

In an age when schools all too often look like prisons, and suburban houses aspire to the monumentality of palaces, such advice seems all the more timely.

## Notes

1. Adolf Loos, *Ins Leere gesprochen, 1897–1900* (Paris and Zurich: Éditions Georges Crés et Cie, 1921). The second edition of the book, published the same year, contains two additional essays, “Der Staat und die Kunst” (The State and Art) and “Oskar Kokoschka.” The former is a shortened version of the foreword to Loos’s essay in *Richtlinien für ein Kunstamt*, published in Vienna by Richard Lanyi in 1919. The essay on Kokoschka, which Loos wrote about an exhibition of his friend’s work at the Kunsthalle in Mannheim, was not published until January 1931, when the first edition was already in press.
2. Adolf Loos, *Spoken into the Void: Collected Essays 1897–1900*, intro. Aldo Rossi, trans. Jane O. Newman and John H. Smith (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982).
3. Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime. Selected Essays*, ed. Adolf Opel, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, California: Ariadne Press, 1998).
4. Brenner Verlag was owned and operated by Loos’s friend, Ludwig von Ficker, who was also editor of *Der Brenner*, among the leading progressive literary magazines of the time.
5. For a contemporary assessment of Loos’s stature see, for example, Philip Lehmann, “Architektur von Menschen her,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 8 February 1931, 17.
6. Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), 192.
7. Ludwig Münz and Gustav Künstler, *Der Architekt Adolf Loos: Darstellung seines Schaffens nach Werkgruppen/Chronologisches Werkverzeichnis* (Vienna and Munich: Schroll, 1964); Adolf Loos, *Sämtliche Schriften*, volume 1, ed. Franz Glück (Vienna: Verlag Herold, 1963). The second volume never appeared.
8. Adolf Loos, *Ins Leere gesprochen 1897–1900*, ed. Adolf Opel (Vienna: Georg Prachner Verlag, 1981); and Loos, *Trotzdem 1900–1930*, ed. Adolf Opel (Vienna: Georg Prachner Verlag, 1982).
9. See Burkhardt Rukschcio, “Ornament und Mythos,” in Alfred Pfabigan, ed., *Ornament und Askese im Zeitgeist des Wien der Jahrhundertwende* (Vienna: Verlag Christian Brandstätter, 1985), 57–68.
10. Loos, “Ornement et crime,” *Les cahiers d’aujourd’hui* 5 (June 1913), 47–56.
11. Loos, “Ornement et crime,” *L’Esprit nouveau* 2 (November 1920), 159–168.
12. Loos, “Ornement et crime,” *L’Architecture vivante* (Spring 1926), 8–30.
13. Loos, “Ornament und Verbrechen,” *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 24 October 1929. The essay was subsequently reprinted in the *Prager Tagblatt* in November of the same year.
14. Adolf Opel, Introduction to *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, 11.
15. Lina Loos, *Das Buch ohne Titel. Erlebte Geschichten*, eds. Adolf Opel and Herbert Schimek (Frankfurt and Berlin: Ullstein, 1986), 81.
17. Oskar Kokoschka, *My Life*, trans. David Britt (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 36.

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Reviewed by Alina Payne

## Pioneers of the Modern Movement from William Morris to Walter Gropius

by Nikolaus Pevsner

London: Faber and Faber, 1936.

2d ed., New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1949.

**1942:** A historian’s position in times of acute crisis is unenviable. He is apt to be thought donnish, escapist, a straggler from the ranks of progress. Dr. Giedion gives me the impression of being acutely conscious of this and of having felt obliged to write his history with one hand and beat the philosophic drum with the other. The drum, I confess, bores me. But Dr. Giedion’s history is the real thing.

—John Summerson, review of *Space, Time and Architecture*

**1958:** The disappearance of the idea that Modern architecture is going to redeem the world is what most strikingly differentiates Hitchcock’s book from earlier treatments of the same period. Obviously Modern architecture is not going to redeem the world. But how important this proposition was.

—Colin Rowe, review of H.R. Hitchcock’s *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century*

**1977:** Pevsner’s outlook is historicist in precisely the Popperian sense. It is holistic and preoccupied with the future. He believes that art is and should be a product of the economic, social, and political conditions under which it is created; he believes that there is such a thing as the essence of an age, and that the common essence is more important than its individual manifestations; he has accordingly discerned the political and social norms of the twentieth century, and insists that art and architecture must be subordinated to them. Consequently he can and does insist that he knows what will and must be the architectural expression of the age.

—David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture*

**1978:** He [Pevsner] was clearly fortunate to be set on a course by Gropius almost before he knew that such a thing as a “Modern Movement” might exist; he certainly was influential in shaping the ideas of two if not three generations of architects, historians and critics, so that all were inclined to make his prophecies come true. And at least one of the reasons he was so influential was that his historical generalizations looked true at the time, and in many cases still look good. The relative blackness of pots and kettles is not at issue here: Pevsner’s performance is. He got it right. He got it more right than Giedion or Henry-Russell Hitchcock. It behooves any of us to recognize that he produced a picture of the architecture of his own time which was useful, applicable, and has had demonstrable predictive power. If it was Whiggish historicism, or the kind of moralizing that comes naturally to a self-made Lutheran, that made it possible to do that, then so much the worse for Butterfield and Popper.

