be abandoned. (Değirmenci & Pilehvarian, 2018). Otto Wagner, who is a part of the Vienna Secession movement, has always produced modern and functional designs, although he has been influenced by different movements and styles from time to time. Known as the father of modern architecture in Vienna, Wagner did not avoid ornamentation in his designs, but applied decoration in a modern and appropriate way to the period. He used new materials in

his designs and reduced the decoration to two dimensions. Initially seemed to be on the side of Adolf Loos, but in the later stages of his profession, he took an anti-Loos position.

According to Adolf Loos, Wagner had a tradition, a style of his own, and he never strayed from that style. This is why Loos had a great admiration for Wagner.

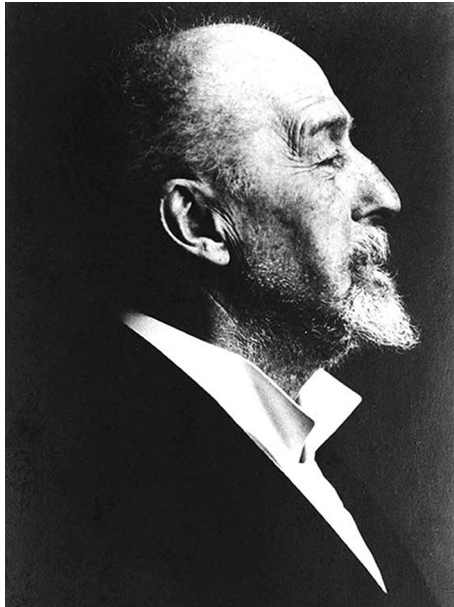


Figure 4. Otto K. Wagner, (URL 6)

ADOLF LOOS AND ARCHITECTURE

The discourses and designs of Adolf Loos are often harmonious and sometimes contradictory. By examining his designs periodically, it is possible to observe the development of Loos' ideas and his success in reflecting them on architecture. One of Loos' first designs is Kartner Bar, which he designed in 1908. This project is notable for the ornament used on the exterior. The reason for this remarkable attraction may be that it is a commercial venue.

The next building is Adolf Loos' most famous and influential building, Looshaus. This building, which was started in 1909 and finished in 1911, has been subjected to a lot of criticism in Vienna of the period for its simplicity. Today, this building is shown as a proof of the contradiction between Loos' discourses and his architecture. The reason for this is

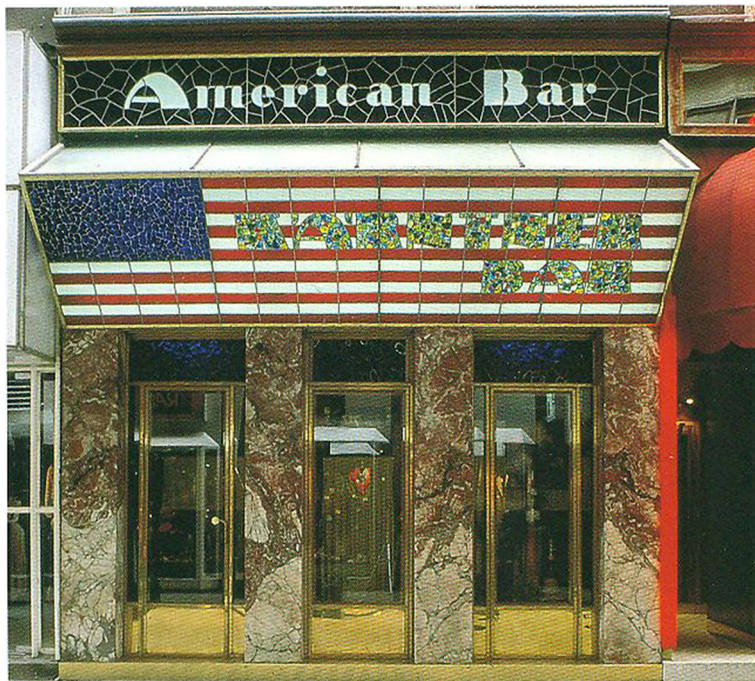


Figure 5. Kartner Bar, 1908, (URL 7)

the columns used on the front of the building, which are not known to be carriers and are perceived as ornaments. However, Loos explained about these columns in his book on Architecture. He said that these columns are not ornamental; they are really necessary columns in the carrier system, so they are used. At the same time, it can be observed that marble is used expertly in this building. There is a palace directly opposite the building, and this unadorned rise of this building opposite this palace was interpreted as an insult by the critics of the period. Therefore, the construction of the building was stopped. After a while, the construction was completed with the support of Otto Wagner to Loos.



