

## Ornament and object—ornament *as* object

Review of:

Alina Payne, *From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernity*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012, 360 pages, 62 color + 108 b/w illus, ISBN: 9780300175332, Cloth: \$65.00

During the mid nineteen-thirties, the art and architectural historian Hans Hildebrandt (also the author of the first survey of modern architecture and German editor of Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture*) was working towards a book project on a 'World History of Adornment' to be published by Propyläen Verlag as part of its well-known series on *Kunstgeschichte*.<sup>1</sup> Over a period of several years, the scholar compiled massive bibliographies (some of them listing more than two thousand items), made a great number of notes and sketches, and corresponded extensively with museum administrators to obtain photographic reproductions. But in spite of the Sisyphean effort and although the manuscript and illustrations were more than half complete, the book never materialized. While there were insurmountable political reasons (such as the fact that the author's wife was Jewish, which cost Hildebrandt his academic position at Stuttgart), the publication also folded from the sheer enormity of the research endeavour. Hildebrandt was collecting not only ornaments around the world, but also the massive literature on the same objects—an army of books, journals, treatises, folios, and countless exhibition catalogues on bodily adornment that had been published over the course of a century, mainly in German, French, and English. Hildebrandt's unfinished history stands as a testament to the unique bond between ornament and historiography: a form of history that not only describes the development of decorative artefacts but also attempts to replicate their wealth, luxury, and variety, however arduous it may be to transcribe such qualities on paper. It is as if the massive quantities of ornament discovered in the nineteenth century during several archaeological and ethnographic expeditions were eventually buried by the books that were piled onto them. Could this mountainous literature be one of the contributing factors to what we customarily perceive as the ostensible disappearance of ornament from twentieth-century practice? The very profusion of historiography that enhances ornament with the allure of textual criticism also presages its demise and replacement by unornamented objects. This may be an instance of Victor Hugo's 'ceci tuera cela,' in which the book on ornament does not exactly 'kill' ornament but helps bury it following a fittingly ornate funerary oration.

<sup>1</sup> Hans Hildebrandt, bibliographic and other research notes for 'Der Schmuck,' ca. 1936-37, Hildebrandt Papers, Research Library, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. See also, Spyros Papapetros, 'An Ornamental Inventory of Microcosmic Shifts: Notes on Hans Hildebrandt's Book Project 'Der Schmuck' (1936-37), *The Getty Research Journal*, 1 (2009), 87-106.

This gradual eclipse of ornament that captures art historiography's negative dialectics is the main subject of Alina Payne's *From Ornament to Objects*. In sum, the book describes the transition from the endless stylistic iterations of architectural ornamentation in the late nineteenth-century to the unornamented household objects of early twentieth-century modernism, smooth sculptural artefacts that carry over the rhetorical function previously allotted to ornamentation. Payne begins her account with Adolf Loos's well-known lecture *Ornament and Crime*, a powerful invective against the use of adornment in buildings and furniture, which, due to its virtuosic rhetorical delivery, is itself a fine specimen of verbal ornamentation. Another architect, Le Corbusier, who, next to Loos, figures both at the starting point and the conclusion of Payne's story, rehearses the trajectory from ornament to object in his own writing and design practice. Once a jewellery and watch engraver (the profession of his father) as well as a careful reader of ornamental motifs (as evidenced in his careful copying of ornaments from Owen Jones's *Grammar of Ornament* and Alois Riegl's *Altorientalische Teppiche*), the young designer would fully ornament his first building commission, the Villa Fallet at his native La Chaux-de-Fonds (1906), with the stylized pattern of a pine tree rhythmically repeated throughout the façade and the interior of the house. And yet this is the same architect who less than two decades later (and on the grounds of the 1925 Paris Exposition of the Decorative Arts) would install his Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau, an unornamented building envelope populated by mass-produced furniture as well as storage units designed by the architect. A similar trajectory from ornament to object, albeit a more oscillating one, informs Corbusier's expansive body of writing, from the lyrical symbolism of the travel diaries of his youth to the objectivist rhetoric of his later architectural manifestos (as well as the synthesis of both styles in his writings after the second-world-war).<sup>2</sup> Corbusier's career illustrates not only the development from ornament to object but also the contradictions that complicate such linear progress. The trajectory from ornament to object is not a direct one; it is a path that contains ornamental loops and formal undulations as well as methodological regressions to earlier paradigms. Modern practice does not move steadily from decoration to artefact, but rather *between* the two; sometimes the two categories move in parallel and at others against one another. Based primarily on the polarizing rhetoric of Loos and Le Corbusier in the 1920s, Payne's argument assumes an equally polemical tone and traces a polarity between ornament and object, while her material often divulges the underlying analogies that unite the two species via a variety of corresponding tactics common in textual and design practices. Her scrupulously researched historiographic account of the literature on ornament makes abundantly clear that ornament *is* an object of both scholarly and practical investigation and that such inquiry often follows a cluster of bifurcating trajectories that are as intricate as the ornamental motifs whose origins the art historian or designer endeavours to delineate.