—Reyner Banham, review of *Morality and Architecture*

**2001:** *Morality and Architecture* was thus an attempt to explain why it is unnecessary to accept the vacuous philosophy which lies behind modernism. Taking on the establishment, the book caused a considerable stir at the time, receiving passionate praise and passionate criticism. Why bring it out again twenty-four years later? The reason is simply that, though the general public is as hostile now as it was then to the damaging effects of modernist architecture in historic settings, the professional architectural establishment is still dominated by the same beliefs. Then as now, the practice of traditional and classical architecture is taught in no British school of architecture.

—David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture*, 2001 edition

### ARCHITECTURE AND OBJECTS: THE POWER OF PEVSNER

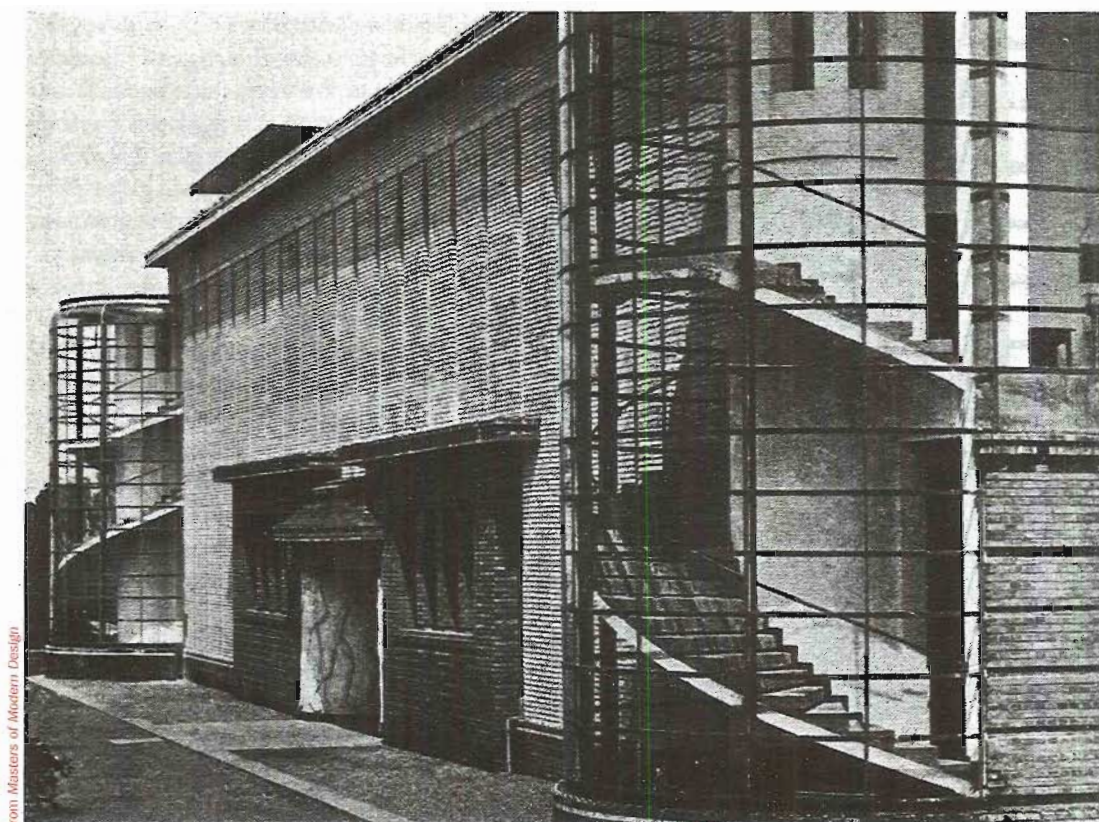
Théophile Gautier is said to have died of a broken heart over the destruction of Paris perpetrated by Baron Haussmann. Although not associated with loss of life, the roughly contemporary Battle of Styles in England was equally heated and personality-driven. In its turn, the polemic surrounding modernist architecture and its advocates reached no less of an emotional and intellectual pitch both between the wars and since. Each century has its architectural *cause célèbre*.

Yet, as controversies go, the one focused on modernism has lasted longer than anyone could have predicted. If the first critiques of modernism can be traced back to the 1950s (in England and Italy), and if its tenets and vocabulary seemed to receive death blow after death blow in the ’60s, ’70s and ’80s, in the past fifteen years it has once again drawn the attention of both scholars and practicing architects. At the remove of more than a generation, modernist architecture still poses important questions. Nevertheless, despite and perhaps because of this renewed interest, it continues to be perceived as problematic.<sup>1</sup>

Recent studies of the early accounts of modernism are a case in point. Treated with suspicion in the past decades, these accounts, like the architecture they present, have become once more the objects of reassessment and debate.<sup>2</sup> On the face of it, these histories of the birth, rise, and victory of the “modern movement” differ little in their broad strokes. All follow a trajectory that leads from the Industrial Revolution, through the American skyscraper, the British turn to the Arts and Crafts, the cleansing if ultimately stillborn intermezzo of Art Nouveau, the development of new technologies and materials, the creation of the Werkbund and demise of Expressionism, to the mature work of Gropius, Mies, and Le Corbusier. Depending on the author, the straight line rising to this climax may include additional names and movements (such as the Dutch, the Futurists, or the Russians), but the similarities in the stories they tell are striking.

This historiographic template—based on progress as fundamental ordering principle—is a familiar one. In their own way these narratives perpetuate a tradition first consecrated by Giorgio Vasari, the begetter of art history, who in his





Gropius and Meyer: Model factory, Werkbund Exhibition, Cologne, 1914

slow awakening, the first glimmers, the early successes, and the race to the finish of the Renaissance. Yet unlike his modern colleagues, Vasari did wonder about the future and felt some qualms. Where the *epigoni* would go or what there was left for them to do once the collectively sought aesthetic norm was attained, he did not know; nor did he know (although he feared) if art, as he knew it, would come to an end and be reborn once again, but differently, in the cyclical way of all living things.