Figure 6. Haus am Michaelerplatz, 1909-11, (URL 14)

About ten years after the construction of the Bellariastrasse building, between 1882 and 1883, Loos commented that for another building of Wagner located on Stadiongasse Street, "hard as a caged lion killing a butterfly", he admitted that the design was beautiful, but the style was harsh.



Figure 7. Stadiongasse, 1882/1883, (URL 15)

It is possible to observe how much the architectural style has changed in the Karlsplatz pavilion, which was designed by Wagner in an average of 20 years, in 1900. Loos did not admit that this building was originally designed by Otto Wagner, claimed that it was out of the hands of the design team and that Wagner was not involved, but Otto Wagner was proud of this structure and announced that he designed this structure himself.



Figure 8. Karlsplatz Otto Wagner Pavillon, 1900, (URL 16)

Most of the projects that Adolf Loos made after 1910 were residences. In these houses, we observe that vaults are frequently used on the exterior as a complementary element of the building in the early periods. Built in 1910, the building that is thought to form the basis of Bauhaus architecture, Steiner Haus is also an example of being the first reinforced concrete structure of its kind.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES OF ADOLF LOOS

In this process, while Loos' designs were simplified on the exterior, the rate of material usage in the interior never changed. On the exterior, Loos largely reflected the plan of the building, and on the interior, Raumplan never compromised on the materiality, spatial details, and features that make the house a home. He had a sensitivity towards human needs in all the details he designed in the interior. Loos refers to the story of Little Rich Man, a story he adopted as his way of thinking in his writings during these periods. If this story is;

"Once upon a time, there lived a man who was very rich and had a perfect family, and was envied by everyone. He agreed with an architect, experts from dozens of different professions came to his house, and a major change was made from top to bottom. From the chair he sits on to the fork with which he eats, everything is now an art. The architect designed everything for this man, even a pen he used had a special place on the table. The man was very pleased with himself, I was proud of himself, but as time passed, it started to tire him. The architect did not allow the man to take anything into the house and said that he designed everything he needed. The man no longer needed anything, because he had everything." (Loos, 1982)

With this story, Loos once again emphasizes that architecture is not a branch of art and emphasizes the relationship between architecture and art; Architecture is to offer people a comfortable life, art is to disturb people. A work of art has no responsibility to anyone, but a building is responsible to everyone, he explains.



Figure 9. Steiner House 1910, (URL 8)

It is very important to experience the space he designed for Adolf Loos. The purpose of his designs is to increase the sense of curiosity and not to guess the interior from the outside of the building, and to appeal to the five different senses of the visitor in the interior. For this reason, he uses the material skilfully in his designs. Almost all of Loos' buildings have a very intense use of materials in the interior, and Loos has never compromised from this attitude throughout his architectural adventure.



Figure 10. Horner House, 1912 (URL 9)

One of the materials Loos uses most in interiors is marble. He mentions that he went to Africa to find the marbles he used on the exterior of the Looshaus building. Marble is a noble material for Loos and uses this material extensively as a covering element not only horizontally but also vertically.



Figure 11. Left- Duschnitz Villa, 1915-16 (URL 10), Right- Brummel House, 1929, (URL 13)

Another material that Loos uses extensively in the interiors is wood. He frequently used wooden elements on both horizontal and vertical surfaces, and this element can be observed in almost every structure. It defines and separates the spaces by making changes with the colour tones of the wood material according to the frequency of use of the spaces, whether they are general or private spaces.