<sup>2</sup> On Corbusier as writer, see M. Christine Boyer, *Le Corbusier, Homme des Lettres*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011.

Perhaps the most revealing case is that of Gottfried Semper, whose ‘heritage’ is described in the first chapter of Payne’s book and echoes throughout the rest of its pages. Semper evidently thinks of ornament in terms of an object; in the title of an important lecture he delivered in Zurich in 1856 on the formal principles of ornamentation (part of which was later incorporated into the architect’s ‘Prolegomena’ to his voluminous *Style*), Semper opts to use not the word *Ornament* but *Schmuck*, a term describing three-dimensional objects of human or architectural adornment.<sup>3</sup> For Semper, discussions of ornamentation should not address flat disembodied patterns whose geometric contours follow the equally static principles of classical aesthetics; on the contrary, the architect polemically argues that adornment materializes in concrete artefacts that have mass, direction, and movement. Ornament (the Greek *Kosmos*) regains its cosmological function not by rehearsing universal systems of classical harmony but by dynamically reacting to the impact of physical, social, cultural, and, implicitly, political forces that inscribe each human artefact into the real world. The naked dynamic form (such as the parabolic shape of ancient Greek projectiles studied exhaustively by Semper) is the object’s true adornment.<sup>4</sup> Even if Semper’s own decorative designs for building interiors and household artefacts are replete with ornamental figures, figurative decorations are a mythological cover whose meaning becomes increasingly indecipherable and finally detached from the formal and functional core of the object. The nude deities dressing Semper’s buildings are eventually substituted by naked architectural forms.

Indeed, during an era increasingly suffused by the mechanical replication of historicist ornament, Semper’s theoretical valuation of functional form is prophetic of developments that emerge in the next fifty years. It is no accident that in the first decades of the twentieth century, August Schmarsow would still invoke Semper when describing the formal principles (*Gestaltungsprinzipien*) of ornament in terms of proportionality, symmetry, and direction.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Semper’s greatest contribution was the transformation of the ornamental artifact into an experimental *model* by which the architect, theorist, or historian can test a number of alternative

<sup>3</sup> Gottfried Semper’s lecture ‘Über die formelle Gesetzmässigkeit des Schmuckes und dessen Bedeutung als Kunstsymbol’ was first published as a brochure by Meyer & Zeller in Zurich in 1856 and as an article in the *Monatsschrift des wissenschaftlichen Vereins in Zürich* 1, Zurich: Meyer & Zeller, 1856, 101-130. It was republished in Gottfried Semper, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Hans and Manfred Semper, Berlin and Stuttgart: W. Spemann, 1884, 304-343. The first section of the essay has been translated into English by David Britt as ‘From Concerning the Formal Principles of Ornament and its Significance as Artistic Symbol,’ in *The Theory of Decorative Art: An Anthology of European and American Writings, 1750-1940*, ed. Isabelle Frank, New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2000, 91-104; for a translation of the second section see, Gottfried Semper, ‘On the Formal Regularity of Adornment and Its Significance as a Symbol in Art—Part II,’ translated by Anna-Kathryn Schoefert and Spyros Papapetros in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 57/58, Harvard University Press, 2011, 299-308.

<sup>4</sup> On Semper’s analytical study of ancient projectiles, see Gottfried Semper, *Über die bleiernen Schleudergeschosse der Alten*, Frankfurt: Verlag für Kunst und Wissenschaft, 1859.

