Ornament and the Vienna Secession: A Study of the 1902 Beethoven Exhibition

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Ornament and the Vienna Secession: A Study of the 1902 Beethoven Exhibition

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Introduction

Today we tend to think of ornament as a delightful but inessential addition to the body of an object or a person. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “a thing used or serving to make something look more attractive but usually having no practical purpose” and “decoration added to embellish something.”¹ In other words, it is perceived as an aesthetically pleasing and superfluous attachment. In fin-de-siècle Vienna, on the contrary, ornament was a critical and contested issue among writers, visual artists, and architects, who debated its identity, function, and integrity. To give but two examples, for the art historian and curator of textiles at the Museum für Kunst und Industrie Alois Riegl (1858-1905), ornament played an essential role in human culture. Throughout his career, he argued that the decoration of surfaces was an important expression of artistic imagination, even more so than the fine arts. To the contrary, for the architect Adolf Loos (1870-1933) ornament was atavistic and redundant, even immoral and offensive. He famously equated the eradication of ornament with the advancement of civilization.²

Given such polarizing views, it is not surprising that the artists of the Vienna Secession and their use of ornament provoked strident criticism for its opulent eclecticism and apparent lack of a visually coherent symbolic program. To their detractors, Joseph Maria Olbrich’s Secession Building (1898; Figs. 1-3) and Gustav Klimt’s *Beethoven Frieze* (1902; Figs. 4-8), created for the Secession’s fourteenth exhibition (often called the Beethoven exhibition), epitomized excess and unintelligibility. I argue, however, that it was precisely the various styles of ornament and its conceptual application that contributed to the achievement of the Vienna

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Secession’s two most important goals, namely, the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, understood as a synthesis of the arts, and the unfettered creativity embodied by its motto: “Der Zeit ihre Kunst Der Kunst ihre Freiheit (to every age its art, to every art its freedom).” They aimed to achieve all-encompassing artwork by designing ornament to appeal to different senses—sight, touch, and sound, as well as to kinesthetic awareness through rhythm. In turn, the Secessionists vaunted supreme creativity in theory and practice thoroughly informed by Riegl’s ideas of the *Kunstwollen* (artistic will) and the evolution of ornament toward ever greater expressive freedom.\(^4\)

The term and concept, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, was first popularized by the German operatic composer, Richard Wagner (1813-1883), who used it in his writings from 1849 onward to advocate for drama as the consummate union of all the arts. Although the concept was adopted in various ways in fin-de-siècle Vienna, Wagner had formulated his ideal *Gesamtkunstwerk* as a reincarnation of early Greek tragedy, in which architecture, music, poetry, and dance all came together to produce a transcendent experience.\(^5\) While various senses had to collaborate to produce such a stimulus, the activation of the sensorium was itself not the goal. Rather, in the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the individual arts were subordinated to a common purpose, namely, to elicit profound emotional reactions and, hence, insight into an ideal humanity.\(^6\) In a similar vein, I suggest that, in both the Secession Building and the *Beethoven Frieze*, the various ornamental motifs engaged the different senses in an almost ecstatic mix, to bring about a

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\(^3\) Ludwig Hevesi (1843-1910), journalist and Secession artists’ friend, contributed the motto.

\(^4\) Margaret Iversen defines *Kunstwollen* as “an artistic will or urge or intent informing different period styles.” Margaret Iversen, *Alois Riegl: History and Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 6.


spiritual, if secular, experience of the religion of art and with it, the vision of a better world.

In regard to the second goal, the correspondence between the Vienna Secession’s proclamation, “to every age its own art, to every art its freedom,” which was articulated in gold relief on the Secession façade, and Riegl’s idea of the Kunstwollen is striking. Kunstwollen, a neologism coined by Riegl, is the collective force that creates a style that in turn manifests itself through a set of motifs, particular to each era. As importantly, Riegl argued that the resulting expression was free of a functional purpose and material or technical constraints. For Riegl, the Kunstwollen was most clearly expressed in the development of ornament across time and different cultures, i.e. a process in which specific ornamental designs such as the tendril and the acanthus freed themselves from previously assumed articulations and uses. Accordingly, in Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik (Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament) of 1893, Riegl took ornament out of its material context and discussed it as a two-dimensional pattern or pure design element, that demonstrated the autonomous drive of the Kunstwollen. I argue that the ornamental program of the Secession Building and the Beethoven Frieze consciously evoked Riegl’s various stages of the evolution of ornament as a visual metaphor for the open-ended development of form and, hence, of creative freedom.

The cultural circumstances surrounding the founding of the Vienna Secession provide a context for the novelty of the Secession’s activities and how its aims were made manifest in their

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8 Henri Zerner, preface to Problems of Style, xxii.

eponymous building. Few works better epitomize the historicist attitude against which the artists of the Vienna Secession reacted than the architecture of the Vienna Ringstrasse.\textsuperscript{10} Although the inauguration of the Ringstrasse of 1857 preceded the Secession Building by almost half a century, the language used to criticize its ornamental scheme and organic effusiveness betrays that the critics held the same expectations that had been satisfied by the architecture of the Ringstrasse: decorative motifs, taken from the Western cannon spanning from ancient Greek through Baroque, were to be coordinated within each building so as to deliver an unequivocal message about its function, hierarchies of taste, and civic importance.

The Ringstrasse was originally a wide sloping glacis, dug up to augment the pre-existing city walls after the First Turkish Siege of 1529. While the glacis had been somewhat adapted to house small workshops and stalls, the military, after the uprising of 1848, showed much resistance to the idea of altering it for civilian usage. Therefore, when the inauguration of the Ringstrasse by Emperor Joseph Franz finally took place in 1857, it symbolized the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie over the military, for the street was now to serve commercial, civic, and residential purposes.\textsuperscript{11} Reflecting the change in the socio-political hierarchy, numerous grand buildings were constructed. More to the point, architects expressed the imposing triumphalism of each building through the use of \textit{Bekleidung} (clothing), i.e. an ornament appropriate to its historicizing reference.\textsuperscript{12}

The major new edifices adapted specific historical idioms for their respective associations of venerable times past. Theophil Hansen designed the Parliament (1874-1884; Fig. 9) in Neo-Classical style, no doubt evoking the origin of democracy in Athenian Greece; Heinrich von

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 27-31.
\item \textsuperscript{12} \textit{Bekleidung} is the term Gottfried Semper used to describe the outer layer draped over the structurally functional part of the building. The term will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.
\end{itemize}
Ferstel’s Votivkirche (1856-1879; Fig. 10) and Friedrich von Schmidt’s Neues Rathaus (1872-1883; Fig. 11) both employed the Neo-Gothic to allude to the piety and tightly-knit communities of the Middle Ages; the Natural History Museum and Art History Museum (both 1871-1890; Fig. 12) by Gottfried Semper, the State Opera House (1861-1869; Fig. 13) by Eduard van der Null and August Siccardburg, the University of Vienna (1877-1884; Fig. 14), and Museum of Applied Arts (1867-1871) by Ferstel are all structures cloaked in the Neo-Renaissance style, celebrating an era of humanistic learning and innovation; Semper and Karl von Hasenauer commemorated the spirit of the early Baroque in their Burgtheatre (1874-1888; Fig. 15) the era in which theater supposedly brought together different classes.\(^\text{13}\)

The convention of draping a work of art in the dress of a venerated epoch, regardless of its relevance to modern life, also dominated the approach of the Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien (the Viennese Academy of Fine Arts), established in 1692, and the Künstlerhaus (The Artists’ House), founded in 1861. An official institution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Akademie trained artists and future art professors in a decidedly conservative manner, exemplified by the art and teachings of Hans Makart (1840-1884), under whom Klimt studied (Fig. 16). The Künstlerhaus, an association of elected artists, owned the city’s only permanent exhibition space and also organized shows abroad to promote what they considered to be the most representative Austrian art. It exercised a considerable influence in shaping Viennese cultural life by determining what the public would see, the standards of taste, and criteria for aesthetic judgment. In reacting against this stifling academic tradition, thirteen artists of the younger generation withdrew from the Künstlerhaus on May 24, 1897, the date that marks the

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\(^{13}\)Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, 36-45.
beginning of the Vienna Secession.  

Although the dissident artists ended up forming a group separate from the Künstlerhaus, their original intention was to remain within it while pursuing their own interests. The story is worth noting, as their complex attitude toward tradition—the desire to embrace it while wanting to be free of it—was also evidenced in the Secession’s use of historical ornament in the spirit of Riegl, who argued that all motifs evolved from earlier ones in increasing variation and freedom. The key was to elaborate on set forms and patterns in innovative ways that broke with staid and outdated formula, including the idea that decorative programs had to be uniform or homogeneous. Moreover, the encounter with important outside influences, such as French Art Nouveau, the British Arts and Crafts movement, and Japonism, took place in this incipient period of the group. Such varied sources were referenced in the Viennese artists’ application of ornamental elements in their architecture, decorative arts, graphic design, and painting.

Dissatisfaction with the exclusivity of the two stalwart institutions had been mounting among more progressive-minded artists since at least the early 1890’s. The seed of the Secession seems to have been casual meetings of two circles of such artists—the Hagengesellschaft and the “Siebner Klub,” both of which met at the Café Sperl.  

There, young artists vented their frustration at the conservative Künstlerhaus. Some of the members of the Hegengesellschaft had been exposed to the *plein-air* method of painting in Paris, whose influence can be detected in works by Josef Engelhart and Maximilian Lenz. Twelve of the Hegengesellschaft artists were among the founding members of the Secession, and they displayed a more naturalistic tendency


16 Ibid., 39.
within it.\textsuperscript{17}

The origin of the Siebner Klub, which was much smaller and represented the future avant-garde of the Secession, remains unclear, and the number of members seems to have fluctuated.\textsuperscript{18} Josef Hoffmann, Leo Kainradl, Koloman Moser, Olbrich, and Joseph Urban were among its constant members. During these meetings the members read \textit{The Studio}, the influential English arts magazine, which introduced them to the work of Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898), James Whistler (1823-1903), Japanese woodblock prints, and movements such as William Morris’s Arts and Crafts and French Art Nouveau, all previously little known in Vienna.\textsuperscript{19} Robert Judson Clark has written that the members of the Siebner Klub adorned blank inexpensive postcards they had collected as a way of practicing different decorative styles, and that these free-style designs anticipated the artists’ progression toward what would come to be known as \textit{Jugendstil}, the Viennese version of Art Nouveau, in which artists subordinated human figures to anti-natural sinuous lines and geometric surface patterning.\textsuperscript{20} By 1897, the move away from organic abstraction to more geometrical motifs typified the Germanic version of this fin-de-siècle style.\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{The Studio} also introduced the members of the Siebner Klub to the comprehensive designs of the Arts and Crafts movement. Analogues to Wagnerian concept \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk} in drama, the Arts and Crafts movement sought the total coordinated experience of various arts in

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 37. Those twelve included Adolf Böhm, Josef Engelhart, Friedrich König, Johann Viktor Krämer, Carl Muller, Alfred Roller, and Ernst Stöhr. Bisanz-Prakken’s chapter titled “The Hagengesellschaft and the Sebner-Klub—The Roots of the Secession” gives a detailed and informative account of the days leading up to the formation of the Vienna Secession. Ibid., 37-52.

\textsuperscript{18} Olbrich uses the word “Siebner” in a letter to Hoffmann on Christmas of 1895. Clark, “Joseph Maria Olbrich and Vienna,” 87.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 89-90.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
the domestic realm of interior design, such as book-binding, furniture, wallpaper, and textiles, all of which became key ventures for the Secession and their firm, the Wiener Werkstätte.\(^{22}\) Admittedly, the synthesis of arts alone did not strictly qualify as a Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk, since the composer’s aim was not the coordination of the arts per se but the deep emotional resonance resulting from their commingling. Under the influence of Wagner’s vision, the Secession artists later combined the lofty concept of Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerk with a range of artistic activities.\(^{23}\) Specifically, I will argue that the Secessionists came close to realizing Wagnerian ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk in the Beethoven exhibition: they created a wide range of artworks—some of which even alluded to music—in order to bring about a religious experience in their “temple of art.”

The year 1894 was a relatively liberal moment for the Künstlerhaus: it even invited artists from the Munich Secession to exhibit. Expectedly, there were ramifications on both sides—unease and unrest from the more academic members, and an explicit display of ambition from the more innovative ones.\(^{24}\) In November 1896, conservative Eugen Felix was re-elected as president of the Künstlerhaus. In the hope of making the institution more appropriate before the golden jubilee of Emperor Franz Josef the following year, Felix started excluding more radical members from exhibiting at home and abroad.\(^{25}\) Klimt, Carl Moll, and Engelhart, in reaction against this move, considered establishing a separate group, the Vereinigung bildender Künstler Österreichs (Association of Fine Artists of Austria) within the Künstlerhaus, and in February

\(^{22}\) Bisanz-Prakken, *Nuda Veritas* 41-42.


\(^{24}\) Clark, “Joseph Maria Olbrich and Vienna,” 91.

1897, asked the Interior Minister for a site to establish their own exhibition space. The request was met positively: the group was granted the lease of a rather prominent site owned by the War Ministry on the Ringstrasse and fundraising effort was initiated. In April 1897, the group sent a letter signed by Klimt, their chosen president, to the Künstlerhaus, explaining their goals: to introduce the Viennese public and the official art organizations to modern art of other countries and to establish a site as a basis for artistic exploration. The letter, which Klimt also sent to Viennese newspapers, emphasized the group’s good will and intention to remain within the Künstlerhaus.

The parent organization, however, was not as tolerant as the young group had hoped. During the May 22th 1897 meeting, the members of the dissident group were severely criticized; Klimt and Olbrich walked out. Two days later, thirteen artists resigned en masse, and the Secession was thus born. While the group worked on securing a permanent site and financial support, in January 1898, they published the first issue of the journal Ver Sacrum (sacred spring) in order to promote their program (Fig. 17). The term “secession” adapted the more recent example of the Munich Secession (founded 1892) and its rebellion against staid academic

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26 Clark, “Joseph Maria Olbrich and Vienna,” 92-93.

27 Ibid., 91-95.

28 Latham, Olbrich, 14. Those included Rudolf Bacher, Hoffmann, Klimt, Johann Viktor Krämer, Julius Mayreder, Moll, Moser, Olbrich, and Stöhr. Rudolf von Alt joined soon after and became their Honorary President; in 1899, Otto Wagner enlisted. It is not clear when or who started calling the group the Secession. Bisanz-Prakken quotes Ludwig Hevesi, who described how Klimt walked out of the fateful meeting at the Künstlerhaus: “the beautiful, artistic programme of the Sezession, which the nineteen had hoped would permit them to remain amicably in the committee has become unfeasible.” Hermann Bahr also uses the word “Secession” in the essay he contributed to the first issue of Ver Sacrum. Bisanz-Prakken, Nuda Veritas, 18, 21.

29 The journal was essential to the Secession’s endeavor in more ways other than its role as the written messenger. The journal was similar to The Studio, the magazine the Siebener-klub members admired, in that it provided a place where artists could experiment with and develop graphic ideas and techniques. More specifically, it was on the pages of Ver Sacrum that Olbrich developed his characteristic motif of combined circles, and Hoffmann, more rectangular patterns. This is only one of many instances that show the importance of the journal to the Secession’s activity: Alfred Roller wrote to Klimt in 1898, “…every issue of V. S. is a small exhibition, and the whole V.S. is a very large one.” The journal also introduced the Viennese audience to Art Nouveau for the first time. Latham, Olbrich, 15, 16. The quote is from Bisanz-Prakken, Nuda Veritas, 23.
It also referred to the *secession plebis*, a practice in ancient Rome in which a disgruntled fraction of society would climb the hills overlooking the capital and threaten to found a second Rome. *Ver Sacrum*, in turn, took its name from an ancient pagan ritual, the sacrificial killing of those who were born in the spring to ensure the constant renewal of society. Excerpts of the manifesto from the magazine’s first issue reveal the group’s most important goals: the desire to find a singular artistic voice, respect for the inspirational freedom of all artists, a classless public, the blurring of boundaries between the fine and decorative arts, and the importance of an all-encompassing work of art that would unite different artistic forms and medium. The manifesto also spoke against the need for polemics around the ideal of “tradition,” since for the Secession artists, continuity and innovation precluded the convention of historicist revivals:

Now every age has its own sensitivity. It is our aim to awaken, to encourage and to disseminate the art sensitivity of our age, it is the main reason why we are publishing a magazine. And to everyone who is striving for the same goals, even if by a different path, we gladly extend a hand for alliance. And then we turn to all of you, without discrimination of status or mean[s]. We recognize no distinction between ‘high art’ and ‘minor arts,’ between art for the rich and art for the poor. Art is public property. … In Munich and Paris the intention of the Secessions has been to replace the ‘old’ art with a ‘new’ art… No, with us it is different. We are not fighting for and against the traditions, we simply don’t have any.

The Secession’s first exhibition opened on March 26 at the Imperial and Royal Horticultural Society on the Ringstrasse, which they rented for three months. The negotiations for a site to build their own exhibition house was drawn out, and the group did not want to miss

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31 The manifesto was given as a series of essays by the Secessionists’ friends, Max Burckhard, then-director of Burgtheater, and the writer Hermann Bahr. It is characteristic of the Vienna Secession that while the artists themselves did not write much to explain or defend their position, they had some prominent writers and intellectuals in their circle, Bahr, Hevesi, and Berta Zuckerkandl to name a few, who eloquently defended them. Bisanz-Prakken, *Nuda Veritas*, 21. Quoted in ibid., 198-9. Originally published in *Ver Sacrum* no.1 (1898).

the opportunity to time their first exhibition with the Emperor’s Jubilee. Olbrich designed a temporary entrance and the main exhibition rooms, while Hoffmann was in charge of fitting the offices.\textsuperscript{33} True to its cosmopolitan ambitions, the exhibition included works by Puvis de Chavannes, Walter Crane, Auguste Renoir, Fernand Khnopff, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Alphonse Mucha, Max Klinger, Max Liebermann, and Franz von Stuck, among others. Despite their emphasis on the originality in the Ver Sacrum, what was shown was not novel: many works had, in fact, been exhibited before at the Künstlerhaus. The exhibition was a success nonetheless, both in terms of attendance and profit. Even the Emperor himself visited on April 6, which no doubt boosted attendance. The members of the Secession went out of their way to help visitors understand the art on display and the group’s goals: some members offered tours to the visitors, a novelty for Vienna.\textsuperscript{34}

The proceeds from the entrance fee and financial assistance from some prominent Viennese, including Karl Wittgenstein (the father of the philosopher Ludwig), soon made the construction of their own exhibition space possible. Olbrich had worked for the architect Otto Wagner (1841-1918), but the Secession Building turned out to be the first permanent structure under his name. It is not clear how he came to receive the commission, and although some early sketches for the edifice by Klimt remain extant, there was no discussion at any point over the choice of the architect.\textsuperscript{35} Their respective designs reveal certain similarities, such as the presence of the dome and pronounced columns that flank the entrance, suggesting a collaboration or exchange of ideas.