Figure 12. Left- Bauer Chateau, 1925 (URL 17), Right- Villa Karma, 1903, (URL 18)



Figure 13. Left- Kärntner Bar, 1908, (URL 7), Right- Lina Loos's Bedroom, 1903, (URL 19)

Two other materials that we often observe in his interiors are mirror and textile. Loos uses these materials skilfully and intensely. Just as people dress for different events, Loos dresses the rooms according to their different functions. Loos defends that the concept of "material honesty" is important when using materials in a building and that every material should be used in accordance with its purpose.

Duschnitz Villa designed by Adolf Loos between 1915-16 and Spanner Country House designed in 1924 differ from other buildings with their pointed roofs and towers. These two buildings are in nature, away from the city centre. Loos' article titled Building in the Mountains, written in 1913, gives clues about the formation of the design ideas of these buildings. In this article, Loos explains his design thoughts with the words "Nature is always sides the truth, don't fear of criticism for being old fashion and think about snow and rain in the buildings you design, not the beauty of the roof (Loos, 2014)."



Figure 14. Left- Duschnitz Villa, 1915-16, (URL 10), Right- Spanner Country House, 1924, (URL 12)

As time goes by, the increase in the effort for simplification on the exterior, but the fact that the use of materials in the interior has not changed in any way can be seen with the Rufer House in 1922. It is the first building where Loos implemented Raumplan. The evolution of culture is achieved by removing ornaments from the items we use daily.

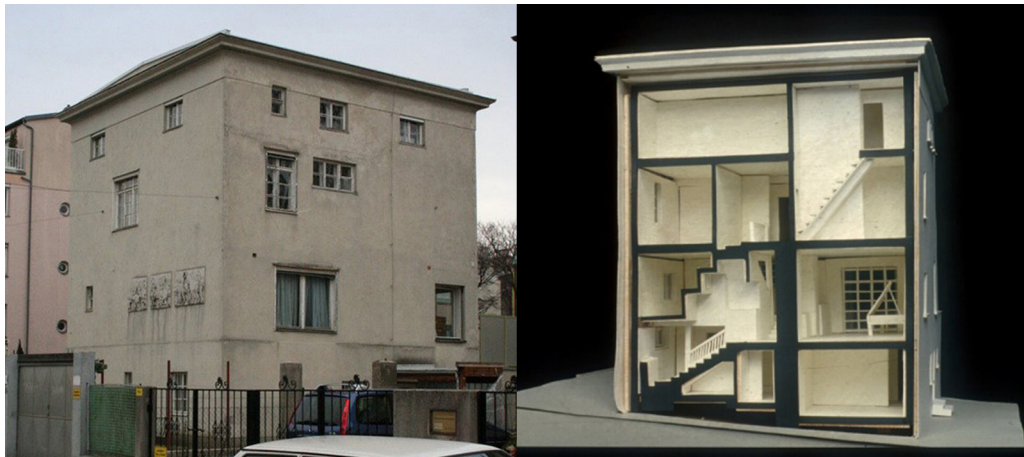


Figure 15. Rufer House, 1922, (URL 11, 20)