<sup>5</sup> August Schmarsow, ‘Anfangsgründe jeder Ornamentik,’ *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 5, 1910, 199-200. The essay is mentioned in Payne, *From Ornament to Object*, 143-144.

hypotheses: tectonic, formal, structural, as well as philological, archaeological, and even epistemological ones. As shown by Semper's exhaustive morphological analysis of textiles and ceramics combined with philologically informed (yet not always accurate) historical reconstructions of the origins of the same articles, minor artefacts such as clothing accessories or small household implements can become major objects of intense scholarly scrutiny and archaeological investigation. Following Schliemann's discoveries in Mycenae and Troy, entire civilizations previously thought lost could be reconstructed not on the basis of massive architectural monuments, but through myriads of small decorative artefacts such as buttons, headdresses and hairpins found in buckets under the foundations of city walls. Ancient civilizations continued to live in the orbit of the small object whose circulation defined the material and conceptual circumference (what Aby Warburg called *Umfangbestimmung*) of modern economy.<sup>6</sup>

Essentially neglected by art historians devoted to the study of the fine arts, the decorative and applied arts finally become legitimate objects of art historical investigation in the late nineteenth-century as part of the scholarly enquiry into the arts 'not fine.'<sup>7</sup> It is precisely the study of ornament that raises such practical artefacts to the status of art historical objects. For example, in spite of methodological differences, both Riegl and Warburg work on the common assumption that small decorative artefacts possess a unique theoretical value as tools for interpreting culture. Ornament and objects and (to an even greater degree) architecture have the ability to arbitrate among a variety of disciplines and connect heterogeneous epistemological domains. Payne mentions Semper's theoretical design for an Ideal Museum, whose four sections house four types of objects and material techniques—textiles, ceramics, metallurgy, and tectonics (which mirror the four sections of *Der Stil*)—yet which does not include architecture (Payne, 63). That is because architecture serves as the overall frame that encompasses all four of these sections. Architecture effaces itself under the presence of its objects.

By becoming objects of museum study, ornamental artefacts are subject to investigation by a number of disciplines, including art history, archaeology, philology, cultural anthropology and ethnography. Moreover, via Semper's comparative morphological studies of natural bodies and man-made artefacts they enter the natural sciences (such as statics and dynamics), as well as comparative anatomy, physiology, biology, and ultimately evolutionary science.<sup>8</sup> Following

<sup>6</sup> On Warburg's concept of *Umfangbestimmung* see Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986, 77-78, 218-19; and Bernd Villhauer, *Aby Warburgs Theorie der Kultur: Detail und Sinnhorizont*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002, 68-71.

<sup>7</sup> See for example Lewis F. Day, *Every-day Art: Short Essays on the Arts Not Fine*, London: Batsford, 1882; cited in Payne, 28.

<sup>8</sup> In his lecture on Schmuck for example, Semper uses the term 'rudiment' when describing the transformation of certain forms of bodily ornamentation (see note 3 in this review). For later evolutionary theories of ornament see a number of the publications ALSO cited by Payne: Alfred C. Haddon, *Evolution in Art: As illustrated by the Life-Histories of Design*, London: Walter Scott, 1902, G. Heuser 'Darwinistisches über Kunst und Technik,' *Allgemeine Bauzeitung* 1890, 17-19, 25-27 and 'Das

Semper, the small ornamental artefact represents the world in miniature, allowing the human subject to intuit its functioning principles and discover her orientation. As noted in the architect's 1856 lecture on Schmuck, the Greek word *Kosmos* signifies both bodily adornment and world order. Contemporary lexicons disclose that *Kosmos* also designates 'discipline,' 'direction,' or 'faculty,' a form of hierarchy that extends to the organization of knowledge. One of ornament's primary functions in nineteenth century historiography is precisely the association of different epistemic faculties under the comparative study of manmade artefacts and natural bodies.