The earliest sketch by Olbrich (Fig. 18) bears a strong resemblance to the Stadtbahn

\textsuperscript{33} Latham, Olbrich, 17.

\textsuperscript{34} “Selected, Annotated list of Exhibitions in the Main Hall of the Vienna Secession, 1898-1998” in Secession: The Vienna Secession from Temple of Art to Exhibition Hall, 159.

\textsuperscript{35} Latham, Olbrich, 18.
buildings (a project where he served as Wagner’s assistant) especially in its squat proportions and the treatment of side-walls unbroken by fenestration (Fig. 19). The dome appears rather elongated and more skeletal than weighty. The decorative curves on the façade recall the surrounding Baroque architecture of Vienna, and reveal Olbrich’s training in architectural historicism. The dome disappeared in the first design submitted to the War Ministry (March 1897), and the two imposing columns that flank the entrance became the highest point of the building (Fig. 20). The starkly symmetrical entrance, windowless walls, and the relatively small scale set it apart from other monumental buildings that lined the Ringstrasse.

Objections to the design were centered on the treatment of the axis and the façade: some members of the War Ministry suggested making the façade more grand and turning the footprint ninety degrees so that the entrance would face the Ringstrasse. Accordingly, Olbrich submitted another version, which the War Ministry disliked even more; they complained that the appearance of such a strange building would depreciate the surrounding real estate. Another objection concerned the plain plaster walls, which made a striking contrast to more traditional rusticated masonry of the Ringstrasse architecture, such as the Museums of Natural History and Art History. A passionate debate ensued. Some newspapers reported severe criticism from the City of Vienna Council members as well. The Secession had some powerful supporters on their side, including the mayor of Vienna, Karl Luger and Rudolf Mayreder, a councilman and the brother of a Secession founding member, Julius Mayreder. However, Moll, then president of the Secession, decided to seek a new and less prestigious site, so that Olbrich could pursue his

36 Ibid., 21.

37 Clark, “Joseph Maria Olbrich and Vienna,” 97.
artistic vision unhindered by the architectural demands of the Ringstrasse.\textsuperscript{38}

We know from various stages of drawings, that it was only when the site changed to the less prominent Friedrichstrasse, a few blocks outside of the Ringstrasse, that the iconic dome appeared in the design (Fig. 21). It is somewhat peculiar in its full, bulbous shape, which is larger than a typical half sphere. Olbrich’s dome has been interpreted variously as a variation of the Baroque baldachin or an imitation of the primitive hut.\textsuperscript{39} Some scholars view this pronounced feature as Olbrich’s response to the Karlskirche (1716-1737), which seems likely considering that the dome of this Baroque church is, to this day, very visible across from the Secession Building (Fig. 22).\textsuperscript{40} There is a major difference between them, however. The latter example is not structural but purely ornamental: the bulbous dome sits on top of a glass ceiling. Olbrich submitted the final design in mid-March 1898. It was approved, and the foundation stone was laid a month later with religious ceremoniousness.\textsuperscript{41}

While Olbrich was the architect, the building also reflected the Secession’s collaborative spirit, especially in its realization of the ornamental sculpture. Moser designed the trio of owls on the side walls and a low bas-relief frieze of dancers with laurel wreaths on the back wall (plastered over in 1908 and now invisible); the original iron doors, now replaced, were designed by Georg Klimt, Gustav’s brother.\textsuperscript{42} The following report by Hermann Bahr on October 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1898, a few weeks before the building’s official opening, testifies to the curiosity and


\textsuperscript{41} The ceremony was recorded by Hevesi. Fiedl, “The Secession as Sacred Center,” 59.

\textsuperscript{42} Robert Waissenberger, \textit{Vienna Secession} (New York: Rizzoli, 1977), 43.
anticipation over the project:

If at the present time you go down by the river Wien in the early morning you can see there, every day behind the Akademie, going from the town to the theatre, a throng of people crowding round a new building. There are workers, craftsmen and women who should be on their way to work, but they stop here, staring in amazement, unable to turn away. They gape, they question, they discuss this thing. ... And that just doesn’t stop the whole day long.43

The Secession Building is striking even today. At first glance, it looks like a squat block topped by a bulbous golden dome. Outwardly, the overall scheme approximates a cruciform, with four short arms protruding from a central square.44 Upon close inspection, the visitor notices that numerous decorative motifs of varied relief and iconography alleviate the severity of the architectural masses. Indeed, the unbroken planar surfaces of the building serve as pictorial ground and backdrop for these designs, in a bold reversal of the conventional use of ornament to articulate the inherent architectural structure.

The most noticeable feature, the dome of gilded gold laurel leaves, nests in four truncated, slightly tapered square blocks with patterned bands of gold squares at the top and stylized fluting at their base. The entrance recalls an Egyptian pylon—recessed entrance flanked by two towers. Otto Kapfinger has pointed out that there is not a single perpendicular plane in the Secession Building: all the exterior walls, most visibly in the entrance, taper upward.45

Olbrich used gleaming gold accents throughout to offset the austerity of the white plastered brickwork, yet simultaneously adding to the sense of sacredness and purity appropriate to a “temple of art.” On the front façade, a broken entablature surmounts the entrance; in place of any proper classical order, Olbrich let his creativity run free: he topped the crown of the

43 Quoted in Latham, Olbrich, 24.
“cornice” with a zig-zag course made of sheet metal (repeating this element in the lower entablatures of the front and side walls of the buildings), while a free-form, looping gold line articulated the base of the cornice, normally occupied by the cove or astragal molding (Fig. 23). The Secession motto, writ large in gold relief letters, “der Zeit ihre Kunst, der Kunst ihre Freiheit,” occupied the entablature frieze band (Fig. 23). In similar large gold relief the words “Ver Sacrum” (sacred spring) appear on the flat and otherwise unadorned left wall of the façade.

Above the setback entranceway proper, three Gorgons’ heads sculpted in an Art Nouveau- Jugendstil manner greet the visitor, their wavy snake locks echoing in shape and rhythm the looping gold lines of the cornice high above. In another unconventional turn, they represent the three arts—Malerie/ Architektur /Plastik (painting, architecture, sculpture) carved in gold just below their visages (Fig. 23). Even more lavish is the frieze of golden foliage that frames the entirety of the entrance, their petal like leaves held aloft by thin trunks below, suggesting a sacred grove through which one passed through to gain entrance. Olbrich had these carved in low relief, the trunk and branches in white, outlined silhouettes, the foliage with the gold infill, to link with the dome of gold leaves higher above, a coming together of painting, sculpture and architecture in one motif. The same bas-relief of lithe trees and foliage repeat at the far ends of the façade now all in white, accentuating the unbroken, linear flow.

They then reappear on pilasters that articulate the sides of the façade, which feature a different floral motif on their bases. Here one finds a contrast between different geometric and organic elements—horizontal bands and molding, incised circles and another arrangement of intricate serpentine lines and flower-like forms (Fig. 24). Most astonishing is the design that Olbrich inscribed in the narrow interval wall between the facade sides and the side-arms

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proper—a loosely spiraling line, almost like a partial treble clef (Fig. 24). Further along one encounters two sets of a trio of sculpted owls set on a ledge. A symbol of Athena, goddess of wisdom and the arts, the owls are flanked by a laurel wreath, the honor for poets (Fig. 25). A broken band in an abstracted chain or belt-buckle design marks the mid-height of the side-elevations (Fig. 25). Though now painted over, the back walls originally sported Moser’s frieze of stylized female dancers in a quasi-Assyrian style, with arms raised high and holding hoops that form their own additional running circular pattern (Fig. 26). The architecture could not be more different from the grand historicizing buildings of the Ringstrasse, especially in its stylistic pastiche (Greek, Egyptian, Assyrian) and ornamental fantasies.47

As noted earlier, the building caused quite a stir among the Viennese when it was finished. Carl Schreider, writing for the conservative newspaper Deutsches Volksblatt, ironically described it as “a little Egyptian, some Assyrian and a little Indian, no wonder therefore that on the whole it appears ‘Spanish’ to the great majority of people.”48 The term “Assyrian” likely referred to Moser’s dancers, and “Indian,” possibly to the gleaming-white structure of the Taji Mahal. Others hinted at the Orientalist other through mocking phrases such as “Assyrian Convenience” and “Mahdi’s Tomb [Islamic redeemer’s shrine].”49

Such responses reveal the difficulty for visitors in grasping the building as a whole and its simple geometric gestalt. Contemporaries noticed this or that ornamental motif, or a peculiar aspect of the overall form, but the varied elements did not make sense together, as evidence by those who referred to it as “a cross between a glasshouse and a blast-furnace,” and “a hybrid

47 Alofsin writes that Olbrich produced a building that “resonated with history, but not historicism.” Ibid., 57.
49 Quoted in ibid., 32, Waissenberger, Vienna Secession, 9.
between a temple and storehouse.”\textsuperscript{50} The perforated dome, with its gold laurel leaves and berries, was disparaged as being “full of holes,” a “table centerpiece,” and a “golden globe of world domination.”\textsuperscript{51}

On the other hand, critics generally praised the interior of the building for its flexibility and functionality. The weight was borne by only six columns, resulting in an airy space, and the walls could be moved around to create a space for each exhibition (Fig. 27). Moreover, the walls were bare so that they could be decorated for each occasion.\textsuperscript{52} It is curious that the starkness of cubic quality of the exterior was unacceptable, while the same feature of the interior was seen as functional and therefore well-received, indicating that contemporaries held different expectations for the outward and inward appearances.

However scorned by naysayers, the members of the Vienna Secession intended the building to be a temple of arts. The poster to the second exhibition featured an image of the Secession Building, and its accompanying catalogue stated: “May this house become a home for the serious artist as for the true art lover. May they both, creating and enjoying, seeking and finding, be here united in this temple in sacred service, so that [Ludwig] Hevesi’ words, which our building bears on its brow, may in truth come to pass: To every age its art, to art its freedom” (Fig. 28).\textsuperscript{53}

Amidst the eclecticism, Olbrich deliberately evoked sacred architecture. The shape of the building approximates a cruciform plan; the entrance recalls an ancient Egyptian temple; the Gorgon sisters above the entrance are reminiscent of the pediments of archaic Greek temples;

\textsuperscript{50} Quoted in Szeless, “To New Art a New House Planning and Construction of the Building 1897-98,” 30.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Quoted in Vergo, \textit{Art in Vienna 1898-1918}, 55.
and the dome refers to the domain of heaven, as in traditional church architecture—or even the temple of the Pantheon (Figs. 23, 29). Once their temple of art opened, the group energetically organized and put up exhibitions, sometimes a few per year.

The most significant exhibition, however, was the 1902 “XIV Ausstellung der Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs Secession Wien (XIV Exhibition of the Association of Austrian Artists Vienna Secession),” conceived as a Gesamtkunstwerk with the central conceit being an homage to Ludwig von Beethoven and his triumphant last movement, the choral “Ode to Joy” of his Ninth Symphony. Gustav Mahler conducted the symphony at the opening with members of the Vienna State Orchestra. The artistic program and exhibition design was headed by architect Hoffmann and involved some twenty Secession artists. In addition, they commissioned a larger-than-life size effigy of the composer by the German sculptor Max Klinger (1857-1920). Though Klinger’s sculpture was placed in the central and largest room of the tripartite exhibition space, it was Klimt’s Beethoven Frieze that provided the visual counterpart to Beethoven’s music program of heroic struggle and fulfill humanity, as well as a narrative of the messianic role of the arts. I argue that Klimt conceived many of his motifs and ornamental devices in concert with the strategy already established by Olbrich, so that from exterior to interior, one experienced a coordinated experience. Ornament in both the building and the frieze fulfilled narrative, visual, and tactile functions, critical in achieving the Secession’s two most important goals—a Gesamtkunstwerk and the realization of its motto “to every age its art, to every art its freedom.”


My thesis builds on previous scholarship, though no single study connects theories and practice of ornament in fin-de-siècle Vienna, manifested in the building and the frieze, to the nexus of ideas paramount to the Secession. The Secession Building has been the subject of detailed studies by Robert Judson Clark and Ian Latham, and seen as a provocation to the conventions of the Ringstrasse—an architecture for its own age, or turn of the century Vienna. Latham’s study documents the evolution of Olbrich’s designs, while Clarke gives detailed information on the architect’s training and career. No study considers Olbrich’s eclectic ornament in the context of debates on ornament of the time and the Secession ideas of creative freedom, a multi-sensorial experience of art, or the rapport between it and Klimt’s frieze.

Scholars on the Beethoven Frieze have studied its history, sources of influence, and various interpretations of iconography. Stephan Koja’s short monographic study on Klimt’s masterwork gives background on the 1902 Secession “Beethoven Exhibition,” as it has come to be known, and on the other artworks displayed, placing Klimt’s frieze in that context. In addition to analyzing the narrative of the three-part, three-wall painting, he offers a detailed iconographic reading and an account of possible artistic sources, such as the art of antiquity, Japanese prints, and the work of Symbolist painters Jan Toorop and Ferdinand Hodler. Marian Bisanz-Prakken has contributed a detailed understanding of the relationship between Klimt’s sinuous lines and other Symbolist painters, notably Toorop, and how his Jugendstil evolved from Nuda Veritas of 1899 through the Faculty Paintings (1900-07) and the Beethoven Frieze.

58 Ibid., 96-102. The Vienna Secession exhibited and celebrated the works by Toorop and Hodler at their twelfth exhibition that took place in 1901-1902. The group devoted their sixth exhibition of 1900 to Japanese art.
59 Bisanz-Prakken, Nuda Veritas, 53-60.
Bisanz-Prakken has also given a convincing account of how certain grand themes such as love, death, and battle of elemental forces, were persistent for Klimt during this early period, culminating in the *Beethoven Frieze*.  

The connection between Klimt’s frieze and the last movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, more specifically Richard Wagner’s highly dramatic program for it, has been covered by Koja and Peter Vergo. On the connection between Klimt and Wagner, Timothy W. Hiles has convincingly argued that Klimt was likely influenced by Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*, showing how specific depictions in the artist’s narrative can be linked to paragraphs in Nietzsche’s essay. For example, the importance of the chorus for Nietzsche’s theory of tragedy corresponds to the choir of angels in the climactic scene in Klimt’s mural.

Despite these numerous accounts, the workings of ornament remain understudied. Koja writes that “Klimt was searching for a renewal of the pictorial language in which intellectual content was conveyed through ornament,” but does not pursue this idea. More commonly, specific ornaments in the building and the frieze are discussed in isolation. Kapfinger, Koja, and Vergo identify historical sources and symbolism, but do not link the forms and sequence of

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60 Ibid., 53-67.


63 Ibid., 176.

64 Koja, forward to *Gustav Klimt The Beethoven Frieze and the Controversy over the Freedom of Art*, 10. In a similar vein, Robert Schmutzler, while writing about Art Nouveau more generally, argues that “Art Nouveau expresses itself genetically, first of all, as an ornamental surface-movement where the ornamental element remains dominant, even if applied to the representation of figures or of objects situated in space. … On the other hand, ornament now began to dominate figures and objects set in space as an inner force too, imposing on them an ornamental structure.” Schmutzler then makes another intriguing point that the “ornaments of Art Nouveau are not decorative or noncommittal; they are signs, closely connected with form, meaning, and symbols.” Robert Schmutzler, *Art Nouveau* (Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1962), 9.
ornamental designs to an overall programmatic concern on the part of the Secession artists. Nor have scholars connected the Secession’s reverence for, even obsession with, ornament to Alois Riegl’s writings on the subject, even though he was their contemporary and they knew his work.

Three scholars in particular have addressed ornament in Klimt’s work around 1900 in specific ways and related to aspects of Riegl’s ideas. M.E. Warlick has suggested that Klimt employed certain ornamental motifs, such as the mystical eye (the symbol of the god Ra) and a rosebush (connection to Isis) in the Stoclet Frieze to evoke the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris, in order to proclaim his own artistic rebirth. In her essay on Klimt’s paintings and murals from 1890-1907, Lisa Florman has argued that the choice of ornamental motifs from the “irrational” (according to Nietzsche) Archaic period is evidence of Klimt’s interest in conceptual issues such as the emphasis of emotion over reason, and the reconciliation of these two. For example, Florman demonstrates that in Pallas Athene of 1898, Klimt quoted the head of Medusa from an Archaic temple from Salinus, in order to evoke the spirit of Dionysus and the “sensual irrationality” of Athena. Florman also suggests a connection between Riegl’s evaluation of Archaic ornament and Klimt’s interest in the same period. In “Ornament as Evolution,” Emily Braun connects Klimt’s styles and materials in his decorative details to Charles Darwin’s theory of evolutionary biology and argues that the artist consciously used ornament to comment on larger scientific ideas, including the then dominant belief that “ontogeny replicates phylogeny.”


67 Ibid. 312-14.
Haeckel’s illustrations.\textsuperscript{68} These essays indicate the essential role ornament played in the artist’s oeuvre, but do not consider them in light of the \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk}, the conscious desire for the \textit{Kunstwollen}, or a distinctive period style, as will my following three chapters.

Chapter 1 addresses theories of ornament from nineteenth and early twentieth centuries written by Karl Bötticher, Gottfried Semper, Alois Riegl, and Adolf Loos. The first three saw ornament as essential: Bötticher discussed the ethical importance of the correspondence between the core structure and the decorative outside layer, while Semper treated ornament as something superior to the tectonic and argued that it was the origin of all the other arts, including architecture. Riegl discussed ornament as an independent category of art that was worth discussing on its own. Loos, who was as much an artist as a social crusader, on the other hand deemed all ornament unnecessary and even immoral. By the end of the chapter, I hope to have shown the diverse views on the topic and laid the foundation for understanding some novel ways Olbrich and Klimt used various historical and geographical ornamental motifs.

Chapter 2 discusses the Secession group’s attempt to create a \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk} in the fourteenth exhibition. Bisanz-Prakken and Vergo, among others, discussed the relationship between the monumentality of the fourteenth exhibition and the \textit{Gesamtkunstwerk} by describing how artworks of different medium were put together.\textsuperscript{69} Anna Harwell Celenza, on the other hand, calls the Beethoven exhibition “one of the earliest displays of Beethoven commercialization,” and gives a detailed account of its cultural milieu, in which the idea of


Darwinism permeated both musical and visual arts. Such discussions often tended toward characterizations of works exhibited, possible sources of influence on these works, and an emphasis on the varied artistic medium employed. In this chapter, however, I focus very specifically on how, through the use of ornament, the building and the frieze engaged different senses such as the tactile and the aural.