For all his biases and natural failings, Vasari remains a useful, indeed a unique source for scholars working on the Renaissance today. Yet, unlike him in this respect, the early apologists of modernism—the heroic trinity of Pevsner, Sigfried Giedion, and Henry-Russell Hitchcock that strangely paralleled the trinity of Mies, Gropius, and Le Corbusier—have not all met with the same fate in the revisionist literature. Of the three, Hitchcock has had the easiest time of it. Publishing his magnum opus *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* in the late 1950s, he had far fewer barricades to scale than his two colleagues in arms. Less polemical and proselytizing, he has also been more readily accepted as a historians' historian.<sup>3</sup> This is not to diminish the seminal importance of his 1929 *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration*.<sup>4</sup> Yet this work was (rightly or wrongly) eclipsed by Pevsner's *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (1936), Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941), and by Hitchcock's own revised, much enlarged, and toned-down version of 1958. Likewise his 1932 MoMA *International Style* exhibition catalogue, co-authored with Philip Johnson and Alfred Barr, although influential to be sure, did not enjoy the critical fortune and the same phenomenal classroom exposure and readership over the years. As result Hitchcock did not become a bone of contention in the redefinition of modernism, and it was Pevsner and Giedion who bore the brunt of

the postwar critique.

Of the two, Pevsner has kept the polemical fires burning the longest. His *Pioneers*, published in 1936, with new editions in 1949 and 1968, was reviewed, attacked, and defended at all these critical moments in the reception of modern architecture. So was Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* (reedited even more often and printed until 1980). Yet while the reevaluation of Giedion at the hands of Spiro Kostof, Sokratis Georgiadis, and others in the past fifteen years has recovered the intellectual dimension of his achievement, Pevsner continues to be called to task and presented as an adversary. In his *Morality and Architecture*, reedited in 2001, David Watkin points to *Pioneers* as to some form of original sin when he attacks the resistance to classicism in contemporary British architecture.<sup>5</sup> If indeed Pevsner has sinned, if he has "led, guided, deluded and deceived us," as Timothy Mowl also argues, is there anything to be gained

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from reading Pevsner today?<sup>6</sup> And if, as this present polemic testifies, his book functions like a perpetually smoldering, never quite extinct volcano on the verge of eruption, why does it? What was and what is the power of Pevsner?

Much has been imputed to Pevsner for his all-too-persuasive presentation of a reciprocal relationship between period style and *Zeitgeist*. Indeed, style is Pevsner's starting point—incidentally, it is Hitchcock's and Giedion's too—and his endorsement of a spirit of the age is made clear from the very first lines of the book, which opens with an account of the then distant Battle of Styles.<sup>7</sup> Elliptically ushering in Pevsner's own

thinly disguised combative stance with this reference to "battle," it also announced the methodological underpinnings of his argument. For him "the profound artistic dishonesty that made this comedy possible" was a "dishonesty" that masked the true stylistic identity of the 19th century. That he should choose this style-based frame for his argument is perhaps not surprising: like his fellow combatants, he was trained as an art historian, and the pre-eminent frame for all inquiries in the field at the time (and for a good while to come)—one that he could not escape, try as he might—was style. Of course the notion of period style is closely allied to the Hegelian idea of *Zeitgeist*, being, as it were, the index of its operation in the visual domain. Both are invoked by Pevsner, though perhaps more directly in his contemporary *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England* (1937):

Why are Renaissance ink-stands with a naked figure of Justice, why are eighteenth-century plates with Chinese temples satisfactory? Not because there are any laws demanding or forbidding a certain amount or a certain type of decoration, but because every period creates its own style according to intrinsic laws of vitality. I had to emphasize more than once that most modern architects feel at sea as soon as they are asked to create for decoration, for adornment only (artistic metalwork, elaborate electric chandeliers, jewellery). Now we can give a reason for that, though one which I'm afraid will not satisfy everybody. It is the "*Zeitgeist*" of our age, the age of steel, of speed, of work, or whatever one may call it, that does not allow for much play and carefree enjoyment. One may regret living in such an age, but one cannot alter it, certainly not by imitating the outward forms of other periods.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, this premise and the role of the industrial arts in the development of a modern style are the real starting points of *Pioneers*. And this is precisely where Pevsner also begins to part company from his colleagues and to reveal the unique value of his text. If style led him to endorse a determinist conception of history (whether Hegelian or *Geistesgeschichte* in origin)

complete with its fallacies and shortcomings, it also led him to identify aspects of modernism that would have passed otherwise unnoticed.

Unlike Hitchcock and Giedion, who address some of the arts, it is Pevsner who, methodologically, embarks on the most systematic art historical analysis of modern style. Each of his chapters is more or less neatly devoted to a different class of objects: the decorative arts (chapter 2 and most of 4 and 6)<sup>9</sup>; painting (chapter 3); engineering and new materials-based edifices (chapter 5); and architecture (chapter 7). All together they display (or must display in order to be perceived by Pevsner as progressive) the common features that give visible form to the



Zeitgeist of modernity. How things look—defining their formal qualities in a powerful vocabulary that applies equally to all media—is essential to Pevsner's argument and allows him to move swiftly across the arts.<sup>10</sup> This visual approach also allows the reader easy access to the argument: pictures and words are integrated into a persuasive narrative.