The legacy of Semper's *cosmic* reconceptualization of both ornament and object is evident in the work of two of the most seminal art historians of the late nineteenth century, Aby Warburg and Alois Riegl, very rarely examined together yet craftily imbricated within Payne's narrative. Payne closely reads Riegl's numerous essays on artefacts from museum collections in Vienna, which combine art history and archaeology with ethnographic and folklore studies. Here the lowly decorated implement, only rarely considered as worthy of art historical inquiry, becomes the fulcrum of intense historical scrutiny as well as speculative yet highly rigorous formal or even epistemological theorization. It is the movement of undulating patterns in the diminutive corner of an embroidered vest from a Southern Dalmatian city that discloses an affinity with a similar pattern of interlacing tendrils on an Attic bowl from Aegina and thus demonstrates a diachronic continuity in ornamental development from archaic Greece to Byzantium;<sup>9</sup> and it is the hardly noticeable plastic recessions (only a few millimetres deep) in a Roman fibula or belt buckle that define for Riegl a new conception of space that characterizes an entire era, in this case the Late Roman.<sup>10</sup> The decorative object's conceptual circumference is exorbitantly magnified in relation to its modest or miniscule physical size. As in Freud's contemporary psychoanalytic investigations into dreams, ornament's magnified details can reveal the most intrinsic reality of object-making that hitherto remained covert. However abstract or predominantly formal, Riegl's theoretical analysis of ornamental artefacts inscribes the very national, racial, religious, and cultural properties that it attempts to exclude; historical context is grafted upon the artefact, often by its very absence.

This dialectic addresses the larger problematic of Payne's account a propos the peculiar status of ornament as art historical object. The book allows us to reconsider what the object *of* (and not simply *in*) art history might ultimately be and why ornament is one of art history's most privileged yet enigmatic subjects of investigation. Ornament is material and theoretical, general and particular at the same time; complete in itself but with manifold conceptual and material extensions.

---

Werden von Stylformen. Fortsetzung Darwinistischer Studien' *Allgemeine Bauzeitung* 1894, 53-69; and Lawrence Harvey, *Semper's Theory of Evolution in Architectural Ornament extracted from the Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects*, London: RIBA, 1885.

<sup>9</sup> Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, 1893; reprint Munich-Mittenwald: Mäander Kunstverlag, 1977, 180 and 184.

<sup>10</sup> See the chapter 'Die Kunstindustrie' in Alois Riegl, *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* (1901); reprint Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2000, 264-405

While seemingly isolated from geographic and cultural context, ornamental artefacts give graphic expression to the pressures they receive from their environment. If Semper raised the decorative object to a model for understanding the natural principles of the universe, art historians like Riegl turned ornament into a model for understanding the fundamental principles of art. Such is the evident line of inquiry in *Stilfragen*, in which Riegl draws the main trajectories of ornamental development irrespective of the medium on which the decorative pattern is applied; clay, fabric, or stone, the underlying motif unites materials, surfaces, and genres. In *Late Roman Industry*, a similar principle informs the study of three dimensional artefacts such as pendants, fibulas, and building capitals, as yet again differences in material or scale become secondary; venturing into 3-D space, the art historian ultimately produces a projective surface akin to a Constantinian relief.

Writing at approximately the same period as Riegl, Aby Warburg rehearses the trajectory from ornament to object in his early work, from the manifold analysis of accessories-in-motion in his dissertation on Botticelli (1892) to his anthropological study of ornamental patterns and decorated implements in the pueblo rituals of the American Southwest (1895-96). In the tradition of Semper, whose texts he had read during his student years, Warburg continues writing throughout his career about small ornamental objects as analogical models that encapsulate cosmological principles.<sup>11</sup> In several of his unpublished manuscripts and particularly his *Grundlegende Bruchstücke für eine Monistische Kunstpsychologie* (*Foundational Fragments for a Monistic Psychology of Art*, 1888-1903), Warburg develops an aesthetics of objects in which he examines the cultural, psychological, and symbolic properties of objects from fabric accessories (*Beiwerk*) to bodily adornment (*Schmuck*) to utensils and implements (*Gerät*) to clothing and traditional costume (*Tracht*); he probes the status of these artefacts as inorganic extensions of the human body (reminiscent of Ernst Kapp's 'object limbs' discussed extensively by Payne).<sup>12</sup> Drawing on Warburg's paradoxical term 'foundational fragments,' one notices that several of the essays and treatises on ornament from the period offer to lay a 'foundation' for the evolution of decorative motifs; consider for example the subtitle of Riegl's *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (*Foundations for a History of Ornament*).<sup>13</sup> But does not ornament itself offer a theoretical foundation

<sup>11</sup> On Warburg and Semper, see Spyros Papapetros, 'Aby Warburg as reader of Gottfried Semper: Reflections on the Cosmic Character of Ornamentation' in *Elective Affinities*, edited by Charlotte Schell-Glass and Catriona McCloud, conference proceedings of the 7<sup>th</sup> *International Association of Word and Image Studies*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009, 317-336; and 'World Ornament: The Legacy of Gottfried Semper's Essay on Adornment,' *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 57/58, 2011, 309-329.