The connection between the aural (music) and ornament have been made by E.H. Gombrich and Antoine Picon. Gombrich argued that both ornament and music unfolded with the passage of time, and functioned as the organizing principles that were often taken for granted. Picon poetically wrote that ornament, always situated on the border of magic and rationality, made architecture vibrate. While such general comparisons between music and ornament are intriguing, for a more specific discussion of rhythm and fin-de-siècle Viennese arts, I rely on Michael Gubser’s essay that traced the shifting perceptions of rhythm in the late nineteenth century. I also look at Nietzsche’s theory of Greek tragedy, in which he expounded that this art form was a synthesis of Apollonian and Dionysian impulses. I then combine Gubser’s and Nietzsche’s theories, and suggest the ways in which the often-opposing nineteenth-century views of rhythm, i.e. regularity- and form-giving (Apollonian) and primordial and irrational (Dionysian), are manifested in the use of ornament in the building and the frieze. I also address how some ornament might have performed a role akin to Wagnerian *leitmotif* (leading motive),

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thereby contributing to the unity of the monumental work. I conclude this chapter by suggesting that the XIV Secession Exhibition achieved a Gesamtkunstwerk, not merely in the Wagnerian sense (synthesis of senses), but also in the Nietzsche’s sense (synthesis of man’s opposing urges), in no small part due to the artists’ effective use of ornament.

Ornament also played an essential role in the pursuit of art of its own age and the freedom of art, the topic of the fourth and last chapter of my thesis. I address the ways in which ornament in the two works present a narrative of formal development, that of ever-increasing artistic inventiveness, free of conventional restraints and hence visualizing creative freedom in process. I suggest that they used ornament informed by Riegl’s notion of the Kunstwollen, which he elaborated in his books Problem of Styles: Foundations for a History of Ornament (1893) and Late Roman Art Industry (1901). By way of analogy I recount Riegl’s exposition of the tendril motif (Problem of Styles) over time and across cultures until it freed itself from naturalistic representation into pure abstract design. I rely on several scholars, most notably Margaret Iversen, Margaret Olin, Christopher Wood, and Henri Zerner who have contributed to our understanding of Riegl’s complex theories of history and ornament.74 Diana Reynolds Cordileone has recently brought to attention that as a young student, Riegl read Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy, which may account for the irrational aspect of the Kunstwollen.75 These Riegl’s scholars, however, do not delve into how his theories influenced Secession artists. I conclude by considering that Riegl’s notion of the Kunstwollen centers on the creation of art free of external considerations and specific to its own age. In short, it corresponds to the Secession group’s

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motto, “to every age its art” and “to every art its freedom.”
Chapter 1
Theories of Ornament

This chapter looks at key writings on ornament from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the German language, in order to place the unorthodox decorative program of the Secession Building and the *Beethoven Frieze* in context. Theories by Karl Bötticher (1806-1889), Gottfried Semper (1803-1879), Alois Riegl (1858-1905), and Adolf Loos (1870-1933) will be discussed. Even though the first two were older by a few generations than most Vienna Secession artists, their texts were widely read in fin-de-siècle Vienna, and Semper’s own architecture was very much visible, not the least on the Ringstrasse. Semper and Loos were practicing architects and were also active in publishing and giving public lectures. Bötticher was an archaeologist of classical architecture. Riegl started his career as curator of textiles at the Museum für Kunst und Industrie, and later taught art history at the University of Vienna. An examination of the wide range of their opinions reveals the contested nature of the debate surrounding ornament. This chapter also highlights the ways in which Olbrich and Klimt took their cue from such diverse theories and incorporated them in their monuments, resulting in the celebratory expression of artistic freedom.

The importance of the subject in mid-nineteenth century German-speaking countries becomes evident when we consider that Bötticher, Semper, Riegl, and Loos, each prominent in their fields, spent significant energy considering the origin and function of ornament. One of the most contentious points for Bötticher, Semper, and Loos, was the relationship between the functional core structure and the ornament that covered it. All three viewed these two strata as distinct from each other, but held differing opinions on their respective values. For Bötticher and Semper, the decorative layer was as important, if not more in some ways, as the tectonics, whereas for Loos, the attention to it signaled societal degeneration. Loos of course did not realize
that the unadorned surface, the eventual “white wall” of modernism, could be a sort of ornament.\(^76\)

No other terms expressed the idea of these two distinct components as succinctly as the pair Kernform (core form) and Kunstform (art form), coined by Bötticher in *Die Tektonik der Hellenen (Architectonics of the Greeks)* of 1844. This volume was used as the main textbook at the Bauakademie in Berlin, and therefore had much influence on future architects.\(^77\) The Kernform was the tectonic structure of a building, which changed according to the development of technology and needs of society, while the Kunstform referred to the “descriptive” or legible exterior design that needed to be clearly and universally communicable.\(^78\) Bötticher considered both essential for successful architecture. The Kernform was “*self-sufficient and vital to the existence and usefulness of the entire building*” (i.e. an ontological necessity), while the Kunstform represented “*most apparently and suggestively (the concept of construction)*” (i.e. a representational necessity).\(^79\) Bötticher presented these two elements of a building as forming a “reciprocally expressive joint,” and elaborated on the relationship between the two throughout the book.\(^80\)

Moreover, the Kunstform did not follow upon the Kernform nor play a subsidiary role,

\(^76\) Werner Oechslin argues that even though modern architecture celebrated the unmasked honestly of ornament-free white wall, one cannot have architecture without a surface. In modern architecture, the white wall was the surface, and thus it became a Kunstform. Accordingly, Oechslin writes, its moral prestige of bare structure, i.e. unconcealed honesty, could not last very long. Werner Oechslin, *Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, and the Road to Modern Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 86-87.


\(^78\) In the preface to *Die Tektonik der Hellenen*, Bötticher defined the Kernform as “that which is mechanically necessary, the statically functional schema,” and the Kunstform as “only the functionally descriptive characteristic,” in Oechslin, *Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, and the Road to Modern Architecture*, 189.

\(^79\) Bötticher, *Die Tektonik der Hellenen*, Section 2, in ibid., 191.

\(^80\) Frampton, “Bötticher, Semper and the Tectonic: Core Form and Art Form,” 139.
but developed in tandem with and on equal terms:

[The Kunstform] arises in the same moment in which the member’s mechanistic schema is conceived. The thought from which both derive is one and the same. They are born together. It is only in their manifestation that the concept governing each member becomes apparent. Its inanimate matter assumes the character of an organic vital entity, of a statically functioning entity in a state of perpetual repose and consistency. In fact, every material first acquires meaning at the moment of its genesis because it is stamped by the spirit, animated by thought both of which occur when it assumes a visible form.81

According to Bötticher, the visible representational Kunstform breathed life into the Kernform. Representing the tectonic concept in the correct manner was so critical that he used the word “ethical” to describe this function.82 In order to understand how the Kunstform carried out this vital role, it is useful to look at Bötticher’s ideal of construction, not just of a building, but of any creation.

Bötticher argued that the principle of tectonics should follow the way nature was made by the Creator: in nature, the concept of material and inner construction was expressed in its visible form.83 The perfect joint between the Kernform and the Kunstform ensued the object’s unity as a whole, and it was to be emulated in every human creation down to “even the most trivial pottery for domestic use.”84 Bötticher believed that the inorganic (a manmade object that resulted from purely functional needs) had no symbolic meaning. Its inherent engineering would be

81 Bötticher, Die Tektonik der Hellenen, Section 2, in Oechslin, Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, and the Road to Modern Architecture, 191. In the 1846 speech Bötticher gave on the occasion of his mentor Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s birthday, Bötticher articulated this essential connection between the two forms in a slightly different way. Bötticher called the structural principle and material conditions of the building as the source and foundation of the Kunstform. This was perhaps due to the fact the main aim of the speech was to demonstrate what an architectural style consisted of: for Bötticher, a style was first and foremost the result of a tectonic relationship among the parts of the building, not an abstract aesthetic idea. Carl Gottlieb Wilhelm Bötticher, “The Principles of the Hellenic and Germanic Ways of Building with Regard to Their Application to Our Present Way of Building,” in In What Style Should We Build: The German Debate on Architectural Style, trans. Wolfgang Herrmann (Santa Monica: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1992), 150.

82 Bötticher, Die Tektonik der Hellenen, Section 2, in Oechslin, Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, and the Road to Modern Architecture, 190, 191.

83 Bötticher, preface to Tektonik, in ibid., 188.

84 Ibid.
incomprehensible to the viewer, unless the inorganic entity could take a form comparable to something in nature’s clarity of form and visible processes. Bötticher, however, did not advocate for the direct imitation of nature’s forms: rather, the Kunstform depended on their interpretation and distillation into abstract essences in a relationship that he termed “organic.” Put differently, the concept of organic design for Bötticher was one that mediated the tectonic and the natural.85

Precisely because of the dependence of the Kernform on the Kunstform to be visible, the exact correspondence between two layers was of paramount importance, and his definition of beauty had direct connection to this issue: aesthetic pleasure should derive from a design that expressed “most consistently and completely the innermost concept of that same form and represents its essence in an exterior form most ethically… truly and appropriately.”86 He held up the example of ancient Greek architecture as the defining model: in his mind the classical orders embodied the basic post and lintel system most perfectly. Bötticher did not advocate for mere reproductions of the Greek Kunstform, since needs, materials, and engineering knowledge had changed, but instead called for its recognizable variation. It was inevitable for Bötticher that the Kernform was to be “transformed into a new and hitherto unknown system; for the art-forms of the new system, on the other hand, the formative principle of the Hellenic style must be adopted in order to give artistic expression to the structural forces within the parts, their correlation, and the spatial concept.”87

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85 Frampton, “Bötticher, Semper and the Tectonic: Core Form and Art Form,” 139, 141.

86 Bötticher, Tektonik Section 3, in Oechslin, Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, and the Road to Modern Architecture, 192. For Bötticher, the confusion between the two layers was strictly to be avoided: he argued that the separation between them should be unequivocally expressed. Frampton, “Bötticher, Semper and the Tectonic: Core Form and Art Form,” 139. Ann-Marie Sankovitch examined the dependence of the tectonic on the ornamental to be visible at all in her essay on the nineteenth-century discussions of St-Eustache and the changing notion of ornament that manifest in them. Ann-Marie Sankovitch, “Structure-Ornament and the Modern Figuration of Architecture,” The Art Bulletin 80 no. 4 (1998): 687-717.

A more concrete example of how the two distinct layers produce a whole, while adapting to the needs and materials of each new era, can be glimpsed in the 1846 speech Bötticher gave to celebrate the birthday of his mentor, Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Bötticher argued that architects should study the history of the building materials that had been used so far and conceive a tectonic structure specific to their own time. There were two ways to do so: either find an innovative application for what had been used previously, or else, when all possibilities had been exhausted for that particular material, move on to a new one. For Bötticher, the time had come to exploit the potential of iron construction. Yet, even with an iron Kernform, he regarded the classical Greek architectural ornament as its ideal outer expression: indeed immediately after recommending iron structure as the most recent stage in the evolution of structural design, he paradoxically suggested that the Kunstform of the classical age should be used to dress it.

How did Bötticher reconcile the idea that one layer remained essentially the same while the other changed, and how did that affect the “ethical” correspondence between two layers? A likely answer was the importance of (Western) universal communicability: technology evolved and therefore the Kernform was variable, but the Kunstform must retain some familiarity so that the idea of construction could still be communicated and aesthetic pleasure would be ensured. In order for the Kunstform to remain meaningful to the viewer, the form cannot be chosen at the whim of the maker. By adhering to the language that is already known and accepted, the architect avoids arbitrariness and resulting incomprehensibility. For Bötticher, the Kunstform

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88 Ibid., 157-159.

89 Mitchell Schwarzer discusses this discrepancy between the changing Kernform and the unchanging Kunstform, and attributes it to the two different functions both forms were meant to perform. Schwarzer does not discuss why Hellenistic form in particular was most important for Bötticher to begin with, other than that it was a prevalent language the viewer was likely to understand. Mitchell Schwarzer, “Ontology and Representation in Karl Bötticher”s Theory of Tectonics,” Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 52, no. 3 (September 1993), 278-279.
had to originate from nature, “a pictorially adept transposition of objects derived from the organic world,” because “the thing as it originally existed lends to the newly created thing a cosmic characteristic.”

Information on what Olbrich actually read or owned is scarce. He may not have read Bötticher, but it is safe to say that architects of the period were aware of Semper. Semper studied Bötticher, and some common threads run from one through the other and beyond. Most notably, both believed in the Kunstform’s symbolic and hence communicative importance, and shared the conviction that in all man-made objects, even the most humble artifacts such as pottery and weaving, the exterior form should manifest the interior structure.

Semper adapted Bötticher’s idea of the relationship between the Kernform and the Kunstform, although he more often used the term Bekleidung (clothing) for the latter. Semper defined “the ornamental parts of architecture” as “those symbolical investments of the bare structure, with the aid of which we give higher significance, artistical expression and beauty to the last.” Semper believed that while architecture had to follow the physical laws and conditions of construction, it was thanks to the Kunstform that a building became something higher, namely, art. Bötticher argued that the Kunstform gave the Kernform organic liveliness;

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90 Bötticher articulated, “The structure itself is an invented form without a model in the outside world; the art-forms, though they too are mental creations, are taken from what exists in the outside world.” He argued that architecture worked the same way as sculpture and painting: all three arts expressed an idea through symbols taken from nature, and accordingly, the idea itself must not be so novel that there was no analogue in the external world. He then concluded, “The essence of pictorial art and its relation to nature rests in this interaction between concept and object, between invention and imitation.” Karl Bötticher, “The Principles of the Hellenic and Germanic Way of Building with Regard to Their Application to Our Present Way of Building,” 163.

91 The November 1853 lecture is one of the earliest instances in which Semper used this term and elaborated on the idea of wall-covering. Harry Francis Mallgrave, introduction to “London Lecture of November 18, 1853: ‘The Development of the Wall and Wall Construction in Antiquity’,” Anthropology and Aesthetics, no. 11 (Spring, 1986): 33.

Semper’s word was “poetry.” Significantly, in regards to the role of the *Kunstform*, Semper emphasized the narrative and performative power of ornament:

[The ancients] made [their temples and architectural works] tell their history, the reason for their existence, the direction and power of their action, the role and part which [blocks of wood or stone that were made into beams and cylinders] were destined to take in the whole work, and how their relations would be to each other; they made them tell also by whom and for what destination the whole construction was made. Their tales were made in a language consisting of certain characteristic types, performed on the surfaces of the naked schematical forms of the building.  

To communicate the tectonic form, both Bötticher and Semper assumed that a building’s exterior appearance should be modeled after the workings of nature, and since Greeks did exactly that, their architectural ornament was superior. Semper wrote that the language of ornament was to be “taken or derived from analogies in nature and self-understanding for every one who has some feeling for nature and the dynamical signification of natural forms.” In one of the lectures he gave in London in 1854 for example, he detailed how a row of leaves would bend differently depending on the weight put upon them. He then argued that Greek ornamental elements of cyma and abacus were inspired by this observation, thereby successfully communicating the idea of weight-bearing. The divergent point between Bötticher and Semper—Semper seems to have valued the performative power of ornament more than Bötticher—might be a reason why Semper did not exclusively advocate for Hellenic ornament. As noted in the Introduction, Semper employed a Baroque *Bekleidung* for the Burgtheatre and Neo-Renaissance for the museums he designed, and such clothing “performed” a dual role: it evoked a particular era and nostalgic ideals associated with it, while still drawing attention to the

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93 Ibid., 62.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., 63.
96 Ibid., 64-66.
physical and material laws of its underlying construction.

Semper’s idea of the Kernform as covering was further articulated in his essay, “The Four Elements of Architecture” (1851). Here, he argued that the most primitive dwelling had four elements: hearth, mound, enclosure, and roof.97 The hearth was the spiritual and moral center of the dwelling. Humankind developed different skills, crafts, and applications for the building of each (ceramics and metal work around the hearth, masonry works for the mound, weaving for the enclosure, and carpentry for the roof). Before the invention of a masonry wall, humankind first enclosed the dwelling with woven, textile “walls” (the first being plant matter). In what would become one of the most influential themes for the century to follow, Semper unequivocally wrote, “I assert that the carpet (as a vertical wall) plays a most important role in the general history of art.”98 Discovery of weaving in particular was the watershed moment for ornament according to Semper, and subsequently, for all of the creative arts: by using strands of grass that happened to be colored differently, our ancestors became aware of the aesthetic possibility of patterning.99

Even after ancient humans started erecting solid walls, weaving played an important role: either a woven wall-covering, such as a carpet, was hung over it, or the solid plane was decorated with painting and reliefs in a geometric pattern as if covered by a carpet.100 This brief summary

97 Bötticher had already pointed out the importance of the hearth and the wall-covering, but not nearly as systematically or thoroughly as Semper did. Wolfgang Herrmann, Gottfried Semper: In Search of Architecture (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1984), 140-141.


99 Semper wrote in Der Stil, “…came the invention of weaving, first with blades of grass or natural plant fibers, later with threads spun from vegetable or animal materials. The differences in the blades’ natural coloration soon led to the use of varying orders, which generated the pattern.” Quoted from Section 60 of Der Stil (Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts) in Oechslin, Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, and the Road the Modern Architecture, 207.

100 Semper, “The Four Elements of Architecture,” 104.
of Semper’s complex theory raises two fascinating points: the woven wall-covering preceded the masonry wall itself, and the pattern on the wall, derived from the properties of natural materials, marked the beginning of inventive thinking of ornament and all the other arts.

The first point is significant, since it reinforces the idea of unity and joint. For Bötticher, the Kernform was the functional part, which needed to be represented by the Kernform. By contrast, Semper argued that at first the wall-covering alone enclosed and partitioned the space: in other words, the carpet was performing the function and representing itself at the same time. Semper in fact called the masonry wall “an intrusion” that had “nothing to do with the creation of space,” and wrote, “even where building solid walls became necessary, the latter [the masonry walls] were only the inner, invisible structure hidden behind the true and legitimate representatives of the wall, the colorful woven carpets.”

Riegl closely studied Semper, and wrote his first monograph, Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament, partially in response to the latter’s theory of ornament. Riegl, however, was unique in that while many theorists, including Bötticher, Semper, and Loos, discussed ornament in its relation to what it covered, he discussed it as an autonomous entity with its own history. In other words, the unity of the joint between the Kernform and the Kunstform was irrelevant to him, since ornament was not responsible for representing anything. Furthermore, Riegl believed that ornament was no less creative or imaginative than the fine arts and that it was the clearest expression of the Kunstwollen, since

101 Ibid., 103, 104.

102 Riegl, Problems of Style, 4-5. Zerner, preface to Riegl, Problems of Style, xxii. The original title, Stilfragen, is indicative that the volume was in large part a response to Gottfried Semper’s Der Stil (1861-63), in which Semper argued that material and functional considerations generated a style.

103 Put differently, Riegl took ornament out of its material context and treated them as independent, two-dimensional motifs, which in turn enables us to discuss Klimt’s ornamental pattern in a painting in same way we examine architectural ornament in the Secession Building.
ornament was not bound to any naturalistic representation, didactic purpose, or symbolic meaning. Florman has written that for Riegl, ornament was “the most economic crystallization available of the *Kunstwollen*.”¹⁰⁴ In *Problems of Style*, Riegl celebrated the freedom of ornament to develop, solely driven by ever-changing forms and rhythms. To prove his point, he focused on tracing the evolution of a single motif, the tendril, a curling vine that often ends in a rhythmic spiral.