Although Pevsner gives all aspects of artistic production equal space in tracing the birth of a modern architectural style, it is his emphasis on the decorative arts that sets his use of style apart.<sup>11</sup> Even the book's title conveys this approach. As it shifts from *Pioneers of the Modern Movement* (1936) to *Pioneers of Modern Design* in the 1949 MoMA edition, and despite the reference to Walter Gropius, it is a statement of dif-

established by the Werkbund. The ultimate synthesis, however, comes in the work of Gropius—and this is true not only of his buildings but also (and especially) of his Bauhaus curriculum, which embodied the unity of the arts and confirmed the presence of a Zeitgeist. "For more than a decade [the Bauhaus was] a paramount center of creative energy in Europe. It was at the same time a laboratory for handicraft and for standardization, a school and a workshop."<sup>16</sup> Urbanism (a principal issue for Giedion and not addressed by Hitchcock at all in 1929) is hardly mentioned by Pevsner, who is concerned with the formal qualities of single buildings and single objects, not with their metropolitan agglomeration.<sup>17</sup> If the modernists' battle cry "vom Sofakissen zum Städte-

objects of daily consumption.<sup>19</sup> To be sure, Herbert Read's 1934 *Art in Industry*, promotes a similar aesthetic to Pevsner's—pro Bauhaus and Gropius, pro abstraction and modernism—and is moreover an acknowledged source for *Pioneers* in its attention to the decorative arts. Yet his voice rang a familiar note to an art historian of Pevsner's background: Read's own source also seems to lie in the Riegl tradition, in this case through the agency of German art historian Wilhelm Worringer (Riegl's most famous follower) whose *Form in Gothic* is one of the very few works that he cites.<sup>20</sup> Yet even despite this similarity, Read's book remains an investigation into the decorative arts in the 19th-century British tradition initiated by such works as Richard Redgrave's or Henry Cole's (whose joint brainchild was the 1851 Great Exhibition). Unlike Riegl and Pevsner, Read does not claim to see a causal relationship between the arts, and he posits no link between *Kunstindustrie* and architecture.

Instead, an even more important source for Pevsner was Riegl's own predecessor, Gottfried Semper. Writing his magnum opus *Der Stil* (1860–1863) as both architect and art historian, he had set out the lines of inquiry upon which much of Riegl's work was to evolve, particularly the strong case for *Kunstindustrie* as the DNA of any culture. Despite its impact this work remained on the periphery of art history as *Kunstwissenschaft* (for not being sufficiently historical) and had long since been removed from the canon upon which Pevsner's education had been based. Yet, for Pevsner, he offered one fundamental insight: the mass-produced object of daily use is the point of contact between art and society. And, in a revolutionary move for the time, Semper claimed that the quality of the "high" and "monumental" arts depends on the health of that relationship. It is thus Semper's admonition and education-based solution to his own mid-19th-century crisis (he developed both an education curriculum and a philosophy of museum display which was seminal in Britain and Austria) that Pevsner literally lifts without acknowledgment for *Pioneers* (there is only one fleeting reference to Semper's seminal essay, "Industry, Science, and Art" of 1852 in the 1968 edition) and for *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England* (1937).

Having appropriated a particular notion of style from the Semper-cum-Riegl tradition, Pevsner identified the period texts that addressed the industrial arts and developed his argument against this documentary background. Thus he drew heavily on the writings of Herman Muthesius (by contrast Hitchcock has only two passing mentions of *Das englische Haus*) and van de Velde (particularly *Die Renaissance im moderne Kunstgewerbe* of 1903). That these texts also allowed him to anoint his new fatherland with a leadership role in begetting a new modern vocabulary was not an insignificant detail. Of course he simplifies matters and obscures some of his sources. For example, in his *Moderne Baukunst* of 1908, Karl Scheffler had argued that objects and interior design lay at the origin of the modern architectural vocabulary and had elevated Morris and van de Velde

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ference (from the points of view of Giedion, Hitchcock, Gustav Adolf Platz, and others) suggesting an exploration of more arts than one. The so-called *Kunstindustrie* (Morris's reforms) lie at the beginning of Pevsner's narrative and become the red thread weaving through the rest of the book. After the wake-up call to the low quality of the decorative arts provided by the 1851 Exhibition and the much needed ensuing reforms in arts education, he argues, the industrial objects (the "small things of everyday use") in England in the period 1890–1914 displayed "cleanness, gracefulness, refreshing simplicity, lightness, plain surfaces. . . . The close atmosphere of medievalism has vanished. Living among such objects, we breathe a healthier air. Of particular importance for the coming Modern Movement was the expression of this new spirit in cabinet-making."<sup>12</sup> This achievement literally reifies a shift until then only perceivable in painting: "[O]ne recognizes the tendency towards large, unbroken surfaces, strong colours, bold patterns—a parallel to Cézanne or Gauguin in painting." Indeed, Cézanne shows that "the abstract scheme of construction . . . is the real subject of the picture; constructing his pictures with cylinder, sphere and cone."<sup>13</sup> For Pevsner, "the leaders of European painting in 1890 fought for something that had never existed before. . . . On the whole the new style was free from tradition, unencumbered and uncompromising. . . . [T]he break was achieved by the painters earlier than by the architects."<sup>14</sup>

Thereafter the narrative unfolds along now familiar lines, powerful because simple. Pevsner's leading heroes, Henry van de Velde, Otto Wagner, Adolf Loos, and the Frank Lloyd Wright of *Art and Craft of the Machine* (1901) "were decisively stimulated in their thoughts by England."<sup>15</sup> But their achievements were isolated. "To have achieved a wide movement promoting these new ideas is undeniably the merit of German architects and writers." *Sachlichkeit* (objectivity, simplicity), standardization, and machine art are the distinguishing features of the "universally recognized style" subsequently

bau" ("from the sofa cushion to city design") described a spectrum wider still than Pevsner's, he nonetheless was the one to give the *Sofakissen* its due in the rise of an architectural vocabulary.