<sup>12</sup> The latter part of the title eventually changed into *Pragmatic Theory of Expression*. See Aby Warburg, *Grundlegende Bruchstücke zu einer monistische Kunstpsychologie (pragmatischen Ausdruckskunde)*, Warburg Institute Archive III.43.1. A version of Warburg's project on aesthetics was recently published as *Frammenti sull'espressione: Grundlegende Bruchstücke zu einer pragmatischen Ausdruckskunde* (bilingual edition in German and Italian) edited by Susanne Müller and translated by Maurizio Ghelardi and Giovanna Targia, Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> See note 12 in this review. This foundation may also take the form of 'original causes' as in the article by Schmarsow, 'Anfangsgründe jeder Ornamentik,' mentioned earlier in this review, note 7.

for several forms of art historical and philological scholarship? It is perhaps no accident that ornament is the dissertation subject of several prominent art and architectural historians and cultural critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Think of Adolphe Behne's dissertation on the incrustated style of decoration in Tuscany and Siegfried Kracauer's dissertation on cast-iron ornament, to mention only a few.<sup>14</sup> One could argue that Warburg's doctoral dissertation on Botticelli and the depiction of accessories-in-motion in Renaissance painting and literature, as well as Riegl's *Stilfragen* (even if written after almost a decade of writing on a number of minor objects, such as calendars and carpets), constitute *inaugural* works in which ornamental objects serve as introductory guides or even blueprints for later art historical research. Studies of ornament are viewed as offering access not only to the epistemological foundations of a certain mentality or culture, but also to the methodological principles of the art historian that retraces such analogies. Ornament sets up the art historical design, including the one drawn by the art historian.

This could also be true in the case of the author of this splendidly designed book. *From Ornament to Object* retraces the main theme of Payne's first major book publication *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance*.<sup>15</sup> The main connection between the two books is ornament's constitutive relation to rhetoric. In addition to its mediating function, ornament has the capacity for (re)invention—formal, material and conceptual variation—which, as Payne describes, derives from the art of rhetoric. Drawing from both historiography and design, her account underlines the analogies (as well as occasional contradictions) between rhetorical theory and building practice. In her earlier work, Payne argues that Renaissance ornament grants the building the ability to speak and communicate with the urban environment based on a repertory of iconographic, social, and cultural conventions. In *From Ornament to Object*, she argues that in twentieth-century modernism, following centuries of ornament's prevalence in architecture's rhetorical performance, objects now play that role and do the talking for buildings. This suggests that even in modern architecture, the drive for decoration (what Semper calls *Verzierungstrieb*) does not subside; it simply changes course towards a new mode of rhetorical expression.

Payne further argues that in twentieth-century modernity objects not only talk *for*, but also *become* the building: architecture itself becomes subject to a gradual objectification as modernist buildings acquire object-like properties. In contrast to the qualities of solidity and permanence attached to the historical architecture of the previous centuries, modern buildings espouse the logic of portability and ability for reinvention. Payne describes Gerrit Rietveld's Schroeder House in Utrecht (1925) as

<sup>14</sup> Adolf Behne, *Der Inkrustationsstil in Toscana*, Berlin: E. Ebering, 1912 and Siegfried Kracauer, *Die Entwicklung der Schmiedekunst in Berlin, Potsdam und einigen Städten der Mark vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zum Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Worms: Wormser Verlag and Berlin: Wasmuth, 1915.

<sup>15</sup> Alina Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance: Architectural Invention, Ornament, and literary Culture*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

'a giant Rubik's cube, in which stairs, doors, walls, and balustrades moved, collapsed, expanded, and contracted (Payne, 7).' Similarly, Corbusier's Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau (1925) is a virtually portable geometric envelope that can be reproduced in series and serves the purpose of housing objects produced for a mass market. Modern architecture's mobile character subsists primarily not on physical mobility but on the capacity for structural, material, and typological reinvention—a form of *pre-* or *re-fabrication*—and on a variety of materials and scales. The complete sequence described by Payne is then not only from ornament to object but also from ornament to object to building (and vice versa): all stages of design production become part of a reification process in which objects of every scale appear ostensibly interchangeable.