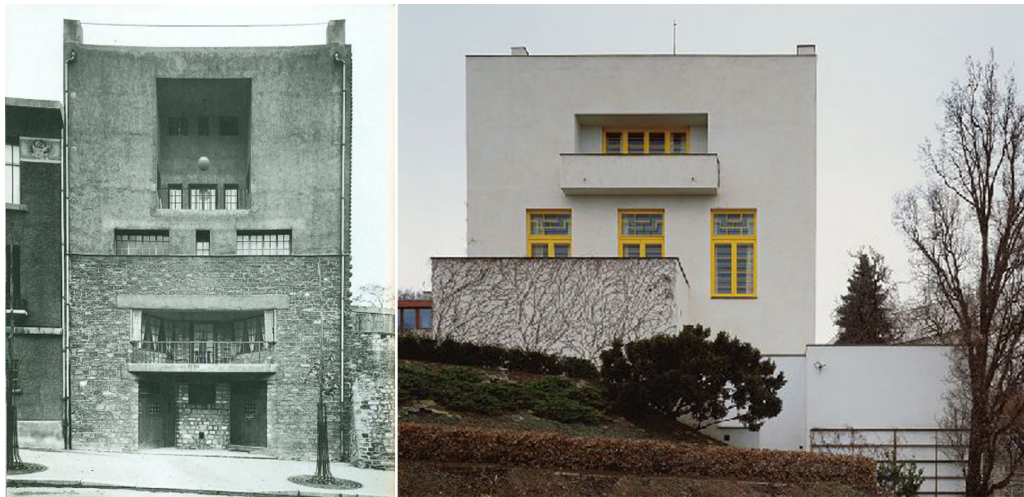


Figure 16. Left- Tristan Tzara House, 1925-26, (URL 21), Right- Müller Villa, 1928-30, (URL 22)

Raumplan, which is often compared to Le Corbusier's Plan Libre, is the design of space in three dimensions, not two. So, Loos plans design volumes, not sections. Loos argues that the height requirement of each space is different and raises spaces at various levels with Raumplan. With these elevation differences, it separates private areas and public areas from each other. At the same time, according to Loos, these elevation differences add a theatrical atmosphere to the spaces.

While designing the volumes, Loos does not care about the effects that will occur on the exterior of the building by designing it from the inside out, and in this way, the plan of the building is reflected on the facade. The clearly observable Loos structure is the Müller Villa, where Raumplan has been masterfully implemented. As seen in the graphic, the spaces are expressed as cubes and each cube is at a different level, with different heights and widths.

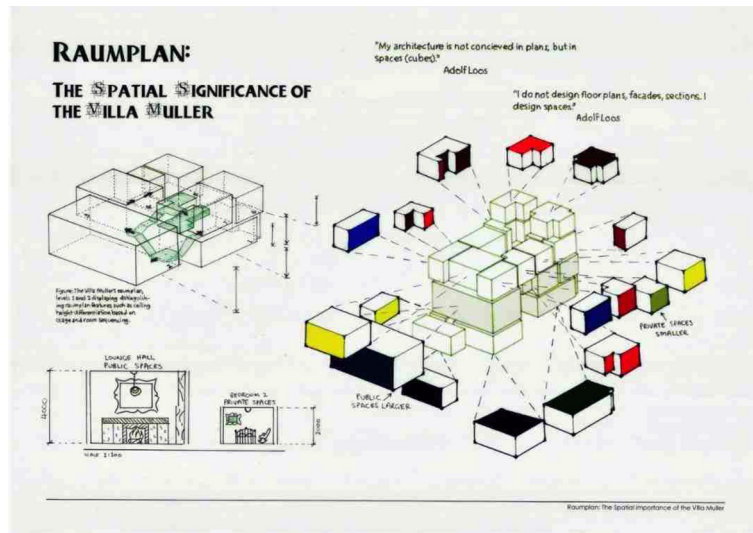


Figure 17. Raumplan Chart, (URL 23)

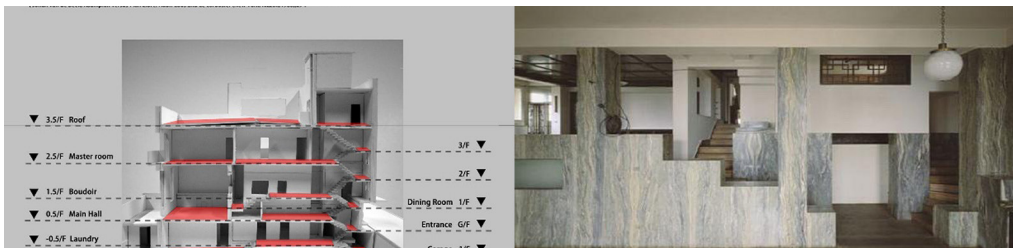


Figure 18. Müller Villa, 1928-30, (URL 24, 25)

The continuation of this simplification is observed in the Tristan Tzara House in 1925-26 and in the Müller House in 1928-30. These structures have a different attitude from the buildings built in previous periods. Loos avoided symmetry in all his designs until these two structures. Tristan Tzara House was built in Paris for Tristan Tzara, the founder of Dadaism. During this period of Loos, the House does not need to tell everything to the outside; instead, he says, all his wealth must be expressed within. At Tristan House, the windows are not meant to view outside, but simply to bring light into the interior.