Although Pevsner's dependence on the Vienna school's turn to *Geistesgeschichte* filtered through German art historians August Schmarsow and Wilhelm Pinder has been acknowledged, his dependence on another Vienna school theme has remained in the shadows.<sup>18</sup> Pevsner's move to credit the decorative arts with a central role in the development of a modern vocabulary of the arts was not new, for although he never names him, he clearly owes much to a tradition consecrated by the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl. In the same way that his Swiss contemporary Heinrich Wölfflin can be sensed behind Giedion's work or Harvard art historian A. Kingsley Porter behind Hitchcock's, and though much has been made of Pinder in Pevsner's case, Riegl is the real force behind his approach. There is certainly no question that he knew Riegl's work. As a German-trained art historian, Pevsner literally could not have avoided a thorough acquaintance with his oeuvre, which was not only considerable but also seminal. As far as method is concerned, Riegl's chef-d'oeuvre was and remains *Spätrömische Kunstindustrie* of 1901, in which he fully develops and establishes the concept of *Kunstwollen* (a basic will-toward-art that characterizes every historical period). However, it is not the *Kunstwollen* that Pevsner picks up from Riegl, but his expanded field of objects pertaining to art. Indeed, though Riegl covers all late Roman art, the decorative arts are the book's center of gravity (he also privileges them in the title). For Riegl, the *Kunstindustrie* is the truest sensor of style (a position already evident in his *Stilfragen* of 1893) and the repository or essence of the *Kunstwollen* of a period in its most naked and raw, and therefore most genuine state. The idea was already present if not fully developed in Wölfflin's 1888 *Renaissance und Barock*, in which the author not only talks about the *Formgefühl* (feeling for form) of an epoch but also locates its first signs in the

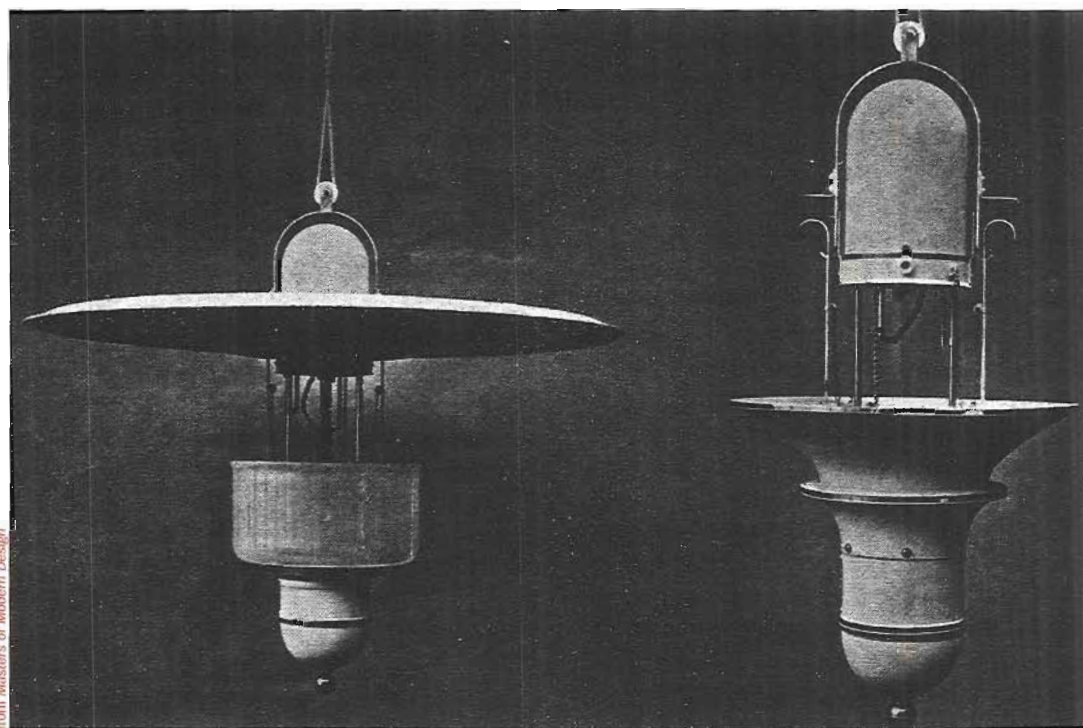


ulary and had elevated Morris and van de Velde as exemplary agents.<sup>21</sup> It is hard to believe that, with his education and interests, Pevsner had not read this book. Yet, intriguing though such lapses may be for today's reader, the persuasive power of his book lies precisely in its ability to tell a powerful story with a few well-delineated characters who carry a linear plot swiftly to its climax.