Yet we do not proceed from ornament to object by a leap. In between these two categories there are a number of artefacts that serve as mediators, most prominently the miniature models of built architecture that Payne describes as *Kleinarchitektur*: ciboria, pulpits, fountains, and choir stalls whose plastic decoration imitates larger building structures. While most of these architectural miniatures originate in the Renaissance, they become the objects of art historical inquiry by turn-of-the-century scholars such as Cornelius Gurlitt, Georg Dehio, and Alois Riegl. In this case architecture turns into both a portable object and an ornament that facilitates the representation of as well as the experimentation with architecture. Via its miniaturization into ornament, architecture essentially expands to the status of a prototype that can generate a number of formal, tectonic, and typological alternatives. *Kleinarchitektur* signifies an architecture *within* architecture—an architecture of the second degree. The same objects reintroduce the problem of scale in both ornament and building, since they create patterns that can ostensibly expand or contract at any scale: from miniature furniture decorations to vast building and even urban arrangements. Indeed one of ornament's most intriguing yet perplexing qualities is its essential *scalelessness*—its resistance to transforming into an object with perfectly definable physical dimensions (this might be one of the more subtle differences between ornament and object).

The gradual transition to architecture, via the mediation of *Kleinarchitektur*, allows Payne to shift her attention in her last chapters from art historians to architects. She discusses Herman Muthesius (also a doctoral student of Cornelius Gurlitt), whose theoretical and architectural work highlights the renewed importance of objects in the British and German traditions of applied arts, and then returns to the writings and design practice of Adolf Loos. As Payne demonstrates, while the Viennese architect polemically denounces ornament, he is fully knowledgeable of the rich literature on the subject. Loos's virtuosic display of embellished rhetoric, not only in 'Ornament and crime' but also in a number of other lectures and journal articles, displays that the author is culpable of the very crime he polemically castigates. One may detect a similar criminal propensity towards understated embellishment in the architect's decorative understanding of the surface, manifest in the lavish materials and shining textures of his resplendent

architectural interiors. If ornament signifies the visual means by which a building distinguishes itself among its peers, then ornamentation in Loos (and a good part of modern architecture) subsists in the very lack of traditional ornament; ornament's new rhetorical power subsists in silence—a dramatic pause of high theatrical value.

The book's narrative circle closes when Payne returns to one of her introductory examples, Le Corbusier's Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau (1925). This and a series of contemporary buildings by the architect acquire a multifaceted mobile character similar to the objects they are housing. Payne underlines Corbusier's interest in travelling storage trunks that underscores the quasi-nomadic existence of the modernist subject. His *maison sur pilotis* behaves as a mobile enclosure that houses a number of ready-made artefacts, often selected by the architect from catalogues. Popular or specialized publications are essential in architecture's new mobility status: the building's permanence consists in its *circulation* as an object that feeds (or provokes) the public imaginary. As in Corbusier's early 1920s purist paintings of glass bottles and wineglasses in which content and container appear to fuse, the building envelopes of Corbusian pavilions, villas, or houses-in-series are ostensibly modelled by the very objects they enclose to the degree that the very notion of enclosure is seemingly abolished. It is unfortunate that the book does not expand on Corb's early studies of ornamentation under Charles l'Eplattenier in the school of applied arts of his native La Chaux-de-Fonds. As mentioned earlier, during this period the young designer (at that time Charles-Edouard Jeanneret) not only studied treatises of ornamentation such as the works of Charles Blanc, but also made a large number of ornamental designs, from watches and jewellery to his first commissions for houses built in the vicinity of his native Swiss town and replete with ornamental motifs. In spite of his later attack against the (over) 'decorated art of today,' Corbusier's work divulges a deep engagement with decoration and pattern, which may be congruent with and not antithetical to his interest in the standardized mass-produced object.<sup>16</sup> The Swiss architect's long career thus demonstrates the essential continuity 'from ornament to object' rather than a break or a rift.