CONCLUSION

In the last period of Adolf Loos's 38-year architectural adventure, it is seen that Loos uses the exterior only as a tool to cover the interior, and these designs support the mask metaphor described in the Ornament and Crime article. With the metaphor of the **mask**, Loos likens the façades of buildings to the masks that people wear against the outside world. The exterior belongs to the society, and the interior belongs to the user. In the concept of **tattoo**, human and structure analogy is used. Loos has a very harsh and critical attitude towards tattoos and says:

"If someone who is tattooed dies in freedom, then he does so a few years before he would have committed murder." (Loos, 1931)

Loos argues that societies with a low cultural level use ornamentation abundantly, and societies with a high level of culture prefer simplification. He says that the decorations made in the buildings should not be outside the building but with the use of materials inside.

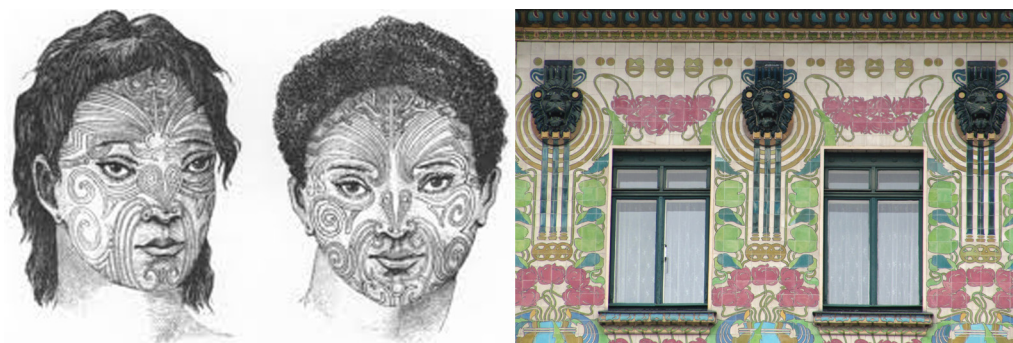


Figure 19. Left Tattooed faces, (Canales, J., & Herscher, A. 2005) Right- Tattooed facades, (URL 26)

So, what lies behind the word Ornament is Crime, what is the basis of these controversial ideas? As demonstrated by this article, Loos' phrase "ornament is crime" turns out to be misinterpreted but to have deeper meanings.

Loos says that ornamentation is murder and defines ornamentation not as a direct crime, but as an element that encourages crime. He says that embellishment is showing something more than it should be, and trying for it causes unnecessary effort, time and money to be spent. Therefore, he argues that all these indirectly cause people to commit crimes by damaging the country's economy. He defines ornaments as a symbol of intellectual power and that there is no room for decoration in today's conditions.

Adolf Loos, who lived in Vienna in the 19th century, when ornamentation was used most intensively, developed a different perspective by opposing the architectural style of the period. With this point of view, he received a reaction in many environments, but he did not give up on his idea and on the contrary developed it more. By following the development of Loos' architectural style over the periods, we can see that he has completely succeeded in applying his ideas in his latest designs.

According to the buildings designed by Loos, we can say that Loos does not like symmetry on the façades of his designs. Loos designs interiors almost perfectly and the interiors he designs can be called quite "ornamental". The interiors are designed too much, appealing to all five senses of the user, while the exterior is used only as a "mask", its sole purpose is to invite the visitor inside. Loos, who uses so much ornaments in the interior, has designed the exterior as if it were careless and haphazard, especially in his recent buildings, contradicting each other and this is an interesting contrast.

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Ethics Committee Approval

Ethics committee approval was not required for this article.

Legal Public/Private Permissions

In this research, the necessary permissions were obtained from the relevant participants (individuals, institutions, and organizations) during the survey and in-depth interviews.

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