Given his novel attitude, Riegl began the introduction to *Problems of Style* with the rhetorical question: “What, you ask, does ornament also have a history? Even in an era such as ours, marked by a passion for historical research, this question still awaits a positive, unqualified answer.”¹⁰⁵ Riegl was somewhat apologetic that much of his argument might strike the reader as “negative,” meaning that he might appear more focused on refuting prevalent ideas than presenting a new one. The purpose of the book was to “address the most fundamental and harmful of the misconceptions and preconceptions that still hinder research today,” namely Semper’s materialist-driven theory of artistic creation, which argued that form derived from materials and function. As Zerner has written, “Riegl was above all anxious to demonstrate the autonomy and freedom of an aesthetic urge in man.”¹⁰⁶

Riegl’s argument in *Problem of Style* focused on the independence of ornament, from two specific external considerations, one materialistic, the other symbolic. As to the former, Riegl refuted Semper, even though Riegl was very careful to separate him from his followers, whom

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¹⁰⁵ Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style*, 3. Reynolds-Cordileone writes about the mixed reaction of contemporary readers to *Problems of Style*: while Riegl’s discussion of the history of ornament was enthusiastically received, his objection to the materialist method of art history was largely ignored. Reynolds-Cordileone, *Alois Riegl in Vienna 1875-1905*, 103-106.

¹⁰⁶ Zerner, preface to Alois Riegl, *Problems of Style*, xxii.
Riegl felt pursued much more simplified versions of his theory. Semper was however unequivocal in his belief that all ornament originated in the fundamental need to make an enclosure with woven material, and hence the weaving was the source of all subsequent arts.  

As a way of countering this argument, Riegl took Maori culture as an example. He pointed out that adorning one’s body was more fundamental than an urge to form a dwelling. He also maintained that simpler linear and geometric ornamental motifs existed before weaving, and moreover argued that some of the oldest existent motifs, such as spirals and circles, did not suit the medium of weaving at all.  

In addition to the materialist theory of art, Riegl also refuted those who gave every ornament a symbolic origin, a problematic approach, in his view, most clearly and thoroughly expressed by the American art historian, W.G. Goodyear. In *The Grammar of the Lotus* (1891), Goodyear argued for the utmost importance of the lotus flower in ancient Egyptian culture, because it represented the sun God. He also maintained that ancient Greece and Rome inherited among its most fertile artistic ideas from Egypt, and thus interpreted every vegetal motif found in these three cultures as a derivative of the lotus and its characteristic features. While Riegl praised Goodyear’s ambition to discuss the history and development of ornament in depth, he was doubtful that the sun cult had such an overwhelming role in ancient Egypt and

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108 Riegl, *Problems of Style*, 5, 22. Riegl focused on this topic in the paper he presented in 1890 to the Viennese Anthropological Society, titled “Neuseeländische Ornamentik.” The presentation discussed ornament employed on the body and wooden products by the Maori, whom Riegl regarded as “ahistorical,” since they had very little contact with the outside world and seemed to live in a primitive manner unchanged from time immemorial. Starting from the assumption of Maori’s primitiveness, Riegl countered the materialist theory of the origin of ornament in two ways. Riegl argued that that the ahistorical human nature, i.e. *horror vacui*, was the source of humankind’s urge to decorate; even though the Maori copiously used spiral motifs and materialists attributed spiral motifs to the technique of either weaving or metal-working, the Maori had neither. Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl’s Theory of Art*, 68.  
refuted the idea of such deterministic transmission to ancient Greece and Rome.\textsuperscript{110}

Riegl dismissed both materialist and symbolic theories as reductive: “Where the artist is obviously responding to an immanent artistic creative drive, Goodyear sees symbolism at work, just as the artistic materialists in the same instance utilize technique as their incidental, lifeless objective.”\textsuperscript{111} For Riegl, the artist’s inner drive—the “free and creative artistic impulse (the \textit{Kunstwollen})”—was the force behind the development of all arts, be it painting, sculpture, or a single motif.\textsuperscript{112} Riegl, reflecting the Darwinian model of the time, argued that the \textit{Kunstwollen} had its own evolutionary drive and each advancement was marked by increasing inventiveness, freed from earlier constraints.

Loos was familiar with both Semper and Riegl, as the notions of weaving and evolutionary model played prominent roles in his theory of ornament. He, however, took the opposite view from Bötticher and Semper regarding the relationship between the structure and ornament. He forcefully argued for the separation of these two layers and the need to shed ornament from objects of utility, such as clothes, furniture, and architecture.\textsuperscript{113} He did concur with the idea that carpet historically and functionally preceded the wall. In an 1898 essay entitled “Das Prinzip der Bekleidung (The Principle of Cladding),” which makes a clear reference to Semper, Loos began with a statement that the architect’s task was to “provide a

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 4. As seen here in the insertion in the parenthesis by the translator, Riegl uses the actual word, “Kunstwollens” (in place of “artistic impulse”) at this moment. Alois Riegl, \textit{Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik} (Berlin, Verlag von Georg Siemens, 1893), vii.
\textsuperscript{113} Loos is not the first one to discuss the two layers as separable. For example, Leon Battista Alberti argued that building should be naked and complete before it was clothed, and that unless it was a public building, one should not dress it elaborately. Oechslin, \textit{Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos and the Road to Modern Architecture}, 34. Leon Battista Alberti, \textit{De Re Aedificatoria} (ca.1452), Section 845, in ibid., 178.
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warm and livable space.” Since carpets were warm and livable, the first task of the architect was to spread out a carpet on the floor and hang another four to form the walls. Only because one could not build a house out of carpets alone, a structural frame to hold them had to be invented, which was the architect’s second task. The main point of this essay was to argue against covering a material in the way that concealed its true material, for example, painting stucco in the brick color. By the time of his often-cited polemical essay, “Ornament and Crime” of 1913 however, Loos had come to see all ornament in modern society as atavistic and immoral: he provocatively declared that only primitives and (would-be) criminals sported ornament.

Loos modeled his argument against ornament on evolutionary biology, but for reasons opposing Riegl’s thesis. The opening paragraph of “Ornament and Crime” rehearses the then common thesis of ontogeny replicating phylogeny. It compares the development of a human embryo to animals of different evolutionally stages, and the maturation of a child to various civilizations. After observing that the modern-day primitive (the Papuan, in Loos’ mind) freely decorated their faces and surfaces of their tools, Loos claimed to have made the following “discovery”: “the evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects.” In the essay, Loos argued that modern men should have evolved out of

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115 Ibid.


118 Ibid., 289.
their need for ornament, and those who still insisted on decorating their chairs, plates, and light fixtures must be degenerate or atavistic.

While Loos was unequivocal about his dislike for ornament in so called “advanced civilizations,” he was not always against it. For example, he had paternalistic patience for a Slovak peasant woman who took pride in her lacemaking, or a shoemaker who spent time making decorative shapes.119 In their socially backward and lowly economic state, according to Loos, they had not evolved to find a better way of enjoyment so one must be tolerant with them. Loos patronizingly wrote, “I can tolerate the ornaments of the Kaffir, the Persian, the Slovak peasant woman, my shoemaker’s ornaments, for they all have no other way of attaining the high points of their existence.”120 For more cultivated mankind however, there was no longer meaningful connection between ornament and one’s environment, since for Loos, modern society would benefit from ever-increasing focus on productivity and efficiency.121 Looking back in 1924, Loos denied that he had advocated that ornament should be forcefully eliminated from objects: instead he claimed that he had believed that without any systematic effort, it would “disappear on its own accord” by running its own natural course.122 In other words, evolution toward tectonic purity in the Kernform would lead to the extinction of ornament.123

Unlike Riegl, Loos made a clear distinction between ornamented objects and high art, both of which, however, shared the same origin. The first artist, Loos argued, was the one who

119 Ibid., 293-4.
120 Ibid., 294.
121 Ibid., 291.
123 Riegl too had talked about ornament in terms of evolution, but in a very different way: for Riegl, ornament itself, not the humankind’s relationship with it, evolved.
smeared the wall of his cave with an erotic symbol in order to get rid of his excess libidinal energy. Loos claimed that Beethoven created the Ninth Symphony (composed 1822-24, premiered in Vienna in 1824) out of the same but more developed urge, and provocatively wrote: “the man who created it (the first ornament) felt the same urge as Beethoven, he was in the same heaven in which Beethoven created the Ninth Symphony.” The difference was that the “primitive” ornament was an unnecessary addition to a useful object, while Beethoven’s work was a complete whole conceived to elevate mankind out of the mundane. Most of Loos’ argument focuses on how a society would save greatly on time, labor, material, and money, by getting rid of ornament on things like a cigarette case. Efficiency and utilitarianism for him marked the design of an “advanced” society. Creativity should be spent elsewhere, namely, on high art. Loos wrote, “absence of ornament (in a utilitarian object) has brought the other arts to the unsuspected heights. Beethoven’s symphonies would never have been written by a man who had to walk about in silk, satin, and lace.” Along with Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Loos praised Wagner’s Tristan and Isolde (composed 1857-59, premiered in Munich in 1865) as the epitome of such achievement. It irritated Loos greatly that the very same people who were sophisticated enough to appreciate Beethoven and Wagner wanted to embellish utilitarian objects. Loos’ friend, the critic Karl Kraus (1874-1936) agreed that nothing was more vulgar that

124 Other theorists, both for and against ornament, had interpreted man’s primitive urge to cover an empty surface, be it the wall or one’s body, as the beginning of art. Owen Jones, for example, in a much more benign language discussed tattooing of the face and body the same way in 1856. Owen Jones, The Grammar of Ornament (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2001), 31.


126 Ibid., 294.

127 Ibid., 294. Loos mentions Tristan and Isolde in a similar context in “The Poor Little Rich Man.” Adolf Loos, “Poor Little Rich Man,” in Adolf Loos, Spoken into the Void, 126. The essay was originally published in Neues Wiener Tagblatt on April 26, 1900.
to “use the urn for a chamber pot.” 128

The separation between utilitarian objects and everything else, such as nature, the human body, and works of art, was so important to Loos that he even had distinct definitions of beauty for these two categories. In the essay titled “Chairs” (1898), he praised the British for their logical attitude toward furniture, and pointed out that their design for seating was solely based on practical purposes and not on external flourishes. For an object of use, on one hand, beauty was relative: only when the object suited a particular purpose in a given situation, it was beautiful. 129 Beauty for the rest, on the other, should be about perfection: nothing could be added or subtracted from the object without harming the whole. Loos here mentioned a person’s physical and mental beauty as an example, but one can surmise artworks belonged here as well. 130 Even though they differed in their definitions of beauty, both Bötticher and Loos saw beauty as a moral issue. Loos and Kraus attacked those who wanted ornament on objects of use as immoral, because they were knowingly slowing down the inevitable evolution of mankind and wasting resources, when plain and rigorous functionality alone should be deemed beautiful. 131

While “Ornament and Crime” focused on the ills ornament brought to society, in “The Poor Little Rich Man” (1900) Loos warned about its harmful effect on individual lives. A successful man, who seemingly has everything—faithful wife, well-behaved children, admiring

128 Loos’ friend, the famed satirist Karl Kraus wrote, “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 urn,” quoted in Allan Janik et al., Wittgenstein’s Vienna (Chicago: Elephant Paperback, 1996), 89.

129 Adolf Loos, “Chairs,” in Adolf Loos, Ornament and Crime Selected Essays, 63, 64.

130 Ibid., 63.

131 This is not the only reason why Loos regarded ornament to be unethical. Mary McLeod discusses in detail Loos’ belief that ornament is dishonest and ephemeral, in other words, (in his view) feminine. Mary McLeod, “Undressing Architecture: Fashion, Gender, and Modernity,” in Architecture: In Fashion, ed. Deborah Fausch et al. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), 38-123.
friends, and thriving business—one day realizes that he knows nothing of beauty and his home has none of it. As a man of action, he decides to invite beauty into his home, ostensibly to make his life complete, so he employs an architect. The architect removes everything that the man has owned, and fills his home with paintings, a statue by Charpentier,132 and beautifully decorated objects of utility. The man is overjoyed, his friends are impressed, and journals report about his home. However, the architect now insists on a total control of the man’s life through the arrangement of the artworks and utilitarian objects. The client is not permitted to wear his embroidered bedroom slippers anywhere else in his own home, or to put cigarette ash in a wrong tray, let alone to display a picture his grandchild made for him. The architect even stops by to make sure that the man and his family live their lives “correctly,” meaning that they do not move or remove anything and use the beautifully decorated objects exactly as intended. The man is miserable fearing that he has no freedom anymore, but the architect exclaims, “you are complete!”133 In this little moral tale, the decorated objects overtake the life of the family who purchases them: ornament now dictates their behavior. It has been suggested that this tale was a criticism directed at the Vienna Secession artists, who often designed the entire furnishing for private residences and whom Loos publicly and repeatedly attacked as “those who prostitute art!”134

Despite their different attitudes toward ornament, Semper, Bötticher, and Loos all agreed that it had a powerful effect on people. For Semper and Bötticher, ornament affected one’s


perception of an object by its communicative power: this ability of ornament elevated a mere useful object to the level of an artwork, with resulting aesthetic pleasure. Loos’ belief in the power of ornament was filled with emotion as he feared that it could control one’s life through obsession over superficial beauty. For Loos, such power was immoral and dangerous.

The copious use of ornament in the Secession Building and the *Beethoven Frieze* evidences that both Olbrich and Klimt shared the positive view held by Bötticher and Semper, and believed in its elevating and performative power. On the exterior of the building, there are elements that derive from classical Greece, and certain motifs might allude to Semper through their evocation of the art of textile. However, Olbrich did not simply follow Bötticher and Semper: his use of ornament has little to do with presenting the underlying tectonic structure. For example, looking at the exterior, we do not even get a sense of how many stories there are in the building.

It seems that the Secession artists’ conception of ornament was the closest to Riegli’s. Olbrich used ornament independently of its previously assumed task of communicating the underlying invisible structure. Moreover, both Klimt and Olbrich valued the narrative power of ornament that Semper had emphasized, but employed it more in the vein of Riegli: they presented an ever-developing history of ornament from time immemorial, and used it as a metaphor for increasing artistic freedom. By consciously referring to the origin of ornament, Olbrich and Klimt did exactly what Loos would have criticized—they celebrated the man’s innate and untamed urge.

Olbrich’s capricious ornament that he applied to the surface of otherwise pure white walls was anathema and “immoral” to Loos, an attitude undoubtedly reinforced by the Dionysian or irrational elements of such unbridled creativity. In the 1929 version of “Ornament and Crime,”
Loos named Olbrich along with Otto Enckman and Henry van der Velde, and predicted that their works would shortly be intolerable, precisely because of their use of ornament. Loos neglected to consider how both Olbrich and Klimt employed ornament to the ends of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the highest art form for some, because of its sensory and primal nature. For them the advancements of modernity did not preclude constants of human nature. This point relates in turn to some ambiguous aspects of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* itself: the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, even though idealized as the highest point of artistic evolution, paradoxically relied on visceral appeals to various senses, and drew on humankind’s un-individuated and primordial past, as will be seen in the next chapter.

135 Adolf Loos, “Ornament and Crime,” in Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime Selected Essays*, 171. This was the first version of the essay to be published in Germany.
Chapter 2

Gesamtkunstwerk and Ornament

The concept of the synthesis of arts, or Gesamtkunstwerk, is associated with Richard Wagner, although he did not originate the term. Wagner first defined the idea in his essays Art and Revolution and Artwork of the Future, both of 1849, as the synthesis of different arts that would spring from the innate, unarticulated urge of the people and, in turn, give them a glimpse of the transcendent. The exemplary Gesamtkunstwerk for Wagner was Greek drama. In Art and Revolution, he described the brief history of Greek tragedy, which he called “the highest conceivable form of art.” First, song and dance were bound together through rhythm, then humankind created the amphitheater (architecture) and scenery (plastic arts), and finally added speech (poetry). In Artwork of the Future, Wagner outlined the workings and goal of the total work of art (in the gendered terms of his time):

The great United Art-work (Gesamtkunstwerk), which must gather up each branch of art to use it as a mean, and in some sense to undo it for the common aim of all, for the unconditioned, absolute portrayal of perfected human nature—this great United Art-work (Gesamtkunstwerk) he cannot picture as depending on the arbitrary purpose of some human unit, but can only conceive it as the instinctive and associate product of the Manhood of the Future.

The Secession artists shared in this ideal of an all-encompassing and transcendent aesthetic experience. The Secession Building itself was the result of collaborative effort and intent. The statement published in the catalogue to the second exhibition proclaimed that the group was

136 The German philosopher and theologian Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahndorff first used the term, in his essay “Aesthetics, or Theory of Philosophy of Art” (1826). Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781), Novalis (1772-1801), and Ludwick Tieck (1773-1853) also advocated for the synthesis of arts. J. G. Sulzer was perhaps closest to Wagner in that Sulzer specifically saw the opera as an exemplary form of total artwork. Vergo, The Music of Painting, 106.


138 Ibid., 33.

“united in this temple in sacred service.” In other words, the Secession artists had the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk in mind from the inception of the group: their purposeful and idealistic activities culminated in their fourteenth exhibition of 1902, often called the Beethoven Exhibition.

The main organizers, Rudolf Bacher, Adolf Böhm, Josef Hoffmann, and Alfred Roller conceived the “XIV Ausstellung der Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs Secession Wien (XIV Exhibition of the Association of Austrian Artists Vienna Secession),” as an homage to Beethoven. The artistic program was centered around the larger-than-life size effigy of the composer by the German sculptor Max Klinger (1857-1920), who himself was also a gifted amateur singer and pianist. The Secession artists had admired Klinger and previously included works by him: they displayed a few drawings from the series titled Amor and Psyche at the group’s first exhibition. In the third exhibition (1899), Klinger’s Christ on Olympus (1896) commanded an entire wall in the central space. At some point in the summer of 1901, the Secession members heard that Klinger was at work on a monumental statue of Beethoven, and approached him with the idea of organizing an exhibition around it. Because of its ambitious scale and composition (it measured over ten feet tall and including a bronze throne), the statue

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140 Quoted in Vergo, Art in Vienna 1898-1918, 55.

141 Vergo calls the XIV exhibition, “the exhibition as performance.” Vergo, The Music of Painting, 124, 131. Vergo discusses the ways in which different medium of visual arts came together, i.e. performed together to convey the idea of space in the manner of Klinger, and Klimt’s mural unfolded over a period of time like a piece of music, performative art par excellence. Vergo, ibid., 125-127, 130-131.