Perhaps even more disturbingly for some of his readers and unlike Hitchcock and Giedion, Pevsner also had a strong leftist social message to deliver. Although Morris is again the paradigmatic figure who identified the "one essential problem, the indissoluble unity of the art of one age and its social system," it is in Germany that a socially conscious architecture was ultimately conceived. Despite his paean for his adoptive country, Pevsner did not pull his punches, and he berates the English for resisting the social agenda of modernism: "One reason was [that] the levelling tendency of the coming mass movement—and a true architectural style is a mass movement—was too much against the grain of English character. A similar antipathy prevented the ruthless scrapping of traditions which was essential to the achievement of a style fitting our century."<sup>22</sup>

This concern to preserve the social taproot of modernism is even more evident in Pevsner's lesser-known contemporary, and I would argue, companion volume, the 1937 *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England*. Again his source was Semper, whose own work was deeply informed by that other revolutionary moment, 1848. Unlike Herbert Read, whose interest in the decorative arts never lead him to posit a social role for the arts, Pevsner almost quotes from Semper when he develops a whole education program to raise the level of taste in his society and blames the deplorable state of the decorative arts on a capitalism run riot: "the shape and appearance of all products were left to the uneducated manufacturer. . . . [T]he consumer had no tradition, no education, and no leisure, and was, like the producer, a victim of this vicious circle."<sup>23</sup>

This leftist position in Pevsner's work was not unrelated to his conception of a period style revealed in the objects of daily use. Indeed, if his advocacy of a nonaestheticized, mass-oriented modernism sets his history of the movement apart, his focus on the industrial arts is a methodological counterpart to his social concerns, as it was for Semper, the political émigré to England following the 1848 revolution. Raising the status of the modest objects of daily consumption, of the objects that reached the masses, to that of cultural icons, he also promoted a nonhierarchical, democratic conception of the arts. The tradition endured through Riegl and the association of the Vienna School of art history with the Museum für Kunst und Industrie. But ultimately the study of the decorative arts became separated from the trunk of art history, as high art, once again, took center stage for most inquiries. Both Giedion and Hitchcock followed this trend, and it is not until 1948 that Giedion seriously (if differently) addressed the issue of objects as



Behrens: Street Lamps for the AEG, 1907-1908

instruments in his *Mechanization Takes Command*.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, art historical work on the decorative arts remained a tributary to the mainstream of the discipline well into our own day, not dignified with the prestige accorded the other arts and their genius artists.

Pevsner's commitment to the original, political impulse behind modernism made dating another very important issue for him. Aware that modernist forms were beginning to be appropriated devoid of their content, he made it his object to combat this trend. That his perception was correct was borne out by Colin Rowe forty years later: "It [modern European architecture] was introduced [in the United States] largely purged of its ideological and societal content; and it became available, not as an evident manifestation or cause of socialism, but rather as a *décor de vie* for Greenwich, Connecticut, or as a suitable veneer for the corporate activities of enlightened capitalism."<sup>25</sup> It is for this reason that Pevsner places great emphasis on the invention of modernism, on the original modernist project and its political (rather than aesthetic) roots. For him the representative of this unadulterated modernism is Walter Gropius in 1914 and, more broadly, the Germans (particularly Peter Behrens). What comes later is development—brilliant to be sure—but emptied of content. This is why *Pioneers* ends with the Werkbund show of 1914, whereas Hitchcock and Johnson extend their books to 1932 (the full title of their 1932 exhibition is *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922*), and Hitchcock's 1929 *Modern Architecture* includes Le Corbusier, J.J.P. Oud, Robert Mallet Stevens, and Mies, and charts modernism into his very own present. Likewise, in his 1941 *Space, Time and Architecture*, Giedion extends his inquiry to the late 1930s, and, although Gropius is the climax of a development he traces from the Industrial Revolution onward, so is Le Corbusier, who gets equal billing.

For Pevsner's project to be successful, however, he had to identify the "real" pioneers, and these are Wright, Loos, to a lesser extent

Charles Voysey and van de Velde, but especially early Gropius. In fact, *Pioneers* is really an answer to Le Corbusier's claims in his then recent *Oeuvre complète*,<sup>26</sup> which gave Pevsner a feeling of urgency to set the record straight and probably also contributed to his polemical tone: "The historian must emphasize this point, because Le Corbusier, partly owing to his magnificent artistic imagination and partly to a certain showmanship, has been taken for one of the creators of the Modern Movement. It is surprising how after so short a time of twenty or thirty years historical facts already tend to become dim and legends to grow up."<sup>27</sup> This position Pevsner first made clear in his 1931 review (written in the summer of 1930) of the *Oeuvre complète* in *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, where the basic framework of *Pioneers*—protagonists, arguments, and style-based methodology—is already fully formed.<sup>28</sup> This anti-Corbusier and anti-aestheticism attitude may also be the answer to the question of why Pevsner (surprisingly) never mentions Cubism (which figures heavily in Hitchcock and Giedion). Is it because he does not want to credit the Cubists with inventing the transparency he credits Gropius with? Is it because he perceived Le Corbusier's Purism to have picked up where Cubism left off (at least in his own telling of the story in *Après le cubisme* of 1918)? Is it because Cubism is French from 1907 to 1914, when he wants the threads of modernism to be all in German hands? Given his biases, all these answers are possible. Indeed, Pevsner's negative view of Le Corbusier and post-WWI modernism never changed. In the 1968 edition of *Pioneers*, Pevsner ends on a rousing critique of Corb's neo-Expressionist manner (presumably at Ronchamp) and subjectivism, which he sees in stark opposition to the socially driven aesthetics he documents and advocates.

Clearly in the 1930s historicizing modern architecture is a common project that unites Hitchcock, Pevsner, and Giedion. Yet all three are essentially moving in uncharted territory.



