Ornament and Crime

Croquet chair and stool, Marcel Wanders, Dutch, 2008

Hella Jongerius, “Four Seasons”, 2008
“There is scarcely a people, in however early a stage of civilization, with whom the desire for ornament is not a strong instinct. The desire is absent in none, and it grows and increases with all in the ratio of their progress in civilization.”

-Owen Jones, *Ornament of Savage Tribes*, 1856
The ornament of a savage tribe, being the result of a natural instinct, is necessarily always true to its purpose.

Owen Jones, *Ornament of Savage Tribes*, 1856
“Ornament does not increase the pleasures of life. If I want a piece of gingerbread I will choose one that is completely plain…it tastes better that way.”

Loos, *Ornament and Crime*
Ornament and Crime
THE ARCHITECTURE
OF
LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI
IN TEN BOOKS.
OF PAINTING
IN THREE BOOKS
AND
OF STATUARY
IN ONE BOOK.
TRANSLATED INTO ITALIAN BY
COSIMO BARTOLI
AND NOW FIRST INTO ENGLISH,
AND DIVIDED INTO THREE VOLUMES
BY
JAMES LEONI,
VENETIAN, ARCHITECT; TO WHICH ARE ADDED SEVERAL DESIGNS
OF HIS OWN, FOR BUILDINGS BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE.
VOL I.

London, Printed by THOMAS EDDIN.
M. DCCXXVI.
Leon Battista Alberti, *Santa Maria Novella*, 1470, Early Italian Renaissance
Ornament and the Problem of Sensual Perception

William Holman Hunt
*The Awakening Conscience*, 1853
“Even the sweet astonishment, the pleasurable forgetfulness of self, which overcomes us at the sight of a beautiful work of art, is proof that our pleasure is one of self-subordination...we willingly allow our pleasure, which beauty defines for us, to take precedence over all our other feelings. By attracting our attention entirely to itself, beauty diverts us for a while from ourselves, so that we seem to lose ourselves in the beautiful object.”

K.P. Moritz, 1785
“It may be taken as an invariable truth that knowledge, and knowledge alone, can enable us to form an accurate judgment respecting the beauty or want of beauty of an object, and he who has the greater knowledge of art can judge best of the ornamental qualities of an object...Let him who would judge of beauty apply himself, then, to earnest study, for *thereby* he shall have wisdom, and by his wise reasoning he will be *led to perceive beauty*, and thus have opened to him a new source of pleasure.”

Christopher Dresser, 1873
Tea pot, 1870s
Christopher Dresser
Decoration on all castings (iron, copper, bronze, tin, etc.).
Decoration on all fabrics (curtains, furnishings, fashions).
Decoration on all white linen (table clothes, underwear, bed linen).
Decoration on all papers.
Decoration on all pottery and porcelain.
Decoration on all glassware.
Decoration in all departments! Decoration, decoration: yes indeed, in all departments; the department store became the ‘ladies’ joy’!
“To provoke elevated sensations is the prerogative of proportion, which is a **sensed mathematic**; it is afforded most particularly by architecture, painting, and sculpture.”

Le Corbusier, *Le Plan Voisin*, 1925
Ornament and Surface
“(The Romans) made it their chief object to employ all together, if possible, every decorative appliance—granite, jasper, porphyry, marble, painted stucco, bronze, and mosaic; they used all these with more profusion than discernment. With them, to charm meant to dazzle, to astonish; and they appreciated but slightly the refinements of Greek genius.”
“However richly ornate a building may be, the ornamentation must be subordinated to the conception, in order not to weaken, disturb, or obscure its expression.”

Viollet-le-Duc, 1814-1879
“I grant that in such a case the more lavish the ornamentation the more vigorously should the idea be expressed, and that it can be more easily manifested in a building that is simple—than in one that is loaded with ornament. But it is plain that where an idea is wanting the temptation is strong to conceal feebleness of conception beneath a parasitical embellishment.”
Heinrich Wölfflin: Ornament as the Carrier of the Cultural Zeitgeist

Zeitgeist: “spirit of the times”
“...a century of ugliness”
“When I speak of ugliness in the realm of the spirit, I am referring to the total lack of what one might call a common purpose in our existence, a sense of working together toward one goal. A certain consecration of life is lacking, ultimately a lack not of education...but that of culture, which is something quite different.”

Hendrik Petrus Berlage
1856-1934
“In every country the revival of the so-called historical styles, the Neo-Gothic and the Neo-Renaissance, went exactly hand in hand with the beginnings of industry and the domination of capital—an extraordinary coincidence. It would seem as if the power of artistic invention waned with the growth of industry, that this marked the beginning of the spiritual vacuum. For is not the revival of earlier styles ultimately the result of a general spiritual emptiness?”

Hendrik Petrus Berlage
1856-1934
“Now architecture is and remains the art of construction, the joining of together of various elements *into a whole* to *enclose a space*. And as even this fundamental principle has become an *empty formula*, the first priority is to go back to the basics, to construct well…we must do it in the simplest way. Intrinsically *comprehensible objects* should be created once again, objects whose bodies are not obscured by cladding.”

Hendrik Petrus Berlage
1856-1934
The triumph of form and the demise of Ornament

Walter Gropius and Bauhaus
Haus am Horn, Weimar, c.1920

Marianne Brandt, Tea Pot, Bauhaus
Dessau, c.1926
“The will of the age conceived in spatial terms. Living. Changing. New. Not yesterday, not tomorrow, only today can be given *form*...Create form out of the nature of the task with the means of our time.”

Friedrichstrasse Skyscraper
Berlin-Mitte, Germany; Project, 1921
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
Mies van der Rohe, Barcelona Pavilion, Spain, 1929
Mies van der Rohe
Detail, Barcelona Pavilion, Spain, 1929
Barcelona ottoman, 1929
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
Ornament

an applied element, subordinated to the other arts

a pure, abstract carrier of beauty and culture

the element that expresses an object’s style and aesthetic spirit
FORM

The nature of our task /the means of our time

The will of the age conceived in spatial terms

The one true style
How are these objects related?

How do they embody the ‘irrational’ impulse of the curve?

(five specific points...)
What is the difference between these two wallpaper samples? How do they express central ideals of the design reform movement—or not? How are they related to social concerns in the latter 19th century? (give five specific characteristics, quotes, themes)