142 Ibid., 115.

143 Ibid., 124. Klinger, although his reputation has declined since, was then one of the most highly-regarded artists at that time, with fame rivaling Klimt’s. Waissenberger, Vienna Secession, 61. Most scholars seem to agree that Klinger approved of the exhibition. Waissenberger, for example, writes that Klinger “is said to have been most moved” and thanked the Secession artists with “tears in his eyes.” Ibid., 67. Vergo cites Alma Mahler, who reminisced that Klinger was so touched that he “was unable to control his feelings, and tears ran slowly down his cheeks.” Vergo, Music of Painting, 130. Berta Zuckerkindle also recorded that Klinger expressed his gratitude that his ideal of collaboration of all forms of visual arts have been translated to reality with “a miracle of sensitivity and understanding,” quoted in ibid., 131.
needed to be cast at a special factory in Paris (Figs. 30, 31).  

Hoffmann designed a tripartite exhibition space with a large central space to house Klinger’s monument to the composer, flanked by two smaller side-halls. Klimt created the Beethoven Frieze (on removable plaster panels) for the three main walls of the left side-hall, and multiple smaller works by the Secession artists graced all three spaces. The exhibition opened on April 15, 1902, with a short concert of a simplified version of the last movement of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, arranged and conducted by Gustav Mahler. The installation, without further musical accompaniment, lasted until June 27th of the same year. The exhibition attracted 60,000 visitors, in no small part due to the Klinger’s fame and Klimt’s notoriety.

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk and ornament: how the ornament in the exterior of Olbrich’s Secession Building and Klimt’s Beethoven Frieze contributed to realizing a total work of art, a singular event in the Secession’s ambition to herald the role of artist as savior and art as the new religion. First, I suggest that the diversity of forms, origins, and materials of the ornament appealed to different senses, namely, tactile, visual, and aural. The aural aspect, in turn, brings to the fore the two ways in which ornament is musical: its similarity to the leitmotif and to rhythm. The Wagnerian leitmotif is a short musical motif or melodic phrase paired with a certain character of an opera. It often evolves according to the development of the narrative and the character’s involvement with other entities and events. Composers also used the leitmotif in the orchestral background to presage

145 Ibid., 88-89.
146 Ibid., 83, 87.
147 Although Wagner did not invent the term himself and the technique had existed long before him, the term is today mostly associated with Wagnerian monumental operas, especially with his Der Ring des Nibelungen (1876).
what was to unfold unbeknownst to the characters on stage. I suggest that some of the visual motifs in the Secession Building and the Beethoven Frieze were used repeatedly and sometimes furtively, with variations or even a sense of ongoing development, in a similar manner as the Wagnerian *leitmotif*. I then discuss the contrasting characteristics of rhythm—regularity-giving but also irrational. I argue that the ornament in the Secession Building and the Beethoven Frieze celebrate and combine such dualities of rhythm in order to create an ideal union that evokes the transcendent.

The irrational aspect of rhythm and ornament leads to the last section of the chapter, which interrogates the connection between Nietzsche’s interpretation of Greek tragedy as the synthesis of Dionysian (formless and irrational) and Apollonian (form-giving and rational) impulses and the Secession’s evocation of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. At the time of writing *The Birth of Tragedy* (first published in 1872), in which these two drives were extensively discussed, Nietzsche greatly admired Wagner, who was then working on his essay on the Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. In the preface of the volume, Nietzsche directly addressed the composer, and acknowledged his influence. Wagner regarded Greek tragedy as the epitome of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and Nietzsche argued that Greek tragedy was born out of the union between Dionysus and Apollo. Hence I interpret the Secession’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, not only as the synthesis of various arts, but also as the synthesis of Dionysian and Apollonian forces.

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150 Although not with these terms, Wagner repeatedly talked about true artwork as originating from innate urges of mankind (vis-à-vis intellectual or practical considerations) much earlier. For example see “The Art-work of the Future,” 73-77. Florman’s essay on motif taken by the Archaic period (700-480 BCE) in Klimt’s early works is very informative. Florman argues that Klimt’s use of Archaic motifs such as Medusa (taken from Temple C at Selinus, ca. 550 BCE, and adapted in Klimt’s *Pallas Athene* of 1898), or an archaic vase (*Portrait of Joseph Pembauer* of 1890) indicates the influence of Nietzsche’s theory that during the Archaic period the Dionysian forces were given prominent artistic expression. Florman, “Gustav Klimt and the Precedent of Ancient Greece,” 310-14, 319-20.
Some scholars have argued that Klimt read, and was influenced by, Nietzsche’s writing, and pointed at the representation of a chorus in the last scene of the painting as evidence.\textsuperscript{151} I suggest that Olbrich and Klimt additionally showed Nietzsche’s influence on a more general level, by making the two underlying forces of Greek tragedy manifest in ornament: some decorative elements in both artworks clearly evoke the Dionysian, while others signal the Apollonian. The co-existence of two forces become apparent in contrasting characteristics, such as asymmetrical versus symmetrical, unresolved versus self-contained, organic versus geometric, oppositions held in tension to resolve in a higher unity in the end. The result was a new kind of monumental art, grand in scale and message, but instead of being didactic or edifying, all-embracing and invigorating.

Even though the Vienna Secession organized many successful and well-attended exhibitions, the XIV iteration marked the defining moment for the group.\textsuperscript{152} The artists themselves were aware of its importance, as evident in the preface to the catalogue by Ernst Stöhr, a painter and composer.\textsuperscript{153} In general, the Secession put much thought into its catalogues, forming a special committee to ensure that the publication and other graphics were part of the unified experience of each show.\textsuperscript{154} The catalogue to the “Klinger Beethoven” exhibition, a cloth-bound booklet of over eighty pages, was no exception. It included: the floor plan to indicate the room sequence, Stöhr’s preface, an excerpt of an essay by Klinger, the explanatory


\textsuperscript{152} For example, Koja calls it “one of the most spectacular successes in [the Vienna Secession’s] history.” Koja, “Gustav Klimt’s \textit{Beethoven Frieze}: Evolution and Program,” 83.

\textsuperscript{153} Anna Harwell Celenza suggests that Stöhr was put in charge because he was the only Secession artist who was musically inclined. Stöhr was an amateur composer and a member of the newly founded Vienna Wagner Society. Anna Harwell Celenza, “Music and the Vienna Secession: 1897-1902,” \textit{Music in Art} 29, no. 1/2 (Spring-Fall 2004): 207-208.

\textsuperscript{154} Koja, “Gustav Klimt’s \textit{Beethoven Frieze}: Evolution and Program,” 83.
“tour” of Hoffmann’s design, and notes on each of the works exhibited (Fig. 32). In the preface, Stöhr recounted that the group had met and decided to mount an exhibition that would be so grand and completely different from what they had done before. It was to constitute a religious experience, “the most sublime and best that human beings had ever been able to produce, a temple of art.”

Painting and sculpture came together, he explained, in service of the “Raumidee (spatial idea),” underscoring a three-dimensional and temporal experience. Although he did not use the term Gesamtkunstwerk, the Wagnerian influence is clear: everything involved in the exhibition was to contribute to the creation of art as the new religion.

Raumidee was a concept that Klinger had addressed in an essay “Malerei und Zeichnung” of 1891, which exerted widespread influence. The artist maintained that it was no single painting or sculpture, but the relationship of one artwork to another and to the ensemble on the whole that generated and communicated a coherent meaning to an audience. In other words, a rhythmic coordination among all elements over space and time successfully orchestrated the “Raumkunst (spatial art).” An excerpt of Klinger’s text appeared in the catalogue, in which he called for artists to combine their arts to convey the single Raumidee. Klinger used terms such as “Gesamtgewollte (total intention)” and “Gesamtwerken (total work),” evidencing the influence of Wagner, and specifically compared the result to what the composer strove for and achieved in his staged operas.

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156 Koja, forward to Gustav Klimt: The Beethoven Frieze and the Controversy over the Freedom of Art, 10.

157 Vergo, Music of Painting, 116.

Wagner likely inspired Klinger on the choice of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) as the subject matter of the statue: he had raised Beethoven to the deified status through his writings and performances. From early on in his career, Wagner eloquently voiced his admiration for Beethoven in print.159 In 1840 and 1841, he published a collection of three short stories that told a tale of a young German artist who decided to become a composer upon hearing a symphony by Beethoven and attempted a pilgrimage to Vienna to meet the famed composer.160 At the beginning of the story, Wagner wrote in the first person, “No Mohammedan more devoutly longed to journey to the grave of his Prophet, than I to go to the house where Beethoven lived.”161 When the aspiring but destitute composer dies of hunger, he utters his last words to his friend:

I believe in God, Mozart and Beethoven, and likewise their disciples and apostles. I believe in the Holy Spirit and the truth of the one, indivisible Art. I believe that this Art proceeds from God, and lives within the hearts of all artists. I believe that he who once has bathed in the sublime delights of this high Art, is consecrated to Her for ever, and never can deny Her. I believe that through this Art all men are saved, and therefore each may die of hunger for Her.162

While the analogies to Christianity were clear, Wagner proposed a secular faith in the artist as the god’s messenger, and of art as the true religion. The vehicle of salvation he advocated was the Gesamtkunstwerk, “the one, indivisible Art.”

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160 This tale was first published in France in 1840 and 1841, and then in Abend Zeitung in 1841. In this tale, Wagner ostensibly wished to commemorate his friend, who admired Beethoven and died in poverty in Paris. However, many scholars, among them Robert L. Jacobs and Geoffrey Skelton, also locate in this tale Wagner’s biographical elements and nascent ideas on music and drama that were to develop throughout his long and controversial career. Jacobs and Skelton’s introduction to Richard Wagner, Wagner Writes from Paris... : Stories, Essays and Articles by the Young Composer (New York: The John Day Company, 1973), 15.


162 “An End in Paris” in Wagner Writes from Paris..., 111.
Klinger’s statue alluded to the Greek tradition of heroic effigy in notable ways: the composer sits half-naked on an ornate throne, which the artist carved out of stark white marble from the Greek island of Syros. It flaunts a range of costly materials such as black, white, and purple marble, ebony, alabaster, mother of pearl, and semi-precious stones. This polychrome statue acknowledged a debt to Greek sacred sculpture, in particular Phidias’ figure of Zeus. As Koja argues, polychromy through the combination of various media also hinted at “a renewal of art through the concept of a total work of art.” On the back of the seat, Klinger carved a relief of a crucified Christ and John the Baptist standing at the foot of the cross, with a scene of the birth of Venus underneath (Fig. 31). The depiction of Christ as suffering savior and John the Baptist further glorified Beethoven as the one who toiled through his art and sacrificed himself for humanity. As to the perplexing presence of Venus, Celenza has suggested that the juxtaposition forms a kind of paragone: the contrast between merely sensual beauty, and an art that requires grave sacrifice to achieve a purification of the spirit.

The Secession group showed a greater spirit of collaboration among twenty-one artists than Wagner ever managed in his own Gesamtkunstwerk, in which he controlled all the aspects of conceiving and producing his operas. Roller oversaw the administrative organization of the exhibition, but also contributed the poster for the XIV exhibition (Fig. 33). More importantly, he painted the mural, Nightfall, in the ancient medium of distemper with metal and mother-of-pearl inlays, that filled the back wall behind the Beethoven statue (Fig. 34). The poster depicts a woman, her head in deference or ritual offering, holding a white orb. In addition to her flowing

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165 Celenza, “Music and the Vienna Secession: 1897-1902,” 209. Celenza also points out that Beethoven’s throne is flanked by two eagles, the symbol of John the Baptist.
hair, rendered in waves of zigzags, she is encased and flattened by the surrounding patterns: starfish, chevrons, fish scales, and eye-like forms (Fig. 33). Roller repeated this figure in multiple rows in a rhythmic cadence in Nightfall (Fig. 34). As in Klimt’s mural with the figures representing the “Longing for Happiness,” Roller’s work favors abstracted, two dimensional female bodies with flowing hair, deep in reverie, with one figure connected by linear design to the next in a continuous pattern. Klimt’s floating women guided the viewer’s eye through the unfolding narrative, while here the females formed a triangular backdrop that centered the viewer’s gaze on the Beethoven statue.

Along with these major works, there were numerous others that contributed to create a sense of symphonic collaboration. In the left side-hall, in which Klimt exhibited the Beethoven Frieze, Stöhr and Hoffmann displayed small carved reliefs, and Klinger, another statue. The right side-hall contained murals by Ferdinand Andri and Friedrich König, and easel paintings and bas-reliefs by Josef Maria Auchentaller, Moser, and Lenz, to name a few. The variety of mediums and methods employed, such as graffito, carved cement, mosaic, hammered metal, and inlays enforced the ideal of various arts coming together.

Hoffmann’s tripartite schema, akin to a central nave and side aisles, impart the impression of a ritual progression through the space. Klinger’s Beethoven could be glimpsed from the other two rooms through openings in the wall (Fig. 35). The religiosity of the event was felt by many visitors, including Auguste Rodin, who commented on the venue’s

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167 Waizenegger, Vienna Secession, 67.
168 Koja calls all the three parts “three naves with apses,” and Vergo refers to the central space “inner sanctum,” both referring to the serious, religious intention of the layout. Koja, “Gustav Klimt’s Beethoven Frieze: Evolution and Program,” 90. Vergo, The Music of the Painting, 125.
resemblance to a temple.\textsuperscript{169}

As noted in the Introduction, critics praised the bare and open interior of the Secession Building for its functionality and flexibility. Specifically, the walls were left unarticulated for the purpose of being “a space which will allow works of art to be shown to their greatest possible effect,” as the Secession supporter Hermann Bahr wrote in \textit{Die Zeit} in October 1898.\textsuperscript{170} As a result, there was a sense that each installation arose from nothing, as if it were a “magic box,” to use Hevesi’s term.\textsuperscript{171} For this particular exhibition, the accompanying catalogue explained that Hoffmann’s goal was to provide a frame worthy of Klinger’s monumental sculpture.\textsuperscript{172} To this end, Hoffmann covered the walls roughly and unevenly with white plaster. I suggest that this is an instance of ornament, that is, a symbolic carpet, in a nod to Semper. It is possible that Hoffmann wanted to evoke the inside of an ancient, weathered temple, and also that the unevenness made the wall more reflective.

Klimt’s \textit{Beethoven Frieze} provided the narrative component of the exhibition.\textsuperscript{173} Painted in casein with gold and appliqué materials (carpet nails, curtain rings, fragments of mirrors, mother-of-pearl buttons, and costume jewelry made of colored paste), it measures approximately 7 by 11 feet, spanning the upper register of three walls.\textsuperscript{174} In brief it represented an allegory of

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{170} Quoted in Latham, \textit{Joseph Maria Olbrich}, 25.

\textsuperscript{171} Quoted in Kapfinger, “The Temple of Art and Its Origins in Dreamland,” 36.

\textsuperscript{172}\textit{XIV Ausstellung der Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs Secession Wien}, 23. The writer of this particular section is unclear.

\textsuperscript{173} Celenza suggests that Stöhr was helpful here as well: Stöhr might have advised regarding the program of the mural. Celenza, “Music and the Vienna Secession: 1897-1902,” \textit{Music in Art} 29, no. 1/2, 208.

\textsuperscript{174} Bisanz-Prakken, among others, suggested the humbleness of embedded objects reflected the Secessions group’s intention to use simple materials, stated in the catalogue. Bisanz-Prakken, “The \textit{Beethoven Frieze} by Gustav Klimt and the Vienna Secession,” 25.
human strife and salvation, the overcoming of suffering and evil through art, music, and poetry.

The catalogue to the exhibition introduced the work with a detailed description:

First long wall, opposite the entrance: the longing for happiness [the floating female figures]. The sufferings of weak humanity [the standing maiden and the kneeling couple]: the plea to the well-armed strong man [the knight] as the external driving force, and pity and ambition as the internal ones [the female figures behind him], to take up the battle for happiness on their behalf. Narrow wall; the hostile forces. The giant Typhoeus, against whom even the gods fought in vain; his daughters, the three Gorgons. Sickness, madness, death [the grotesque heads and the old woman behind them]. Lasciviousness, lust and excess [the three female figures on the right next to the monster]. Gnawing grief [the cowering figure to the side]. The desires and wishes of mankind fly away overhead. The second long wall: the longing for happiness finds its satisfaction in poetry [the floating figures encounter a female figure playing a cithara]. The arts [the five overlapping female figures, some of them pointing towards a choir of angels singing and playing musical instruments] lead us to the ideal realm where we alone find pure joy, pure happiness, pure love. The choir of the angels of paradise. “Joy, beautiful spark of the gods.” “This kiss for the entire world”

Ornamental details abound. On the first long wall, the female figures of Longing for Happiness form an undulating line that is typical of Jugendstil, their hair studded with jewel-like concentric orbs (Figs. 4, 5); the Knight, along with the figures of Pity and Ambition dressed in patterns of circles and triangles, are protected in a dotted cocoon (Fig. 36). On the narrow wall, Klimt surrounded Typhoeus, his daughters, Sickness, Madness, and Death in squares, triangles and concentric circles, and entwined them in snake-like motifs (Fig. 6); to their right, fat and half-naked Excess, sports a belt with inlays and blue skirt with large circles (Fig. 37); behind her, Lasciviousness and Lust are framed by sinuous gold and nestled in triangles; to her right, we see the emaciated nude figure of Gnawing Grief engulfed in a snake-like pattern (Fig. 6).

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176 Braun has discussed the biological and evolutionary sources of Klimt’s motifs. The “amniotic” blue that Klimt used in Hope I (1903) appears similar to the cobalt blue of the skirt of Excess; Klimt used the color blue for what Hevesi referred to as a uterus motif (for example in Medicine of 1901-07); the blue in general may refer to the sea, “the domain of our ancient human origins.” Braun, “Ornament as Evolution: Gustav Klimt and Berta
second long wall, the Longing for Happiness fly, again forming an undulating line, followed by
Poetry in a dress with large circles and crowned with a diadem, holding a stylized cithara (Fig.
7); after a large blank wall space, the Arts rise up forming a column, the pattern and the color of
their hair reflecting the striation of gold that flow upward with them (Fig. 38); we then reach the
triumphant last scene, where a naked couple, framed in rising gold lines, triangles and stylized
flowers, embrace; the choir, who surround the couple, are dressed in gold undulating stripes and
concentric circles (Fig. 38).

Wagner’s widely read interpretive program (1846) of the all four movements of
Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony was likely one of the major sources of inspiration for the mural.Indeed, Klimt seems to have incorporated some elements from the first three purely instrumental
movements that Wagner saw as programmatic, namely the “grim terror” and “thousand mocking
figures” that greet mankind (the hostile forces), and the those brave who “dive into the whirling
hour,” since “unrest alone proves man is man” (the knight).