To be sure they are synthesizers and analysts, since the literature documenting modernism in architecture (Scheffler, Platz, Gropius, Le Corbusier, and early Giedion) was already in place, but they faced the same dilemma: How can one locate modernism when it does not yet reveal any clear patterns? In a historical continuum (Hitchcock)?<sup>29</sup> In an “eternal present” that abolishes history (Giedion)? As a moment of fracture within history (Pevsner)? Ultimately their collective contribution is that they, in their different ways, participated in the larger yet still fragile project to open up art history to the present. There were precedents in the work of art historians at the turn of the century such as Wölfflin, Josef Strzygowski, August Schmarsow, Julius Meier-Graefe, Cornelius Gurlitt, and others.<sup>30</sup> But this work was either conceived by its authors as art criticism or was produced by art critics, and thus was not perceived as a legitimate component of the art historical academic discipline. Thus the systematic approach Pevsner, Giedion, and Hitchcock adopt, as well as their common desire to embed the investigation of modernity in a historical context, is pioneering. That Pevsner’s book—with all its faults and omissions—was a more manageable, readable account with a strong and convincing message that survived the ebb and flow of popularity is a testament to its value. That Pevsner also turned the spotlight on an aspect of modern visual culture—the decorative arts—which was left virtually untouched by Giedion and Hitchcock is an even more lasting contribution.

## Notes

1. See for example Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (New York: Viking, 1986); David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture Revisited* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) and, at the grassroots level, the recent “developer’s neo-vernacular” that is sweeping North America, replacing the ‘50s and ‘60s Prairie-style suburbia.
2. See the recent republication of Hitchcock’s 1929 work with an introduction by Vincent Scully (H. R. Hitchcock, *Modern Architecture Romanticism and Reintegration* [New York: Da Capo Press, 1992]); the republication of Giedion’s 1928 *Bauen in Frankreich*, with an introduction by Sokratis Georgiadis (*Building in France, Building in Iron, Building in Ferro-Concrete* [Santa Monica, California: The Getty Center, 1995]); Pevsner’s *Pioneers* translated into German, 1983 (reprinted 1996) (*Wegbereiter modern-er Formgebung von Morris bis Gropius* [Cologne: Du Mont, 1983]); and more generally the reevaluation of “modernist” architectural historians: S. Georgiadis, *Sigfried Giedion. Eine intellektuelle Biographie* (Zurich: Ammann, 1989); A. Payne, “Rudolf Wittkower and Architectural Principles in the Age of Modernism,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, September 1994, 322–342; M. Rosso, *La storia utile. Patrimonio e modernità nel lavoro di John Summerson e Nikolaus Pevsner* (Turin: Edizioni di Comunità, 2001); P. Scrivano, *Storia di un’idea di architettura moderna. Henry Russell Hitchcock e l’International Style* (Milan: Francoangeli, 2001).
3. “He will not settle for preconceived ‘constituent facts,’ as his great rival, Sigfried Giedion was to do many years later. He loves his present and would like to justify it, but he will not write propaganda or polemic.” Vincent Scully, 1993 ed. of *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration* (New York: Da Capo), vi. Colin Rowe quoted

- Panofsky: “He [Hitchcock] has been described by no less a judge than Erwin Panofsky as bringing to the study of present-day phenomena ‘the same respect for historical method and concern for meticulous documentation as are required of a study of fourteenth-century ivories or fifteenth-century prints.’” Colin Rowe, *As I Was Saying* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), Vol. 1, 179.
4. New York: Payson & Clarke, 1929
  5. See also D. Watkin, “Sir Nikolaus Pevsner A Study in Historicism,” *Apollo*, September 1992, 169–172
  6. “This is not yet another hand wringing book on ‘Whither Britain?’ There are already too many of those and no one pays them much attention. The more valuable exercise is to understand how we have been led, guided, deluded and deceived in the past” *Stylistic Cold Wars: Betje-man versus Pevsner* (London: John Murray, 2000), 14.
  7. “The Battle of Styles,” stretching roughly from 1830 to 1900, centered particularly on the “combat” between the neoclassical and the Gothic
  8. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 187 “The art historian has to watch national as well as personal qualities. Only the interaction of these with the spirit of an age produces the complete picture of the art of an epoch, as we see it.” *Pioneers*, 188. Unless otherwise indicated all quotes are from the 1936 edition.
  9. “Art Nouveau is the Transitional Style between Historicism and the Modern Movement. . . . But Art Nouveau deserves the greatest credit for the revival of handicrafts and applied art on the Continent” (*Pioneers*, 114); “The leaders of art Nouveau were the first to understand both sides. They accepted the new gospel of artistic service preached by Morris, but they also accepted our age as the machine age” (*Pioneers*, 157).
  10. Pevsner’s vocabulary is not medium-specific and is easily transferable precisely so as to underscore a visual unity. Examples from *Pioneers*: earlier work is characterized by “coarseness and vulgar overcrowding” (49), “superfluous motives”; “his [Morris’s] is the merit of having gone back to simple figures, simple attitudes, simple colours, ornamental backgrounds,” “ [his is the] revival of decorative honesty” (61); on engineering: “architecture in iron and glass kept clean, clear, and sober, because it worked under the protection of science” (121); modern buildings display “pure functional energy” (123); “candour and simplicity” (153); on MacIntosh: “Building in his hands becomes an abstract art, both musical and mathematical” (162–163); “revival of health and lightness” (163).
  11. Although, like Pevsner, Hitchcock did make much of painting, particularly of abstraction (later reinforced by Alfred Barr) and published on the connection between painting and architecture (*Painting Toward Architecture*, 1948, with a foreword by Alfred Barr), he makes no mention of the industrial arts and does not include a single image in his *Modern Architecture* (1929); Giedion treats the industrial arts similarly and includes only two images in a book otherwise highly illustrated.
  12. Pevsner makes this statement with reference to Voysey’s work and the “joie de vivre” evident in the new design (*Pioneers*, 145–149).
  13. *Ibid.*, 71 and 74–75.
  14. *Ibid.*, 72.
  15. *Ibid.*, 12.
  16. *Ibid.*, 42 (unchanged in 1948 ed.).
  17. *Ibid.*, 166–169. It may also be that, since his focus was architecture up to 1914 and the CIAM and the big debates on urbanism (on the Siedlungen, the various *Cités Radieuses*, etc.) did not get under way until some-time after WWI, Pevsner’s omission may be justifiable.
  18. On Pevsner and the *Geistesgeschichte* tradition, see Marlite Halbertsma, “Nikolaus Pevsner and the End of a

Tradition. The Legacy of Wilhelm Pinder,” *Apollo*, February 1993, 107–109.

