

From Splendor to Simplicity: Explaining the
Aesthetic and Ideological Diversity of the
Arts & Crafts Movement, 1875—1914

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Overview

- Research question: What explains the diversity of artistic styles and ideologies across the Arts & Crafts movement?
- Introduction to the Arts & Crafts movement
- Review of conventional sociological model of aesthetics
- Comparative analysis of Arts & Crafts styles and ideologies
- Conclusions and implications of the research

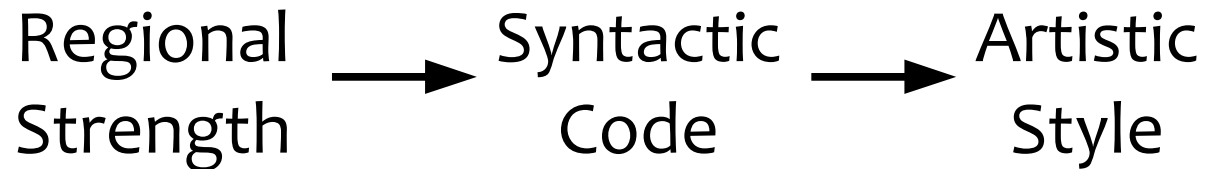
The Arts & Crafts Movement

- 1875—1914
- Began in England, spread to U.S., Western Europe, and as far Russia, Australia, and Japan
- Advocated both social and aesthetic reform
- Founders were critical of industrial capitalism and sought to resurrect the Medieval era and its Gothic styles
- But in the U.S., Frank Lloyd Wright declared “The machine is my God.”
- Central principles: value of labor, regionalism, democratization of the arts, unity of the arts



Sociological Studies of Cultural Form

- Rooted in the work of Simmel (1916), Sorokin (1937-41), and Hauser (1974)
- Developed by Bergesen (1996, 2006) and Cerulo (1995), based on Bernstein (1964)



- Main finding: Stronger societies produce simple cultural forms and weaker societies, complex forms

Measuring Organic versus Geometric Style

- Degree of Symmetry
Asymmetric versus Symmetric
- Degree of Multiplicity
Unity versus Multiplicity
- Degree of Linearity
Serpentine versus Linear
- Degree of Simplicity
Ornate versus Simple

Deg Geo = 0.94



Deg Geo = 0.0

Regional Style by Regional Strength

(Mean degree geometric and standard errors in parentheses)

	Weak Regions	Strong Regions
Geometric Style	Austria (.60, .07)	U.S. (.56, .05) Germany (.58, .05)
Organic Style	U.K. (.29, .04) Hungary (.31, .08) Scandinavia (.34, .04)	

- Conventional model fails to explain Austria's aesthetics
- What is the relationship between aesthetics and ideology?

Dominant Ideology by Region

	Labor	Region	Democracy	Unity	Style
Backward-looking Regions					
U.K.	√				Organic
Scandinavia		√			Organic
Hungary		√			Organic
Forward-looking Regions					
U.S.			√		Geometric
Germany			√		Geometric
Austria				√	Geometric

- Regions that valued labor and regionalism produced organic work. Regions that valued democratic design and unifying the arts produced geometric work.

The Value of Labor

- Of primary concern in England, where Morris, Ashbee, and others eschewed industrial fabrication and cultivated nostalgia for the past, expressed politically as socialism.
- Of secondary concern in the United States and Germany, but see Stickley's "The Craftsman," Roycroft, and Byrdcliffe



Regionalism and the Vernacular

- Only principle emphasized in all regions: design should reflect the landscape; use local materials
- Most important in Scandinavia and Hungary, where it was interpreted as romantic nationalism



Democratization of the Arts

- Of primary concern in U.S. and Germany; mechanization is valued for its cost savings
- In England, subordinated to (expensive) hand work
- Dismissed in Vienna

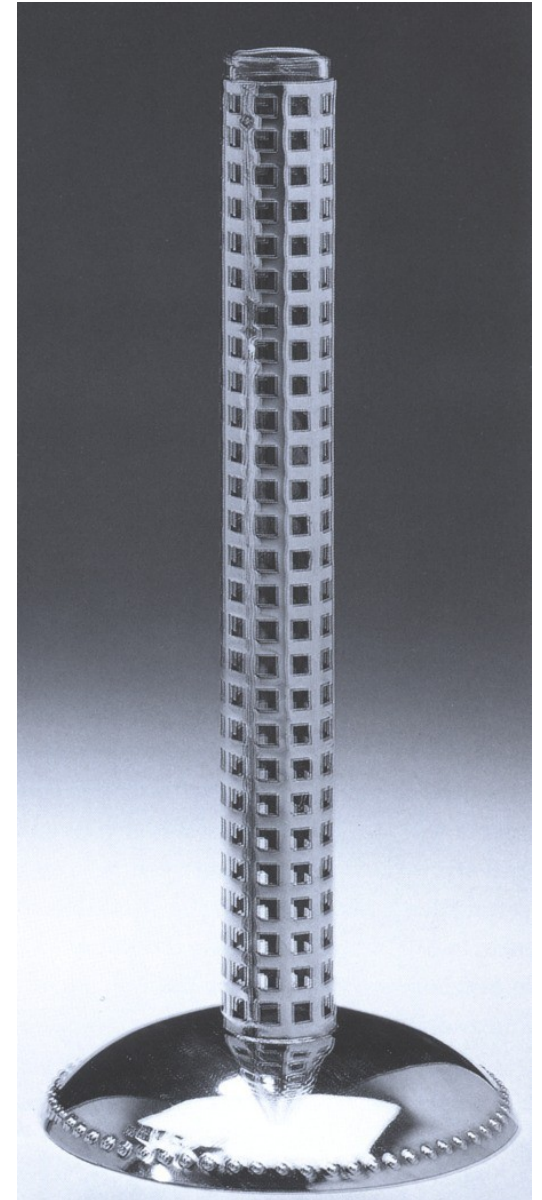


Unity of the Arts

- “Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.”
- In UK and US, the goal was to bring beauty to everyday goods
- In Austria, the goal was to raise the status of applied and decorative arts to that of fine art
 - Vienna Secession (Vienna, 1897) and Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna, 1903)
 - “To the Age its Art, To the Art its Freedom”
 - Emphasis on the Gesamtkunstwerk
 - “Our aim is to create an island of tranquility in our own country, which, amid the joyful hum of arts and crafts, would be welcome to anyone who professes faith in Ruskin and Morris.”

Austria: Chasing the Geometric

Koloman Moser



Austria: Chasing the Geometric

Josef Hoffmann



Austria: Chasing the Geometric



Josef Hoffmann: Purmersdorf Sanatorium (Vienna 1904-05)

Conclusion: The Use of Ideology during Unsettled Periods

- The period of the Arts & Crafts was a period of political and economic turmoil.

Consequences:

- Nostalgia in England, expressed politically as socialism
- Backward-looking romantic nationalism in Hungary and Scandinavia
- Forward-looking capitalist ideology in United States and Germany
- Forward-looking status competition in Austria

Conclusion: The Use of Ideology during Unsettled Periods

Conventional sociological model of aesthetics needs to be reconsidered. Must examine the mechanisms by which a region's political-economic situation affects its cultural situation.

- Conventional model:
Regional strength → Syntactic Codes → Artistic Style
- Arts & Crafts model:
Regional strength → Ideology → Horizon → Artistic Style