In contrast to the first three movements, in the fourth and last, Beethoven set glorious
music to a text taken in part from Friedrich Schiller’s poem Ode to Joy (1785). It is worth
mentioning that Beethoven added his own phrase “Oh friends, not these sounds! Let us instead
strike up more pleasing and more joyful ones,” before leading into the victorious passage by
Schiller. Beethoven’s refrain provided a link to the previous struggle, a darker time, out of which

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177 Braun calls these circles, “the biologically grounded spores.” She also discusses a lecture Klimt attended in
which Emil Zuckerkandl, a prominent anatomist, showed a slide of the concentric germ cell nucleus. Ibid., 157.

178 Koja, “Gustav Klimt’s Beethoven Frieze: Evolution and Program,” 93, 94. Vergo, The Music of Painting, 128-
129.

suffering mankind had emerged, underscoring the triumph over adversity. Klimt’s frieze, in turn, gives an entire wall to the depiction of the hostile forces: the final celebratory scene occupies only the very last and small portion of the frieze.\textsuperscript{180} The blank space between Poetry and the final scene, according to Koja, adds to this contrast between the suffering expressed by the first three movements, and the triumph celebrated by the last (Fig. 8).\textsuperscript{181}

The details of visual embellishment emphasized the Secession’s conceptual interests in ornament, and indicate that for them it was no mere surface decoration but an integral part of the Gesamtkunstwerk. Specifically, the motifs and the manner of their rendering found in the Secession Building and the Beethoven Frieze appealed to three different senses, a strategy aimed at beguiling and immersing the viewer in a total aesthetic experience. Admittedly, Olbrich’s temple was not specifically built for the XIV exhibition. It had been conceived, however, as the sacred enclosure in which to bring about a unified art and liberating atmosphere in tandem with the various exhibitions that would unfold within, much in the same way as Wagner had built Bayreuth for future staging of his own operas. Moreover, some of the ornamental details in Klimt’s frieze consciously refer to those found on the exterior of the building, thereby strengthening the continuity of experience, from exterior to interior.

To begin with, several ornamental motifs in the Secession Building refer to the tactile,

\textsuperscript{180} A detailed discussion of the relationship between Klimt’s frieze, Beethoven’s music, and Wagner’s narrative interpretive program can be found in Koja, “Gustav Klimt’s Beethoven Frieze: Evolution and Program,” 93-96. Another essay by Wagner titled “Beethoven” (1870) has also been suggested as an additional source of influence. This interpretation is supported by the fact that when the frieze was shown again in the Klimt retrospective in 1903, it was presented with the Biblical quote, “my kingdom is not of this World,” the same passage Wagner quoted in “Beethoven.” Vergo, The Music of Painting, 128-31. Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy has also been discussed as a stronger source of inspiration. Nietzsche even wrote in the introduction to the book, “transform Beethoven’s ‘Hymn to Joy’ into a painting; let your imagination conceive the multitudes bowing to the dust, awestruck…,” Nietzsche, Birth of Tragedy, 37. Bisanz-Prakken discusses all three possible sources of influence and connects to specific aspects of the frieze. Bisanz-Prakken, Gustav Klimt Der Beethovenfries Geschichte, Funktion und Bedeutung, 32-34.

\textsuperscript{181} Koja, “Gustav Klimt’s Beethoven Frieze: Evolution and Program,” 93-94. Vergo, The Music of Painting, 95. Koja also presents another interpretation for this blank space: Klimt did not want to distract the viewer from the statue of Klinger, which was visible through the aperture right underneath the blank space. Ibid., 97.
through an allusion to the art of textile. As Kapfiner has noted, it is hard not to think of clothing when seeing the buckle-like motif on the side elevations of the building, especially since it appears at the mid-height, or the “waist” of the structure (Fig. 25).\textsuperscript{182} The rectangular bands with horizontal lines and squares near the top of four truncated towers that nestle the gleaming dome resemble the warp and weft of weaving (Fig. 23).\textsuperscript{183} More general evocations of the tactile come to the fore in the varying levels of carving, from barely perceptible (the trees) to low-relief (the geometricized, flat-silhouetted flowers at the bottom of the side elevations) to high and almost in the round (the heads of the owls and the Gorgon sisters; Figs. 24, 25). Olbrich set up a play between the floral motifs on the side elevations (Fig. 30). He also highlighted contrasting textures—for example, the pebbled surface of the articulated base of the building with the otherwise smooth stucco facing (Fig. 39).

Though painted, Klimt’s mural contains mother-of-pearl buttons, metals, and colored pastes that provoke the sense of touch. The garment and waistband of Excess (one of the Hostile Forces) for example, beckon the viewer’s hand: here Klimt accentuated the tactile, since the spherical inlays echo the personification’s bulbous torso (Fig. 37). Significantly this section of the mural—the wall that faces the viewer when he or she entered the room—evokes the dangers of excess in sensory pleasures. In this section, ornamental patterns run riot, threatening to engulf the figures, especially as they move to the right to the personification of Gnawing Grief.\textsuperscript{184} Klimt accentuated the tactile through the visual. Gold snakes writhe through hair, soft layers of fur covers the fearsome Typhoeus, and elsewhere striations and reticulations come into relief through


\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 53.

\textsuperscript{184} Braun has argued that in this panel, Klimt evoked mankind’s “unwelcome ancestor” (Typhoeus as a gorilla), and the linkage between atavism and moral degradation through ornamental motifs, such as the amoeba-like shapes and the snakeskin pattern. Braun, “Ornament as Evolution,” 156-57.
light and dark contrasts. Through image, actual relief, surface texture and directional patterning, both Olbrich and Klimt knew how to trigger, excite and ultimately delight the viewer’s sense of the tactile.

Through ornament, the Secession artists also drew attention to the faculty of vision. Not by chance, the relief of the Medusa and her sisters greet all who enter into the Temple of Art (Fig. 23). Their presence can be seen as a nod to tradition: certain archaic Greek temples, such as the Temple of Artemis at Corfu (first quarter of sixth century BCE), featured a monstrous Gorgon on the pediment (Fig. 29). Their presence on the Secession Building’s façade likely served similarly to prepare the visitor and warn that, once inside, something unexpected, overwhelming and possibly dangerous awaited. Indeed, the intended experience of cognitive disorientation for the turn of the century viewer made itself manifest in the use of disparate types of ornament—archaic, classical, even Baroque—sprung free of any consistent historicizing references or solid temporal grounding. Both the building and the frieze intentionally undermined any traditional allegorical reading, in stark contrast to the ornamental program on the Ringstrasse, which, as we have seen, evoked specific eras through homogenous motifs. Instead, Klimt and Olbrich provided pure visual delight, in a profusion of variety that invites a

185 Temple of Artemis in Corfu was first discovered during the Napoleonic Wars and continued to be excavated under the sponsorship of Kaiser Wilhelm (r. 1888-1918). Beyond the timeliness of the excavation, we do not know if the Secession artists were aware of this particularly well-preserved representation of Medusa. Robin Osborne wrote that the popularity of carving the Gorgon sisters in pedimental sculpture in the first three-quarters of sixth century reflected contemporary artists’ emphasis on a more fruitful (as opposed to merely dangerous and devastating) encounter with gods and heroes. In other words, instead of simply depicting the frightening powers of gods and monsters, such sculptures prepared the worshipper “for the awesome epiphany of the gods.” Robin Osborne, *Archaic and Classical Greek Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 118-19, 73, 75.

186 Koja writes that the Gorgons are there to “ward off the corrupting spirit of the Philistines.” Koja, “Gustav Klimt’s *Beethoven Frieze*: Evolution and Program,” 98.

187 Kapfinger compares Olbrich’s dome and surrounding towers to the Baroque baldachins, which according to Kapfinger have their origin in the myth of the primitive hut. Kapfinger, “The Temple of Art and Its Origins in Dreamland,” 41-42.
more intense—and pure—act of seeing. As a result, ornament emphasized sensation and immediacy over reasoned analysis, a preference key to Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Moreover, not only do these qualities of sensuality and the visceral connect the tactile and the visual, they also link ornament to music, “the heart of man,” or the art of emotion, as Wagner called it.\(^{188}\) The large looping motif, which appears once on each of the side elevations seems to embody this characteristic of the lyrical privileging of pure feeling over clear message: it exudes a sense of free movement and motion by covering a large area, but the motif is too abstract to communicate any fixed meaning (fig. 24).\(^{189}\) Even its similarity to an inverted treble clef proves elusive. Music and ornament share other characteristics. As many scholars have pointed out, the sinuous line of Art Nouveau suggests movement that unfolds over space and time, an important component of music and dance.\(^{190}\) Not considered adequately, however, is how ornament can function in ways similar to the musical *leitmotif* and to aural rhythm. Both these musical elements depend on recurring motifs and patterns, imparting coherence to the listener’s experience over time.

Variation on a *leitmotif*, by being same and different at the same time, gives a sense of stability and progression, on both conscious and subconscious levels.\(^{191}\) In a similar manner, we see some motifs reappear with alterations throughout the Secession Building and the *Beethoven*.


\(^{189}\) While the motif is very visible, there does not seem to be any discussion on it.

\(^{190}\) For example, Robert Schmutzler writes, “the animated ornaments of Art Nouveau are open to the fourth dimension, to the flow of time that is of a distinctly ‘musical’ nature…” Schmutzler, *Art Nouveau*, 9. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, one of the most prominent fin-de-siècle Viennese writer wrote, “The time: 1892. Its spirit: the musical element.” This is admittedly a very vague statement, but nonetheless very evocative not only of the omnipresence of musical influence, but also of the ferment of the era, in which one could not easily articulate what was going on but no less strongly felt the sweeping waves of political and cultural changes under his/her feet. Quoted in ibid., 12.

\(^{191}\) *Cambridge Music Dictionary*, s. v. “leading-motive.”
Frieze, and the repetition is especially effective in bringing about a unified experience when a motif materializes on both works: considering the goal of the exhibition, to bring about a unified experience, one might surmise that Klimt made a conscious effort to adapt some of the motifs from the exterior of the building in his own murals.

One such element is the color gold. As detailed in the first chapter, Olbrich made his dome, the foliage of his slender trees and the façade lettering with the gleaming precious metal. In Klimt’s painting gold appears repeatedly—in the hair of the Longing for Happiness, the knight’s armor, the dotted cocoon-like shape behind Pity and Ambition, the dress of Poetry, the rising column behind the three Arts, and the frame around the embracing couple in the culminating scene (Figs. 4, 5, 7, 8, 36, 38). In all such instances, the color gold helps evoke the idea of divinity and sacredness in the viewer’s mind. The appearance of gold behind the Gorgon sisters and Lasciviousness, Lust, and Excess is harder to make sense of (Fig. 6). Perhaps here Klimt was referring to older, pre-Christian sources of inspiration. For example, Florman has associated the color in Klimt’s work c.1900 with the myth of Danae and the art of Mycenae. Gold evokes a less enlightened time and darker but no less enticing forces. I suggest that the color in both works act as a leitmotif of a superhuman force. It can take many forms, and can turn good or evil. Either way, it lures the mankind and drives the narrative forward to the triumphant scene.

On the motivic level as well, patterns of lines, circles, and squares on the building reappear on the frieze in dazzling mixture of geometric shapes; organically derived designs of leaves and flowers on the former are answered by more evolved organisms, such as reptiles and humans, in the latter. While such visual echoes cumulatively contributed to a total sense of

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design, one element stands out, not only for its repetition but also for its extensive mutation, namely the variations of line as an independent motif. It first appears as a horizontal zigzag under the dome (Fig. 23), and the same motif is repeated on the cornice on the front façade and side elevations. A line reappears in an altered form, now hanging and ribbon-like form right above the motto (Fig. 23). Olbrich made the point of contrasting these two, by placing them close together on top of the pediment.

Klimt depicted the ethereal figures of Longing for Happiness linked together to form an overall undulating line, or as Hevesi commented at the time: “a kind of continuous ornament, just below the ceiling, as a rhythmic succession of flowing forms, of stylized human limbs and heads.”193 Like the cornice zigzag around Olbrich’s building, these figures lead the eye around all three walls of the frieze. Sinuous line takes on a more naturalistic depiction of flowing tresses as in the hair of the Arts and their striated rising background. Elsewhere, it is stylized to an extreme: behind the embracing couple and in the dress of the Choir of Angels, it serves as pure abstract background, activated by its own inherent undulations (Figs. 38).

Stylized flowing hair, a typical Art Nouveau extrapolation of the serpentine line, also served as a leitmotif (though not in the Wagnerian sense, associated with a character), appearing in the works by Olbrich (Gorgons’ locks), Roller, and Klimt, and the two reliefs by Stöhr. (Fig. 40). Bisanz-Prakken has pointed out that these reliefs were displayed in the left-side hall, right below the Hostile Powers of Beethoven Frieze, in which meandering lines overwhelm the figures, and therefore the motif contributed to a coherent experience of the wall.194 In the exterior architecture, continuing to the painting and sculpture inside, undulating line expands in range

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194 Bisanz-Prakken, Nuda Veritas, 130.
and freedom.

Rhythm (visual and aural) is another ornamental element that adds to the sense of narrative, since it is directly connected to spatial and temporal unfolding. In nineteenth-century Germany and Austria, the mechanism and possible origins of rhythm were widely discussed and investigated.\footnote{Michael Gubser, “Rhythm in the Thought of Alois Riegl and his Contemporaries,” 89-99. In this article, Gubser presents a detailed account of theories of rhythm leading up to Riegl. Two main branches of thought concerned themselves with the subject of rhythm, one scientific (positivistic) and the other, sociopolitical. For the latter, \textit{Arbeit und Rhythmus} by the economist Karl Bücher was perhaps the most influential work. It was widely read and went through six editions in quarter a century. The tendency to investigate rhythm in a social context also witnessed some explicitly hierarchical associations between a specific rhythm (rhythm as manifested by bodily movement) and a race, culture, or nation, and was often turned into a tool to evoke an imagined unity of a people. Ibid., 92, 98. Gubser argues that Riegl’s contribution to the discussion was “to link rhythm explicitly to visual organization by inscribing rhythmic temporarily into the composition and perception of artworks.” Ibid., 95. Gubser has elaborated in more detail on this point in Michael Gubser, \textit{Time’s Visible Surface} (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 187-200. I will discuss the relationship between Riegl’s notions of rhythm and the \textit{Kunstwollen} in Chapter 3.} Yet Michael Gubser notes:

\footnote{Gubser, “Rhythm in the Thought of Alois Riegl and his Contemporaries,” 89.}

\footnote{Ibid., 90-92.}

\[\ldots\] as rhythm became an increasingly common signifier in nineteenth-century aesthetic and psychological discourse, its object eluded clear definition. This ambiguity reflected the sense that rhythm marked a quality of experience so immediate and fundamental that it was not amenable to conceptual clarification—indeed, that it stood as a precondition for conceptualization as such.\footnote{Ibid., 92, 98.}

In other words, rhythm was perceived as something that sprang from nature and sustained regularities in all living organisms and their activities from time immemorial. In addition to music theorists including Eduardo Hanslick (1824-1904) and Hugo Riemann (1849-1919), prominent figures from wide variety of fields, such as economics, philosophy, psychology and theater, wrote about rhythm. Although their expertises varied, all discussed the phenomenon as something innate and fundamental to the human brain, either as a unit of time, or as something that enabled us to perceive patterns or continuities.\footnote{Gubser, “Rhythm in the Thought of Alois Riegl and his Contemporaries,” 89.} For example, in his highly influential text \textit{Arbeit und Rhythmus} (first published in 1896), the economist Karl Bücher defined rhythm as
“the ordered structuring of movement in its temporal progression,” and argued that rhythmic bodily movement was united with music and poetry during the repetitive physical labor of “primitive man” to make it more bearable.

Experienced over a stretch of time, rhythm works by creating and building upon listeners’ expectations. After a certain amount of repetition, a pattern becomes established in the mind: when a rhythmic occurrence fits the pattern and therefore meets the expectation, it gives the listener a sense of satisfaction, and when it does not, it disorients. This quality of listener engagement and participation was analyzed by Wilhelm Wundt, a German physician and philosopher, in 1897. Wundt described how the alternating episodes of anticipation and fulfillment contributed to a cumulative tension. Moreover, he wrote that “the way in which these partial feelings are united, and especially the predominance of some of them in the emergent feeling of the whole, is, to an even higher degree than the momentary character of an intense feeling, dependent on the relation which the immediate present feelings have to those preceding.”

Arguably this strategy of an “emergent whole” through rhythmic episodes was employed by Olbrich and especially by Klimt. The rhythmic repetition is such that a visitor came to expect continuing recurrences, and this satisfied expectation created a coherent, culminating experience. One such reiteration is the mixture of certain types of geometric and organic forms. The zigzags, squares, circles, rosettes and undulating lines on the exterior of the building are answered in even more frenzied variation and types on the frieze.

On another level, rhythm operates in Klimt’s frieze through his repeated employment of groupings of three. Naturally, the Gorgon sisters appear as a threesome, but Klimt also depicts three supplicants grouped together echoed by the trio of the Knight, Pity and Ambition (Figs. 5, 198 Quoted in ibid., 91-92.)
Although these are all symbolic personifications, Klimt’s stylizes and flattens their bodies through ornamental details and patterns. Similarly, the figures of Longing for Happiness, through differentiations of foreground, background and color, appear in linkages of three. Lasciviousness, Wantonness, and Excess appear as a unit (Fig. 6). The figures of the Arts, which are again very pattern-like, also form a group of three of a sort: two at the bottom, and one at the top. This third figure, as it turns out, has two overlapping figures behind her, thus forming an additional trio (Fig. 8). Of course, the entire narrative unfolds over three walls.

The number three has strong spiritual connotations. It regularly appears in the Judeo-Christian tradition, from Noah’s three daughters and three sacred objects in the Ark, to the three temptations of God by Satan in the wilderness, and, perhaps most importantly, the doctrine of the Trinity. As mentioned earlier, the plan of the building was also tripartite with the large central room and two smaller spaces on each side. On the exterior, Gorgon sisters and owls stare at the visitor in groups of three. The rhythmic repetition of three is noticeable in both works, and presents the XIV Exhibition as a religious experience—even if it worshipped the secular religion of art.

Rhythmic repetition gives coherence and stability, but other aspects of this life force could work against those same qualities. By the late nineteenth century, with Nietzsche’s 1887 view of rhythm “as a force,” it became associated with the primordial and dangerous. This Dionysian characterization of rhythm stood in deliberate opposition to its Apollonian, regularizing and form-giving incarnation. Gubser writes that “rhythm’s tendency to elude definition and plumb hidden depths of life became not so much a source of scientific frustration as a quality to embrace and celebrate, a mark of vitality that escaped the confines of human

199 Quoted from The Gay Science, in Gubser, “Rhythm in the Thought of Alois Riegl and his Contemporaries,” 89.
Despite the seeming contradiction, rhythm could be simultaneously regular and irrational. It began in time immemorial as a life- and form-giving precondition for everything else: put differently, rhythm as a primitive and fundamental element of life does not differentiate humankind and animals, intellect and instinct. Aspects of ornament in the Secession Building and the Beethoven Frieze seem to embrace this “primitive” or dangerous quality of rhythm. One recalls that the entire back façade of the Secession building was decorated by Moser’s frieze of rhythmic, dancing figures, one undifferentiated from the other in an almost frenzied repetition (Fig. 26). In the mural, the reptilian, scale-like motif that begins with the Hostile Forces threatens to engulf Gnawing Grief (Fig. 6). The repetitive reticulated surfaces, combined with visual snake-like forms and patterned skin, all in tones of brown appear menacing. Significantly Klimt evoked the snake as an open-ended rhythmic pattern rather than an individuated creature, i.e. a self-contained Apollonian form.