19. For the political dimension of this argument, see Frederic Schwartz, “Ornament and Spirit, Ornament and Class,” *Harvard Design Magazine*, Summer 2000, 76–84.
20. H. Read, *Art in Industry* (London: Faber, 1934), 115. The impact of the English post-1851 industrial arts discourse—with its own roots in Semper among others—is also clearly noticeable, as is his connection to continental debates when Read mentions the help of Dr. Karl With from the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Cologne (119).
21. For example, see this statement, which encapsulates the main thrust of Scheffler’s book: “What the leading artists did not achieve: to design *sachlich* simple functional furniture or other objects for the interior, that is what the craftsmenly natures lucked into. . . . The step from picture to crafted ornament, from ornament to furniture and from here to the whole interior is not bigger than the step from the interior to exterior architecture. It is in this relationship that lies the true revolution brought about by the decorative arts movement” Karl Scheffler, *Moderne Baukunst* (Leipzig: Julius Zeitler, 1908), 165 (my translation). For his emphasis on Morris and van de Velde, see 161–165.
22. Pevsner finds the same to be true of urban planning. “In England it was hardly before 1925, or even 1930, that the public began to take any interest in the modern problem of the working-class tenement-house. About the same time, the forms of the Modern Movement began to penetrate into England, the forms which, between 1910 and 1925, had been developed by German, French, and American architects.” *Pioneers*, 166–169.
23. Pevsner, *An Enquiry*, 55.
24. New York: Oxford University Press, 1948.
25. *Five Architects* (New York: Wittenborn, 1972), 19.
26. Zurich: Stenorov and Boesiger, 1930.
27. *Pioneers*, 177
28. “His [LC’s] thesis sounds very certain. Central Europe—Holland and Germany—picks up the French movement from 1900 on. Well, this is simply incorrect.” N. Pevsner, review of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Ihr gesamtes Werk von 1910 bis 1929 in Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, August 1931, 303–312
29. “The literature of the architecture of the present seems disproportionately profuse beside that of the architecture of the past. Thus the illusion is reinforced that the present is a period distinct from and opposed to the past. Historical criticism should however be able to show that as regards architecture the present is the last realized point in the dialectic of history, and that even the most advanced contemporary forms constitute no rootless phenomenon but the last phase in a long line of development.” Introduction, *Modern Architecture* 1929.
30. See, for example, Wölfflin’s short essays on Adolf von Hildebrand; Josef Strzygowski’s *Die bildende Kunst der Gegenwart. Ein Büchlein für Jedermann* (1907); August Schmarsow (a major influence upon Pevsner), who was very interested in contemporary art; Konrad Fiedler, whose aesthetics were deeply marked by his interest in German painter Hans von Marees; Julius Meier-Graefe, *Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der modernen Kunst* (1903); and Cornelius Gurlitt, *Die deutsche Kunst des XIX Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Georg Bondi, 1899) and *Zur Befreiung der Baukunst: Ziele und Taten deutscher Architekten im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1900).

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- 4 **After the Flood** by Esther da Costa Meyer
- 14 **Curtain Wars** by Joel Sanders
- 21 **Environmental Stoicism and Place Machismo** by Michael Benedikt
- 28 **"Matrix of Man"** by Hilde Heynen
- 34 **Disarrayed Distinctions** by Elizabeth Wilson

## On Place

- 42 **A Postcard from the Volcano** photographs by Camilo Vergara  
poem by Wallace Stevens

## On Culture

- 46 **Grounds for Dispersal** by Paul Shephard

## American Scenes

- 52 **St. Louis** essay by Mitchell Schwarzer  
**Past St. Louis** photographs by Lisa Johnston

# Harvard Design Magazine

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## Book Reviews: Class Books Part II

- |                                                                                                |                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 62 <b>Los Angeles</b><br>by Reyner Banham<br>reviewed by Robert Fishman                        | 74 <b>A Pattern Language</b><br>by Christopher Alexander<br>reviewed by William S. Saunders |
| 64 <b>Trotzdem</b><br>by Adolf Loos<br>reviewed by Christopher Long                            | 79 <b>The Image of the City</b><br>by Kevin Lynch<br>reviewed by Gwendolyn Wright           |
| 66 <b>Pioneers of Modern Design</b><br>by Nikolaus Pevsner<br>reviewed by Alina Payne          | 81 <b>Mathematics of the Ideal Villa</b><br>by Colin Rowe<br>reviewed by Daniel Naegele     |
| 71 <b>Perspecta 9/10</b><br>reviewed by Mark Linder                                            | 84 <b>The City in History</b><br>by Lewis Mumford<br>reviewed by Thomas Bender              |
| 86 <b>Letters</b>                                                                              |                                                                                             |
| <b>GSD Notes</b>                                                                               |                                                                                             |
| 87 <b>Faculty Project, Faculty Publications, Faculty Appointments, GSD Events and Programs</b> |                                                                                             |