But there is another rift that Le Corbusier ostensibly bridges, and that is the purported gap between art historiography and architectural practice. Payne underlines Corbusier's knowledge of art historical texts, such as Riegl's *Late-Roman Industry* and Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy*, both of which are mentioned in the carnets of the young Jeanneret during his trip to the East. The two art historical books were apparently suggested to the young designer by his travelling companion August Klipstein, an art history student taught by Worringer, Wölfflin, and Lipps in Munich (Payne, 246). While seemingly a peripheral piece of information, this rare connection is important for the development of Payne's argument, as it presents a momentous alignment among the research interests of art historians and architects. In fact, the same coincidence is characteristic of Payne's

<sup>16</sup> For such critique, see Le Corbusier, *L'art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: Crès, 1925; English trans.: *The Decorative Art of Today* trans. James Dunnett, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987.

own method and speaks to her ability to bridge art historical concerns with current architectural discourses.

Following the historiographic pattern outlined by Semper, Payne employs architecture as a theoretical practice that frames and joins other disciplines, including archaeology, philology, and art history. She demonstrates how art historians like Schmarsow and Warburg expand on Semper's tectonic and other structural principles to introduce spatial issues into their readings of paintings and sculptures, such as the orientation of human bodies or inanimate objects in motion. Semper had in fact introduced such spatial issues three decades earlier vis-à-vis the property of 'directionality' (*Richtung*) attached to certain forms of bodily and architectural adornment.<sup>17</sup> In other words, we do not only proceed from ornament to object and to architecture, but also from ornament to painting and to sculpture; discourses of ornament construct a practical and theoretical framework that encompasses all forms of art and object making.

There are a number of methodological peculiarities that appear more frequently in architectural rather than art historical texts, and which surface here as evidence that Payne's book is written by a historian with a design background and *intent*. For example, while her account follows a primarily chronological order, each of her chapters includes topical references that span a number of decades and create comparisons among a number of chronologically or geographically distant areas. While analyzing the importance of detail as a methodological and compositional instrument in modern art historical discourses as well as art and architectural practices, Payne mentions that Aby Warburg's well-known motto 'God is in the detail' has also been quoted in relation to (or even attributed to) Mies van der Rohe and that 'this confusion of authorship may not be without its measure of insight (Payne, 114).' Such highly suggestive diagonal connections are also present in the illustrations of the book, which, while they too follow a primarily chronological order, often create a number of surprising constellations following the manifold transhistorical references in the text; for example, a double-page spread juxtaposes a photograph of an elegant 'soup tureen and ladle' service set by Christopher Dresser with a photograph of a massive iron bridge in Rendsburg reproduced in the *Baukunst der Neuesten Zeit* by Adolf von Platz (1927), one of the first surveys of modern architecture (Payne, 184-85). As in the striking juxtaposition of images in the Bauhaus books by Moholy-Nagy, what brings these heterogeneous objects together is not a pseudomorphic similarity (for they look nothing alike) but a comparative tectonic logic that establishes a large range of analogies between dissimilar things.

It is historiography, the study of the histories of ornament, which allows such transhistorical comparisons to take place, as when Riegl's late Roman fibulas follow Schliemann's Mycenaean pendants and proceed Warburg's Renaissance accessories and Pueblo headgears. In its complex historical structure, the book

<sup>17</sup> See Semper's 1856 lecture on Schmuck mentioned in note 3 in this review.

recreates that rare moment in the late nineteenth century when the world appeared reunited by its ornament; histories of ornament retraced histories of the world and created imaginative blueprints of its present as well as its future condition. Payne retraces ornament's cosmic moment as well as its eventual collapse and substitution by a new set of universal analogies established by modern architecture in the first decades of the twentieth century. This dialectic substitution proves a point made abundantly clear by the book, which is that studies of historiography cannot be separated from those of art and architectural practice and that such separation impoverishes the study of both. We have often heard the story of the decline of ornament and the emergence of an unornamented aesthetic in architectural modernity, but what does such practice have to do with the endless histories of ornament that precede and implicitly presage such decline? It is precisely this projective or even prognosticating quality of *histories* of ornamentation that Payne's combined account puts into practice.