Less menacing but nonetheless ambiguous, is the flowing chain of figures that personify the Longing for Happiness (Fig. 4, 5, 7). These may seem very far from Dionysian forces due to their closed eyes and gentle, dreamy demeanor; yet such a state belies their obliviousness to the outside world. They float entranced, as if hovering between Apollonian calm and the Dionysian rapture. On one hand, they play a significant role in driving the narrative, uniting the first and third parts; on the other they show no sign of reacting to the struggle that transpires. In other words, they stand for humankind’s constant yearning to emerge from the dark past, a yearning that that remains unsatisfied: only after Poetry appears to articulate this yearning, give it

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Ibid., 98.

Gubser eloquently points out this aspect of rhythm that bridges two poles when he writes, “rhythm is above all paradoxical. Active and passive, primitive and progressive, stimulating and calming, rhythm united opposing qualities in its many characterizations. It demarcated without dividing and connected without homogenizing; it was infinitely regular without becoming flatly uniform.” Ibid., 98.
individuated form, do they change direction, becoming vertical in disposition and then transformed by implication into the united figures of the choir.

Both ornament and music are irrational in that they often work outside the realm of logical thinking, or as Gombrich expressed it, “ornament is dangerous precisely because it dazzles us and tempts the mind to submit without proper reflection.”\(^{202}\) The association of ornament and color with the irrational and primitive was not original to Loos: part of the resistance to the discovery that art of ancient Greece was not pure white but brightly colored and decorated came from this negative association.\(^ {203}\) Klinger’s Beethoven statue celebrated the Dionysian through his profuse and effusive use of inlays and ravishing hues.

Music could also be seen as irrational. Unless aided by lyrics, music cannot convey a precise story or program. Wagner, while discussing the Ninth Symphony, claimed that music could only express emotion, “infinite yearning,” but not an idea, and wrote that even Beethoven needed poetry.\(^ {204}\) Wagner in fact called the final movement of the symphony “the redemption of Music from out her own peculiar element into the realm of universal Art... the human evangel of the art of the Future.”\(^ {205}\) In other words, for Wagner Beethoven came very close to achieving a Gesamtkunstwerk, precisely because he took the courageous step of aiding the irrational or instrumental music, with the rational, or poetry. Similarly, Nietzsche argued that the seed of Greek tragedy lay in the Dionysian spirit of music—inaudible and inchoate emotions, which one experiences not as an individual but through the unity among fellow men and nature.


\(^{205}\) Ibid., 126.
According to Nietzsche, while the origin of Greek tragedy was Dionysian, this musical inchoate spirit needed Apollo, the form-giving power of poetry, in order for it to be presentable and visible on stage.\textsuperscript{206}

Klimt’s frieze exemplified the reconciliation of the Apollonian and Dionysian: the figure of Poetry (associated with Apollo) stands alone, in a stark contrast to the linked figures of Longing for Happiness, or the unified figures of the visual Arts, whose individuality is compromised. She carries a cithara, an instrument associated with Apollo.\textsuperscript{207} While the loud bagpipe, which would distort the player’s face due to the blowing, was associated with Dionysus, the cithara was considered more civilized for its tranquil sound and because one could play it while reciting or singing poetry: the perfect combination of the Apollonian and Dionysian.\textsuperscript{208} It is also significant that the figure of Poetry appears right before the final triumphant scene of an embracing couple, a symbol of contrasting life forces, who stands under two theatrical masks signaling Apollo and Dionysus. Just as inarticulate feelings needed form-giving poetry to be turned into art, the frieze seems to hint at the necessary balancing between the collective and the individual, of the Dionysian and the Apollonian.

The Choir of the Angels also contrasts the collective (Dionysian) and the individual (Apollonian). Nietzsche emphasized that the formation of the chorus marked the decisive step toward the establishment of Greek tragedy.\textsuperscript{209} At first glance, the rigidity of each figure seems to have nothing in common with the Dionysian frenzied unity. However, the repeated ornamental

\textsuperscript{206} Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, 33-39.

\textsuperscript{207} Florman, “Gustav Klimt and the Precendent of Ancient Greece,” 319.

\textsuperscript{208} Florman interprets the figure holding a cithara in Klimt’s \textit{Music I} (1898), on which the figure of Poetry in \textit{Beethoven Frieze} is based, as purely Apollonian. Ibid., 321.

\textsuperscript{209} Nietzsche, \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, 58.
motifs—gold circles punctuating the intervals of wavy gold lines—insist on the rhythm of their own, weaving the figures together instead of differentiating them, forming one wall of pattern with a potential for a frenzied repetition. Yet the chorus, according to Nietzsche and Schiller, formed “a living wall” against the world of reality that allowed the poet to enjoy artistic freedom and present his/her ideal domain. As Hiles has pointed out, the correspondence between Nietzsche’s depiction of the chorus as the wall and Klimt’s choir is likely intentional. Ultimately Klimt’s ornamental frenzy submits to this role as a vital wall.

Klimt’s use of ornament visualized the tension between the unleashed and the contained, in a rhythmic unfolding that ultimately resolved in a higher unity. Significantly the Knight only appears once, in the first wall of the frieze. Instead of celebrating a single heroic figure the last scene culminates in an undifferentiated group of figures—the chorus—and embracing couple only seen from the back. Instead the ultimate heroic figure, the deified one, was Beethoven, as the viewer would have then encountered in the central and culminating room. What Klimt’s mural celebrated, however, was no less momentous, momentous in a much more primordial sense. His frieze revealed how inchoate forces were given form, and the Dionysian was merged with the Apollonian in order to give birth to true art. Ornament was crucial in telling this story.

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210 Hiles, “Gustav Klimt’s Beethoven Frieze, Truth, and The Birth of Tragedy,” 176-77. The mysterious womb-like cocoon around the couple, in turn, might imply that it is the choir who imagines the embrace. This is another connection to Nietzsche, more specifically the part in which Nietzsche called the chorus the “womb” that “generates the vision” of gods. Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, 65-66.
Chapter 3
Evolution and Freedom of Ornament

This final chapter examines the ways in which the ornament of the Secession Building and the Beethoven Frieze embodied the ideas behind the motto of the Vienna Secession: “der Zeit ihre Kunst, der Kunst ihre Freiheit (to every era its own art, to every art its freedom).” I suggest that Alois Riegl’s concepts of the Kunstwollen (artistic will) and evolution of ornament informed the decorative scheme of these two works. In Late Roman Art Industry (1901), Riegl defined the Kunstwollen as “the prevailing artistic intentions in a given period” (“to every era its own art”), and scholars today interpret it as a collective inclination to form artwork in a way specific to each epoch.211 According to Riegl, the artistic will was the source of all human creation and free of materialistic or symbolic constraints. Moreover, because it propelled all artistic endeavors, the concept allowed Riegl to dispense with the traditional hierarchy among fine and applied arts: ornament was liberated from its lowly position. Before we examine specific manifestations of the evolution and freedom of ornament in the Secession Building and the Beethoven Frieze, Riegl’s key and connected ideas, namely, the Kunstwollen, the evolution of ornament, and the relationship of both to rhythm will be addressed.

Riegl first used the neologism Kunstwollen in Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament (1893), and developed the idea throughout his career.212 Henri Zerner has argued that for Riegl, the term Kunstwollen replaced the word style, and was virtually

211 Riegl, Late Roman Art Industry, in Vienna School Reader, 90. Iversen, Alois Riegl, 6-8. Olin, Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl’s Theory of Art, 149-150. Riegl himself defined the term on only few occasions, clearest and longest of which is quoted above.

212 For example, in Problems of Style, as Olin and Reynolds-Cordileone point out, the Kunstwollen is used to counter materialism. Ibid., 149, Reynolds-Cordileone, Alois Riegl in Vienna 1875-1905, 86. In Late Roman Art Industry on the other hand, as Olin argued, the Kunstwollen becomes a central causal force behind artistic creation. Olin, Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl’s Theory of Art, 148. Reynolds-Cordileone traces the changes of Riegl’s key concepts throughout his career. Riegl’s implicit definition of the Kunstwollen would shift its focus from the freedom of creative drive (as opposed to Semperian materialism) to the inclusion of the beholder. Reynolds-Cordileone, 203-6. Zerner discussed in detail different interpretations for the Kunstwollen and their implications for the field of art history. Zerner, “Alois Riegl: Art, Value, and Historicism,” 179-181.
synonymous with it. In *Problems of Style*, the term appears only a few times, and always in contrast with materialist and symbolic theories of the origin of art. Riegl described the omnipresent creative force of the *Kunstwollen* more explicitly in *Late Roman Art Industry* eight years later:

> In every period there is only one orientation of the *Kunstwollen* governing all four types of plastic art in the same measure, turning to its own ends every conceivable practical purpose and raw material, and always and of its own accord selecting the most appropriate technique for the intended work of art. … All human will is directed toward a satisfactory shaping of man’s relationship to the world, within and beyond the individual. The plastic *Kunstwollen* regulates man’s relationship to the sensibly perceptible appearance of things. Art expresses the way man wants to see things shaped or colored, just as the poetic *Kunstwollen* expresses the way man wants to imagine them. Man is not only a passive, sensory recipient, but also a desiring, active being who wishes to interpret the world in such a way (varying from one people, region, or epoch to another) that it most clearly and obligingly meets his desires. The character of this will is contained in what we call the worldview (again, in the broadest sense): in religion, philosophy, science, even statecraft and law.

This passage states the conviction shared by Riegl and Secession artists: an artistic style specific to each era permeated all arts, no hierarchy among them existed, and it was the creative urge, not materials or technique, that determined style. In his study, Riegl gave no preference to the *Arch of Constantine* over a belt-buckle, and treated both as equally valid expressions of the *Kunstwollen*. Indeed, Christopher Wood writes that Riegl believed that the essence of all arts depended on four formal elements (line, color, plane, and space) and that an artwork should have

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213 Ibid., 181.

214 Riegl, *Late Roman Art industry*, 94-95. The “four arts” are architecture, sculpture, painting, and decorative arts. Based on the omnipresent and goal-driven (from optical to haptic) aspects of the *Kunstwollen*, scholars seem to agree that Riegl had Hegelian inclination. For example, see Zerner, “Alois Riegl: Art, Value, and Historicism,” 179-180, 183, Iversen, *Alois Riegl*, 10-11, and Joaquin Lorda, “Problems of Style: Riegl’s Problematic Foundations,” in *Framing Formalism: Riegl’s Work* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 110. Reynolds-Cordileone is an exception, and argues that Riegl was much more influenced by Nietzsche. Reynolds-Cordileone, *Alois Riegl in Vienna 1875-1905*, 26.

no “transitive meaning,” i.e. an outside concept to which it referred. Ornament embodied this expressive autonomy in the purest form. Riegl considered ornament “the emblem of freedom,” free of illustration, narrative, and symbolism. In contrast, for example, a painting would often convey a narrative, even though it based its means of representation on the same four formal elements. Accordingly, Problems of Style is not only a history of ornament, but as importantly also a history of the Kunstwollen, of which ornament is the clearest expression. In Riegl’s discussion of ornament, the Kunstwollen evolved toward an ever a higher level of freedom from mimesis and restrictions on shape and placement. Hence, the play of ornament among Secession artists, who were deeply familiar with their contemporary Riegl and his texts, exemplifies the second part of the group’s motto, “to every art its freedom.”

Riegl argued that “all (man-made) forms are based on models in nature,” even when they were so “drastically altered” as to appear unrelated to natural prototypes. Riegl constructed his theory on the assumption that the less art was developed, the more explicitly it revealed its connection to nature: three-dimensional carving preceded two-dimensional painting. Riegl started his history with prehistoric times, and took his earliest examples from Laugerie-Basse and La Madeleine, caves in Southern France. The very first artwork Riegl discussed was the spear thrower carved like a head of a reindeer from Laugerie-Basse, an expression of a simple “mimetic instinct.” This three-dimensional representation on the spear thrower was nonetheless a valuable expression of the Kunstwollen, and it served Riegl to buttress the following points. Unlike what materialists argued, weaving was not the source of all arts, since

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217 Ibid., 170.
218 Riegl, Problems of Style, 14.
219 Ibid. 14, 29.
the technique did not exist yet at this point in history. Moreover, creative urge preceded functional considerations, since carving the handle would not make it any easier to use it. Rather, first “came the desire to create the likeness of a creature from nature in lifeless material, and then came the invention of whatever technique was appropriate… Therefore, it must have been an immanent artistic drive (the Kunstwollen), alert and restless for action… that impelled them to carve bone handles in the shape of reindeer.” 220

Relief sculpture marked the next step of evolution, and it went through stages of refinement. Riegl wrote: “comes a whole series of developmental phases during which the sculptural characteristics gradually disappear: at first, three-dimensional sculpture becomes flattened, then various degrees of high relief are followed by low relief, finally resulting in pure engraving.” 221 Engraving marked the point where “two-dimensional representation was established and led to the idea of the outline.” 222 It is worth noting that engraving was the first stage at which the line appeared as the essential component of art. Riegl, as an example of engraving, noted a representation of a reindeer’s head on an animal bone from La Madeleine. 223 Riegl wrote, “this turning away from three-dimensional corporeality toward two-dimensional illusion was a crucial step; it unleashed artistic creation from the constraints of the strict observation of nature and allowed a greater freedom in the manipulation and combination of forms.” 224 The definite two-dimensionality arrived with the invention of painting by the cave dwellers of Aquitaine.


221 Riegl, Problem of Style, 29.

222 Ibid.

223 Ibid.

224 Ibid., 15.
Next, line became a motif on its own right, divorced from representational function and now purely decorative: Riegl gave by way of example a spoon made of bone adorned with engraved zigzag, also form the cave of Laugerie-Basse. After this point, his discussion of the evolution of ornament is so focused on the increasing freedom of line (and its descendant, the tendril) that Olin, among others, has pointed out that Problems of Style can also be read as a history of line. Its employment as a discrete artistic means was indeed a momentous marker for Riegl: imagination could now make geometric motifs manifest by releasing them “from their latent existence in nature into an independent existence in art.” In his developmental schema, linear motifs would culminate in the Geometric Style (900-700 BCE).

The self-sufficiency of line was important in two regards. Firstly, it was liberated from being a contour, and by implication, from referring to a specific object in nature. The autonomous expressive power and aesthetic value of line allowed for the creation of (abstract) design, or something manmade yet still based, by virtue of origins, in nature, if now at far remove from resembling anything in the natural world. Secondly, as a result of this autonomy, it was at this stage that rhythm came to the fore in Riegl’s conception of the intertwined histories of art and ornament. The line, now independent, nonetheless had to display certain qualities to be deemed aesthetically worthwhile, and these qualities, as he maintained, came down to “the fundamental artistic laws of symmetry and rhythm.” Only certain linear patterns resulting from symmetry and rhythmic coordination could qualify as ornament: “straight lines became

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225 Even though Riegl took the examples for two distinct stages of evolution from the very same cave, he still discerned progress of the geometrical over the representational. Riegl wrote that zigzags were still far less frequent than the representations of animals at this point in history. Ibid., 32.


227 Riegl, Problems of Style, 17.

228 Ibid., 15.
triangles, squares, rhombuses, zigzag patterns, etc., while curved lines produced circles,
undulating lines, and spirals."²²⁹ The geometric line continued from prehistoric times through the
Egyptian to the Greek, in evolving forms from the stiff stem of the lotus to, eventually, the
curving line of the tendril.

Riegl’s emphasis on clarity and order seems to be influenced by Apollonian values. In
Late Roman Art Industry, he defined rhythm as “the sequential repetition of similar phenomena,
clarified for the beholder the association of parts into a unified totality,” and deemed it essential
to forging “a higher unity.”²³⁰ Gubser has brought to our attention the two aspects of rhythm that
played an essential role in Riegl’s theory of art. First, he considered rhythm the fundamental
stimulus for the creation of form. Whereas in Problems of Style, Riegl gave equal importance to
symmetry and rhythm, by the time of Late Roman Art Industry eight years later, he claimed that
symmetry and proportion were “only special forms of appearance of a higher universal medium
of the visual arts: rhythm.”²³¹ Secondly, rhythm regulated the translation of interval, ground, and
space, i.e., the components of three-dimensionality, into a two-dimensional expression.²³²
Rhythm, more than resemblance, was the common thread that connected nature and flat design—
even seemingly inorganic motifs, such as triangles and squares.

Riegl also analyzed the distinction between historical styles in terms of changing rhythm.
As Gubser writes:

In its simultaneous articulation and unification of shapes, rhythm became a basic
principle of form that characterized more than simply one artistic era; rhythmic depiction
changed over time, incorporating new representational capacities in its orderly regulation
of visual material. Rhythm provided the basis for artistic form and development, and was

²²⁹ Ibid.
²³⁰ Riegl, “The Main Characteristics of the Late Roman Kunstwollen” from Late Roman Art Industry, 87.
²³¹ Quoted in Gubser, Time’s Visible Surface, 192.
²³² Ibid., 190.
subject to Art’s fundamental condition of historicity.\textsuperscript{233} Form is an expression of the \textit{Kunstwollen}, and since rhythm governs the form, rhythm was the concrete means by which artists expressed their creative will and independence. Hence, not only the \textit{Kunstwollen}, but also specific rhythmic manifestation defined a period style. Riegl in fact used the term rhythm, rather than style or the \textit{Kunstwollen}, throughout his first book when he described particular patterns or motifs favored by an epoch.\textsuperscript{234} As he stated, the Geometric Style was “nothing other than abstract rhythm and abstract symmetry.”\textsuperscript{235}

After the momentous step of line’s independence in geometric patterns, next came the invention of the vegetal motif, specifically based on the lotus plant. It might appear somewhat contradictory that line, a geometric element that was once freed from depicting a specific object, resumed its function as a contour of an object in nature. As we have seen, however, the \textit{Kunstwollen} did not aim simply to imitate the outside world, but embodied the higher aesthetic laws of symmetry and rhythm. Riegl traced in detail the early history of the lotus motif, starting from Egypt and then in Mesopotamia and other cultures of the Near East, though he argued it reached its first mature expression in Mycenaean art (revealing his biased belief in the primacy of ancient Greek culture) (Fig. 41, 42, 43). Its stem ultimately evolved over the centuries into the organic forms of serpentine line and arabesque configurations.

His focus was the stem of the lotus, and its development from the straight line to “the undulating line.”\textsuperscript{236} In an earlier manifestation of the lotus motif from the New Kingdom (1552-1069 BCE), artists depicted the stems upright, stiff, and disjunct (Fig. 41). Unsatisfied with the

\textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 189-190.

