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Ornament is a Crime
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For two years, there has been talk about bankruptcy of modern interior decoration. Some consider a return to older styles. And as remedy, the Biedermeier is prescribed.

In Germany, the modern movement is called Jugendstill. We call it Secession. Both designations have become terms of insult.

Nearly ten years ago, in a series of articles, I warned against these styles. I said one should furnish one's home neither in one of the old styles nor in one of these new ones, but in a truly modern way.

At the time, I was expressing a minority opinion. A small minority: I was in fact a minority of one.

Our modern creations were treated with contempt, by artists as well as by the authorities. I suggested that it was not really necessary to elaborate the style principles of our time since we already have this style. Our machines, our clothing, our carriages and their horses, our glass and metal objects, and everything, everything that has escaped the architects' sabotage is modern. As for woodwork, it has had to be supplied to architects on a contract basis for the last fifty years. But it was a worthwhile effort to keep woodwork away from the fancy goods so favored by architects.

Nothing prevented us from setting up modern interior decorating. The path to it was simple. Certain objects made by carpenters, and those who worked with wood, had escaped the architect. It was merely a matter of gathering them and using their shapes for similar purposes. To serve cigars, there are the boxes paraded by bellboys in Viennese restaurants. There are ice-cream containers for everything that is "pastry with ice cream" in the cafés. In stores, glass showcases
serve as furniture. Metal trimmings intended for locks are also used in the manufacturing of trunks.

We had cabinet work that was modern. But something that required the help of architects was absent, namely, ornamentation. Since older furniture had ornaments and profiles that were cut and inlaid, and since the modern woodworker was incapable of designing any, the architect took advantage of him. The woodworker's lack of ability can be explained by the fact that he is a modern man. The architect, on the other hand, is capable because he is not modern. The modern man, as I already suggested ten years ago, is no longer able to produce an ornament. The products of our modern culture offer no ornaments. Trunk manufacturers, leather workers, tailors, and machine manufacturers don't know about ornament.

What makes our culture grand is its inability to create new ornaments. The evolution of humanity goes hand in hand with the ordinary object's moving away from embellishment. Our artists working in applied arts may object as much as they want: for civilized humans, a nontattooed face is more beautiful than a tattooed one, even if the tattoo were done by Koo Moser.

Adolf Loos, Wohnungswanderungen