Perhaps the greatest feat of the book is the imposition of an orderly design in what initially appears as a sprawling mass of obscure writings, treatises, and folios—the very daunting task that Hildebrandt was ultimately unable to accomplish. Any theorist, historian, or critic that has written on ornament knows that ornamentation is not only the richest but also the most treacherous object of art historiography: it is easy for an author to get lost in the endless reproduction of ornamental artefacts and decorative details as well as the elaborate literature that trails behind them. Perhaps more than any other form of art history, the historiography of ornament is also the most complex and contradictory one: the art historian has to empathetically imitate the convolutions of his meandering subject while striving to keep a critical distance from it. Warburg's study of ornamental motifs and spatial patterns related to Pueblo snake rituals is perhaps the most poignant example of such methodological conflict.

The book's overall design is not entirely symmetrical: while it contains a great number of historiographic references, not all texts and authors are treated with the same depth. The sections on Riegl and Schmarsow, for example, are highly detailed and highlight less known material drawn from Riegl's little known articles published in archaeological and anthropological journals<sup>18</sup> and Schmarsow's multiple essays on ornament from 1910 to 1925 published in the *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*.<sup>19</sup> Studies of texts by authors less familiar to English speaking audiences such as Heinrich Geuymüller, Cornelius Gurlitt, and Richard Streiter are also welcome contributions. The section on Aby Warburg, on

<sup>18</sup> See for example Alois Riegl, 'Neuseeländische Ornamentik,' *Mittheilungen der anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 20, 1890: 84-87; and 'Pfederschmuck aus Westungarn,' *Jahrbuch der k.k. Zentral-Kommission für Kunst- und historische Denkmäler* Neue Folge 1, 1903: 273.

<sup>19</sup> August Schmarsow, 'Anfangsgründe jeder Ornamentik' *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 5, 1910: 191-215, 321-55 (see also note 7 in this review); 'Die reine Form in der Ornamentik aller Künste' *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 16, 1922: 491-500; 17, 1923: 1-17, 129-45, 209-34, 305-29; 18, 1924: 83-107; 'Zur Lehre von Ornament' *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 16, 1922: 511-26.

the other hand, is based only on a few of his published essays such as the 1892 dissertation on Botticelli and the 1923 lecture on the North American Pueblos, and draws heavily on the secondary literature by Ernst Gombrich, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Maurizio Ghelardi; the bulk of Warburg's minute research on ornament and bodily gear is in the research drafts for the two previous and many other writings that hitherto remain unpublished and do not appear in this account. Ultimately, however, Payne's argument for the contiguity between ornament and object as complementary instruments of human expression resonates more strongly in Warburg than perhaps any other author analyzed in her book.

Some sections might also appear more synoptic and condensed than others; Semper is the only figure that is granted an entire chapter, while seminal art historians like Wölfflin occupy only a few pages. Yet there are a number of specialized monographs on Warburg and Riegl today, as there are countless studies of Loos, Muthesius, and Le Corbusier, some of them focusing on their use or renunciation of ornamentation. What ultimately matters the most in Payne's account are not the individual references but the analogies and correspondences between all of these characters that are either never or only very rarely brought together in the same history or story. Moreover, as the subtitle of Payne's book discloses, this is not another *history* of architectural modernity but a *genealogy*, an eclectic lineage of historical figures, artworks, and literary texts with a similar origin and endpoint. Cutting across a large segment of nineteenth and early twentieth-century discourses, the book employs ornament not in order to rehearse the same pattern but to draw a new one. Histories and practices of ornament subsist not on the endless repetition of the same pattern but the variation and invention of a new one, one that may even encircle ornament's self-organized demise. More than a century ago, the explosion of literature on ornament was followed by a revolutionary architectural practice. *From Ornament to Object* makes us wonder what the resurgence of interest in ornament in contemporary art historiography as well as recent building practice might collectively augur.

**Spyros Papapetros** is Associate Professor, Behrman Faculty Fellow, and member of the Program in Media and Modernity at Princeton University. He is the author of *On the Animation of the Inorganic: Art, Architecture, and the Extension of Life* (The University of Chicago Press, 2012) and the editor of *Space as Membrane* by Siegfried Ebeling (Architectural Association Publications, 2010). He is co-editor with Christopher Wood of the book series *Literature of Art* forthcoming by Princeton University Press. He is currently completing a second personal book project titled *World Ornament* analyzing the historiography of bodily and architectural adornment in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries from a global perspective.

spapapet@princeton.edu