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid. 187.

\textsuperscript{235} Riegl, \textit{Problems of Style}, 46.

\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 112.
simple arrangement, they started connecting flowers by what Riegl called an “arcuated band.” Lotus flowers alternated with buds and their profile views, strung together along the continuous stem to “create rhythmic groupings” (Fig. 42).237 Riegl credited Mycenaean culture (1600-1200 BCE) for producing the first instance of the curvilinear tendril proper to decorate pottery, and often orienting the motif diagonally to create an additional sense of movement (Fig. 43).238 In contrast to previous cultures in which the stem was subordinate to the flowers and rigidly alternated with them, the tendril provided visual interest with its undulating rhythms, and thus became one of the most visible motifs in Mycenae.239

Riegl was convinced that not only did Greeks perfect the tendril, but also it was their highest contribution to ornament.240 This ascent of the tendril reached its first peak in a Boeotian kyxux from the 7th century BC (Fig. 44).241 Riegl wrote, “[the vase] represents the first instance where the undulating tendril has left the confines of the narrow border strip to wander freely as an independent branch,” and identified this independence as the harbinger of “the ultimate goal of Greek tendril ornament: the free unwinding of undulating lines over any kind of surface, not just within a long, narrow strip.”242

After this initial ascent, however, the evolution toward the ultimate freedom of ornament was slow and arduous. In the Archaic period (700-480 BCE), as he chronicled it, figurative

237 Riegl, Problems of Style, 67-68.

238 Ibid., 109-113. Riegl wrote, “...Mycenaean art discovered the only truly artistic means of connecting vegetal motifs within a horizontal band—by means of the undulating line... Mycenaean artists were the first to discover the lively and dynamic vegetal tendril,” ibid., 112.

239 Ibid., 113.

240 Ibid., 8, 105.

241 Fig. 44 is the exact illustration Riegl used to demonstrate this point, and the tendril might not look so free to us. This shows how gradual the evolution of ornament was, and how minutely Riegl observed such evolution. Ibid., 158.

242 Ibid., 158-59.
representations of heroes and gods took up an increasing amount of space on vases.\textsuperscript{243} Since patterns were often rigidly symmetric and were limited to exact repetition of winding and looping, they could not satisfy “the decorative sensibility struggling to evolve” (Fig. 45).\textsuperscript{244} The only area that was left in the Archaic period for the tendril “beyond the reach of the figurative scenes” was the area around and beneath the handles of a vessel. Nonetheless, the tendril made most of the given space and became increasingly varied, while “at the same time respecting the basic decorative laws of rhythm and symmetry.”\textsuperscript{245}

The observance of symmetry became less strict toward the end of the Attic black-figure period (580-520 BCE), and this tendency blossomed in the Attic red-figure period (530-320 BCE; Figs. 46, 47, 48).\textsuperscript{246} Riegl pointed out that some deviations from strict symmetry were not only allowed but encouraged, because they “heightened the appeal,” of movement, without distracting from the essential rhythm and coherence. In one example Riegl gave, the pattern is mostly symmetrical around the vertical axis, except that the central petal of the right-hand lotus flower is longer than that of its counterpart, and the very end of the tendril is “broken capriciously by a blossom branching off at the bottom” (Fig. 46).\textsuperscript{247} In another example, the axis is tilted and flowers around it follow the direction of the tendril, instead of being placed symmetrically on each side of the axis (Fig. 47). Such development was important because it was “indicative of the dominant tendency of the period, namely, to free tendril ornament from its

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid., 161-162.

\textsuperscript{244} Ibid. 162.

\textsuperscript{245} Ibid. 178.

\textsuperscript{246} Ibid. 182-185.

\textsuperscript{247} Ibid. 184.
inherited bonds and to allow it to evolve with the utmost freedom.”\textsuperscript{248} The breaking of strict symmetry was a major symptom of the tendril nearing its final goal, which it reached around the first half of the fifth century. Riegl wrote about the moment that “at this point, tendril ornament was capable of covering any given surface in an attractive way, limited only by a general respect for symmetry” (Fig. 48).\textsuperscript{249} It seems that at this point, the requirement of symmetry was mostly met by motifs within a larger design, and became subsumed under a more general sense of coherence and rhythm.

The story of the tendril serves by way of example, how the ornament in the Secession Building and the \textit{Beethoven Frieze} points to various stages in Riegl’s evolutionary tale of formal development and creative freedom. The decorative program for both works cover a wide range of historic periods, design, and medium, from the geometric to the vegetal, more representational to the purely abstract, from increasing low relief to purely flat application on the surface area. Both architect and artist made allusions to the history of ornament over time and in different cultures in a kind of meta-narrative, and at the same time they displayed their own transgressive and virtuoso invention of new forms.

Sculptural and naturalistic motifs, the earliest art form for Riegl, abound on the exterior of the building. For example, we find the three Gorgon heads above the entrance with very realistic and lively expressions, and the three owls, more stylized than the Gorgon sisters but also carved almost in the round (Figs. 23, 25). The ornamental dome at the top is composed of

\textsuperscript{248} Ibid., 186, 182.

\textsuperscript{249} Ibid. 186. It is important to note that even though the tendril from this point on had the ability to cover all surfaces, its actual use still continued to be limited to below and under the handles. For an instance of the tendril truly spread out to the main body of the vase, one had to wait for the Hellenistic period. Riegl wrote, “The physical prerequisite, as it were, for a more expansive use of decoration namely, the free, artistic manipulation of tendril ornament, had already been fulfilled by black-figure vase painting. The only problem left was to provide the necessary space for tendril ornament to reach its full potential.” For this to happen, another factor, namely, the expectation of the contemporary viewer as to in how much space and in what way myths of heroes should be depicted, had to change. Ibid. 208, 187.
naturalistic leaves and berries. Not only are such motifs closer to the model in nature, they also evoke their symbolic meaning, and thus less free of external considerations. For the next step of evolution, in which sculpture became increasingly flat, Olbrich contrasted vegetal patterns of varying degree of bas-relief (Fig. 24). The relief of the tall foliage is in fact so low that, especially in the coloring in which it appears on the side elevations, it almost looks engraved, thus hinting at the third stage of Riegl’s evolution.

The geometric style and its hallmark, the line (alone or in combination) as an independent element, is conspicuously celebrated in the pediment—at first as the stiff zigzag and then freer undulating line, both of which are important motifs Riegl referred to as manifestations of “the fundamental artistic law of symmetry and rhythm.” Olbrich contrasted the two stages of line by putting them in proximity. The zigzag continues on the cornice, emphasizing its significance. We also find compound, i.e. more developed, geometrical patterns: the horizontal lines with squares at the bottom of the truncated towers surrounding the dome, and the circles with lines on the side façade, for example, are all placed in very visible areas (Figs. 23, 25).

The tall trunks of the foliage might point to the origin of the tendril as the stiff, vertical stem, as originally seen in the Egyptian art (Fig. 41). We also see a more advanced type of tendril: the partial treble clef on the narrow segment of the side elevation recalls a later, freer stage celebrated by Riegl (Fig. 24). It is confined to a limited and awkward area and it covers the given area with loops and spirals, not unlike the area around the handles of an Archaic vessel. It is in fact a combination of two lines—one that starts at the bottom, rises diagonally after making two clock-wise loops and settles down at the top as a horizontal line; and the other that twists itself around the former with two wide turns like an “s” and joins it above to form two parallel lines. The sense of symmetry is less strict, each line flowing according to its own rhythm, but
interacting nonetheless as if in a dance. Symmetry here seems subsumed under rhythm, and this freer design recalls the culminating point in Riegl’s history of tendril.

The ornament in the *Beethoven Frieze* too traces the trajectory of ornament Riegl presented, in this case intertwined with the development of the narrative. The most primitive stage of the tale of heroic struggle and salvation is depicted in the narrow wall that first faces the visitor (even though it is not the first wall in the sequence). In this panel, Klimt set up a contrast between the three-dimensional and two-dimensional in the inlays in the belt of Excess and almost identical circles painted on her skirt (Fig. 37). Braun has argued that this wall contains motifs inspired by nature’s primitive forms, such as the amoeba-like and reptilian patterns.\(^{250}\) Such designs not only point at the early stage of biological evolution, but also lean toward mimetic—another indication for Riegl that they are at an earlier stage of development.

For Riegl, two-dimensionality was an important step, not only because it marked a move farther away from the model in nature, but also because in such representation, the line (at this stage, the contour) became essential for the first time. Mirroring this significant step, Koja writes, “Klimt rigorously stressed (the figures’) two-dimensionality,” and thus, “the contours increased in importance, and the entire attention of the artist was placed on the elegance and beauty of the expressive line.” He moreover suggests that the presence of “a new creative will” toward “even more beautiful flow of lines, an even softer and rounder vibrating harmony, an uninterrupted, continual rhythm for his very animated line.”\(^{251}\) Geometric ornament, which resulted from the now autonomous line, is one of the most prominent types in *Beethoven Frieze*, beginning with the orbs embedded in the hair of the Longing for Happiness (Fig. 4). In contrast


\(^{251}\) Koja, “Gustav Klimt’s *Beethoven Frieze*: Evolution and Program,” 97. Koja attributes the linear character of the frieze and the importance of the contours to the influence of Japanese prints and decorative art, Aubrey Beardsley, and Jan Toorop.
to the more primitive motifs that engulf the Hostile Powers, triangles, squares, and circles make up the garment of Pity and Ambition at this more refined stage of humankind (Fig. 36). Braun has written that geometric motif for Riegl was “the first autonomous product of the aesthetic urge that separated culture from nature, man from other animals.” In this scene, humankind’s will to elevate themselves from the elemental forces and battle them appears sheathed in such more refined patterning.

The melodiously undulating string of the Longing for Happiness recalls a tendril (Fig. 4,5,7). The tendril here seems to function rather conventionally: by the direction of its movement, it guides the viewer’s eye through the main events, just like an earlier tendril connected lotus flowers and was subservient to them. In the final scene, as Braun has demonstrated, the ornamental motifs contrast starkly with those on the narrow wall. In this most evolved scene of “the kingdom of higher humanity,” the motifs “obligingly disperse in regulated rhythms and parallel trajectories.” In the previous chapter, we saw that yearning embodied by the Longing for Happiness was articulated by Poetry, and thus transformed to the column formed by the Arts and then to the undulating lines of the choir’s dress. On one hand, the strictly regular, rising parallel lines on the angels, combined with the frontal stiffness of the figures, recall the Egyptian treatment of the vegetal design, a move backward from Greek tendril (Fig. 41). On the other hand, these undulating lines are perhaps the most “advanced” ornamental motif in the entire mural. Firstly, they are completely independent: they do not refer to any organisms or


253 Koja writes, “The entire frieze is in effect a monumental transformation of ancient vase painting into a modern pictorial idiom.” Ibid., 98. Koja does not elaborate on this point. The use of the tendril (in this case made of human figures) at a higher area of the frieze certainly brings to mind the typical organizational scheme of Attic vases: the main narrative event took up the middle and largest portion, and more stylized motifs, often the tendril, topped the narrative in a much narrower band.

function as a connector of more important items. Secondly, they subsume the representational figures of the choir and turn them into a wall of decorative design, thereby pursuing its own will and rhythm.

Another wide-ranging motif is rather ambiguous and harder to place in the linear history of evolution. The swirling snake-like pattern behind Gnawing Grief is less evolved in the sense that it appears in the most primitive scene of the mural, and makes its connection to the model in primal nature explicit. However, it is also very free. Unlike most of the motifs that appear in the same scene, or in the entire frieze, it is neither self-contained nor has axis of symmetry—it seems Dionysian. It slithers and continues across the wall according to its own rhythm. In this instance, the decorative design, while flaunting its connection to its source, triumphs over naturalistic and descriptive considerations, thereby claiming artistic freedom with its Dionysian rhythm.

This ambiguous aspect of ornament—simultaneously tied to and consciously dissociated from nature—brings us back to Riegl’s concept of the *Kunstwollen*. Although it was a very important idea for him, in *Problems of Style* Riegl never defined it. Instead, what it was became clearest when contrasted to what it was not—external considerations such as materials, technique, function, and symbolism. This difficulty to articulate what it is might stem from its irrational nature, irrational in that the *Kunstwollen* originated in humankind’s innate and collective urge, much in the same way the true *Gesamtkunstwerk* for Wagner sprang from the folk’s unarticulated desire. Pointing at the primordial nature, Reynolds-Cordileone has suggested that the essential nature of the *Kunstwollen* is irrational: the desire to create originated in one’s unmitigated urge. Riegl described and vaunted this drive as something that was “alert and restless for action” and “impelled (the artist to create).”\(^{255}\)

According to Reynolds-Cordileone, Riegl read Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* during his early years as a student at the University of Vienna (1875-78), and was likely influenced by the irrational elements of Nietzsche’s theory of art, as many of his fellow students were. Riegl later formed and used the concept of the *Kunstwollen* to counter what he considered to be the overly positivistic approach prevalent among his colleagues at the Museum für Kunst und Industrie. Reynolds-Cordileone writes that the notion was particularly useful since it reestablished the importance of inarticulate will behind artistic creation, and it emphasized that the origin of art was only partially accessible to reason.

Dionysian force needed the Apollonian form in order to be visible at all and to become sublimated as tragedy. In a similar vein, it seems that the *Kunstwollen* as a collective and inchoate urge also required the intervention of form, i.e. the principles of Apollonian rhythm, to be articulated and visible as art. In other words, the *Kunstwollen* needed ornament, artistic form _par excellence_ for Riegl, in order to be communicable and sharable across a culture of a given era. Ornament itself is therefore a microcosm of the unstable struggle between the rational and irrational, and it is dangerous by definition, as it contains the Dionysian urge within. Nietzsche argued that tragedy atrophied, because the faith in reason and the search for truth, i.e. the Apollonian urge, became too strong. For Riegl too, the balancing between these two drives was important: when ornament was too regular as in the stiff stem of the earlier Egyptian decoration, the motif lacked life. If ornament became too free, it would not satisfy the requirement of rhythm, the main role of which, according to Riegl, was to convey coherence.

What was the Vienna Secession’s rhythm, their *Kunstwollen* that was specific to their

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257 Ibid., 86-87, 99-103.

One of the most innovative aspects of the ornamental program of these works is the mixture of motifs taken from different historical and geographical sources. Both Olbrich and Klimt proclaimed the freedom to combine them and create their own narrative, as opposed to the historicist manner in which the Ringstrasse architecture was draped in a homogenous Bekleidung. Secondly, both artists employed their ornament not as a subservient decorative element to high arts, but as the major vehicle to deliver their message: high arts and ornament performed together to tell a story, thereby denying the hierarchy among arts.

The third characteristic of ornament that expresses the Kunstwollen of the era is the conspicuousness of the wall and the use of the wall itself as ornament in both of the monuments: this point is simultaneously progressive and atavistic. Semper argued that the wall-covering was the beginning of ornament and all the other arts, and that its essence was its planarity. In other words, the archetypical ornament was an entire surface. It appears that not only did Olbrich and Klimt push the freedom of ornament forward and contribute to the evolution, but they also made their ornament come around a full circle and celebrated its origin.

In 1972, Karl Heinz Schreyl reevaluated the Secession Building and hailed its cubic quality as presaging the purity of modernist architecture, which seems to somewhat ignore the copious ornament applied to its walls. As Werner Oechslin has pointed out, even in the supposedly bare modern architecture, a built structure is bound to have a surface, which then inevitably becomes a sort of Kunstform. I suggest that Olbrich was aware of the potential of the white wall as another ornamental layer and he expressed man’s innate and irrepressible urge to decorate by means of his seemingly pure, functional walls. In an earlier design for the

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259 Gottfried Semper, Style, 123.


building, the front façade was covered with a row of figures, akin to those that were actually realized in the back wall (Fig. 49). The façade as erected, however, is blank, but it is not a simple empty space either. Upon a closer inspection, one notices that it is in fact a panel, i.e. wall-covering, that is put up over what seems to be an underlying wall: Olbrich makes this idea of covering clear by letting the foliage peak out from beneath (Fig. 1). In the Secession Building, the ever-increasing freedom of ornament to cover a larger area has resulted in the white wall, i.e. an entire plane, as ornament.

Another clue to Olbrich’s intention can be gleaned from his recollection that he had the inspiration for the design for the Secession Building while standing in front of the Temple of Segesta (420 BCE; Fig. 50). There, overwhelmed by the purity of the ancient ruins, Olbrich became convinced that “there were to be walls, white and shining, sacred and chaste. Solemn dignity should pervade.” In other words, the entire white wall, rather than a particular pattern on it, took on the responsibility of communicating the sense of dignity.

In the Beethoven Frieze, Klimt too was aware of the role of the frieze as the wall-covering—the archetypical wall—in the vein of Semper. Firstly, Klimt did not attempt to present the illusion that the painting existed independently of the wall. As Bisanz-Prakken has pointed out, Klimt painted so thinly on the plaster at times that the materiality of the greyish white wall adds to the texture of his painting. We have also seen that a large blank space on the wall right before the final scene paused and prepared the viewer for the climax, again pointing at the idea that the wall and the wall-covering formed a unit and performed together toward a narrative goal. Secondly, as articulated in the catalogue, the frieze was part of the overall decorative scheme to

\[262\] Quoted in Latham, 18.

glorify the Beethoven statue. The left “aisle,” in which Klimt exhibited, was a crucial space for the exhibition, since it was there that visitors first got a glimpse of the Beethoven statue and spiritually prepared themselves for the full-on encounter with the god. It is no coincidence that Klimt, the most celebrated of the Secession artists, was assigned the task of filling the majority of this preparatory space and telling a story of redemption through art.265 Those involved in the planning of the XIV exhibition were aware that the mural should articulate the meaning of the particular division of the exhibition space. Both of these points suggest that Klimt regarded his frieze in the manner of Semper: the wall-covering and the wall were originally one and the same, and even after the tectonic wall was invented, the former communicated the spiritual meaning of the enclosure.

Artistic creation is a form-giving act, and accordingly, must tame the Dionysian urge to an extent. The two Secession artists told the history of ornament and brought back the primal origin of all arts to the fore through their use of ornament. By celebrating what Loos considered the inglorious beginning of arts, Olbrich and Klimt perhaps hoped to preserve the Dionysian impulses so that art would continue to develop freely. Moreover, the Secession Building and the Beethoven Frieze honored ornament as the origin of all arts—the purest expression of the Kunstwollen, the archetypical wall, and the microcosm in which the two fundamental drives of humankind would continue to coexist. Such audacity to exalt ornament was perhaps their Kunstwollen.

264 XIV Ausstellung der Vereinigung Bildender Künstler Österreichs Secession Wien, 25.

265 Ibid., 27-28. Bisanz-Prakken calls the left side-hall, “the left aisle,” evoking its religious significance.
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